

Sermon – You are Your Mind
Sunday August 1, 2021

If you could choose one image to describe what your mind does, what image would it be?

For my wife Joanne, I think one image that describes her mind is an endless To Do list. I've learned that women have a superpower called multi-tasking. For all you men sitting here or watching online who are wondering What is "multi-tasking"?, multi-tasking is the ability to deal with more than one task at a time. (Imagine that!)

For those of you who know what our family's social life is like, you know it can get pretty intense. With all the hosting, cooking, social visits, food-drop offs, day trips, themed dinners and family activities – Joanne's mind is an endless to do list. She's constantly planning, scheduling and coordinating! And she does an amazing job at it too!

See, I can plan, schedule and coordinate. But after a long day, my brain is fried! We'll be lying in bed late at night, and Joanne will ask, Who should we invite over next week? Where should we go on vacation? What should we make for dinner 5 weeks from now? And she'll ask all these questions all at once!

I'll just freeze like a deer caught in the headlights. Because when it's late and I'm tired, the image that describes my mind is an empty field – there's nothing inside. It's a black hole, it's a barren desert with tumbleweed blowing across it.

What image best describes what happens in your mind?

Author Joyce Meyer wrote a book about the mind and I love the image she uses. This image perfectly captures what we're talking about today. The image she uses to describe the mind is a battlefield.

Turn to your neighbour and say, Your mind is a battlefield. If you're watching online type that in the chat. Your mind is a battlefield.

You see, like Joanne your mind may be an endless to do list. Like me, your mind may be an empty field. But perhaps more importantly, **your mind is a battlefield.**

What does that mean? It means that whether you realize it or not, there's a spiritual war going on. And this war isn't fought on land, water or in the air. This war is fought in your mind. Because your mind is a battlefield.

So who are we fighting? He goes by different names in the Bible – Beelzebub, Lucifer, Satan. But his goal is always the same – to steal, kill and destroy.

How does he do that? The Enemy isn't as powerful as God. He can't create anything. But he has one strategy that he's used so effectively to take down men and women.

What is this strategy? Deception. The Bible calls him a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

He'll say things to you like:

- You don't matter. You'll never amount to anything.

- You know that sin you've been trying to hide? God could never forgive you for that.
- You'll never get it right. In fact, you'll never do anything right.
- No one loves you. You're just unlovable.

Pastor Rick Warren says, **“Satan knows that if he can keep you from being *you*, who God made you to be, if he can hide your true identity, if he can distort your true identity, [then] he can destroy what God intended for you to be...”**

Satan is actually so good at deceiving us that most of the time, we don't even realize we're deceived. We just think, This is simply the way things are.

How does this happen? It starts when he whispers a lie. You think about it. Then you dwell on it. Then you repeat it over and over to yourself. That little seed that was planted in your mind, takes root and begins to grow.

And over time, Satan doesn't need to do anything. He doesn't need to tell you lies anymore. Why? Because you're telling yourself those lies. But of course you don't think they're lies. You just think, this is just who I am.

- I'm just worthless.
- I'm not good enough.
- I could never do it.

Last year, identity theft was one of the fastest growing crimes in the States. 47 percent of Americans had their identities stolen. As a result, over \$500 billion dollars was lost.

How many of you realize that right now, **Satan is trying to steal your identity**. He plants lies in your mind. And then he gets you to repeat them to yourself until you think they're true. That's when you lose your identity.

But when you lose your identity, you lose a lot more than just money. You lose the most important thing about you - who you are in Christ. Because as long as you believe these lies,

- You'll never experience God's abundant life.
- You'll never discover your calling.
- You'll never become who you were meant to be.

So what do you do when the Enemy attacks? What do you do when he tries to steal your identity?

We're in a series called *Who God Says You Are*. This series is about identity. Every week, we're exploring a different factor that shapes who we are.

We hope this series will help you understand these factors better so that you can establish your identity more deeply not in who others say you are, not in who Satan says you are but in who God says you are.

Your mind is a battlefield and Satan is trying to steal your identity.

So how do you fight the battle taking place in your mind?

In his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul offers these thoughts.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

(2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

The word Paul uses to describe the Enemy's strategy of deception is the word stronghold.

What's a stronghold? This term appears over 50 times in the Bible. It refers to a military fortress that's difficult to attack. These fortified dwellings were used as a means of protection or as a base of attack.

On the screen is a picture of an ancient stronghold. In Bible times strongholds were usually caves located high along the mountainside.

[PPT: Stronghold image]

But Paul says that there are spiritual strongholds. These strongholds aren't located in caves or behind thick walls. They're located in your mind. They exist in your thought-patterns.

Your mind is a battlefield. And your enemy wants you to believe the lies he tells you. The Bible says that Satan is cunning and crafty. He'll patiently set up his trap. And he'll slowly shape your thinking one lie at a time.

Why does he do that? He does that to establish a stronghold. To make you believe something that isn't true. Because once he's established this stronghold, he can attack you whenever he wants.

Aristotle once said, "you are what you repeatedly do." This can apply to your mind as well. You are what you repeatedly think.

There's a lot of scientific evidence for this. The human brain consists of more than 10 billion neurons. That's a lot of neurons! Of course that's only half of the neurons Pastor Andrew has and it's more than double the neurons that I have.

But every time you have a thought, a chemical change happens in your brain. There's an electrical firing between the neurons in your brain which creates a neuropathway. These neuropathways then create the reality you experience in your mind.

But here's the problem. To your brain, it doesn't matter whether the thought you think is true or not. Your brain will process it the same way.

So what does this mean? It means that whether you believe a truth or a lie, either way, your brain will take that thought and create the reality you experience. And like building a habit, the more you think that thought, the easier it becomes to believe and the more real it becomes for you in your mind.

For example, let's say your friend lets you down. Maybe they were just busy, they probably didn't mean to hurt you. But instead of considering their side or recognizing that we all make mistakes, the thought that forms in your mind is this, "people can't be trusted".

Wherever you go, you look for evidence to confirm your bias. And whenever you see it, you say, See, I knew it! People can't be trusted. Friends will always let you down. And so what happens?

You live your life as if that thought were true. You become cynical, untrusting and lonely.

This thought has become a stronghold. It's created the reality you experience.

How many of you know that the Enemy is trying to create a stronghold in your mind? He's always wants you to believe lies like:

- I'll never succeed.
- Things always work out for others but never for me.
- I'll be stuck in this rut forever.

Here's the thing.

- If you think you'll never succeed, guess what? You probably won't.
- If you think you're a victim, you'll learn to act like one.
- If you think you'll always be stuck, you'll never have hope.

As long as you believe these lies, you'll never experience God's abundant life.

So how do you break the strongholds?

I'd like to suggest **4 Strategies For Fighting the Battle In Your Mind.**

The first strategy is to **Name the lie.**

Paul says, we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

We use filters for our water. We install anti-virus software on our computers. How do we protect our thoughts from poisoning our mind?

Paul says, you take captive every thought and align it with God's truth.

Awhile back, I talked about how adult elephants can be kept in place with a simple piece of rope.

How is that possible? Elephants are the largest and strongest animals on the planet.

What happened was when they were young, someone tied a rope around their leg. As a baby, it would struggle and pull with all its strength. But it soon realized it couldn't escape.

As the baby became stronger, it easily could have ripped off the rope and run free. Remember, an adult elephant is the most powerful animal. But that doesn't matter. Because as long as it believes it's powerless, it will remain a prisoner for the rest of its life.

What keeps the elephant a captive? It's not the rope, it's the lie. It's the lie that keeps the elephant from realizing who he really is.

This is tragic for any elephant. But it's even more tragic when it happens to a human being.

Studies show that the younger you were when you were hurt, the greater the impact it had on you. Why? Because the Enemy attacks when you're most vulnerable.

When you've been rejected, when you're suffering, when you're lonely. That's when the Enemy will try to build a stronghold in your mind.

- Maybe you never got attention as a child and you believed that you're unloved.
- Maybe others always got things you wanted and you believed that you don't matter.
- Maybe someone betrayed you and you believed that you're rejected.
- Maybe you were abused and you believed that you're damaged.

You need to name the lie. Why? Because you can't defeat what you can't name. When you name the lie, you take its power away. To shine light into the darkness and the darkness can't overcome it.

So what lie is holding you captive?

For me, I've struggled most of my life with the lie that I'm not good enough. How about you?

Joni Eareckson Tada was paralyzed from the neck down as a teenager. She overcame her depression and anger and lived an inspiring life for God. How did she do it?

She named the lie. She says she did it by "grabbing my thoughts by the scruffs of their necks and jerking them into line. I will not allow thoughts to take me down these dark roads."

The second strategy is to **Replace the Enemy's lies with God's truth.**

Paul says, The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world... they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (2 Cor 10:4)

What are these weapons?

God gives us armour to fight our enemy. What kind of armour are we talking about? The Bible says, we've been given:

- the belt of truth
- the breastplate of righteousness
- shoes of the gospel
- the shield of faith
- and the helmet of salvation

But all these are defensive weapons. Is there an offensive weapon we fight with? Yes, there is. It's the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

You see, the word of God is sharper than a double edge sword. It cuts away lies, it demolishes strongholds.

When we ran our Identity Workshop in-person, one side of the room would be covered with signs with words on them like:

- Unloved
- Ashamed
- Broken
- Inadequate

These words represent the lies that you and I have internalized about ourselves.

Now the other side of the room was covered with words like:

- Accepted
- Valued
- Victorious
- Overcoming

We didn't just make these words up. They come from God's Word. You see, throughout the Bible, God is constantly affirming your identity. He says that in Christ,

- You are chosen before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4, 11)
- You are no longer condemned (Romans 8:1, 2)
- You are more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37)

What truth do you most need to claim right now? What truth do you need to feed your mind with?

Paul says,

whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things... And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

The third strategy for fighting the battle in your mind is to **Create visual reminders**.

Organizations put up inspirational quotes on their walls. Boxers keep a photo of their opponent during training. Creating visual reminders like these are a great way focus on what really matters.

This idea didn't come from the business world or the sports world. It comes from the Bible.

God created us to be visual people. That's why throughout the Bible, God tells people to:

- Write commandments on their doorframes.
- Build memorial stones.
- Eat special meals.

These visual reminders are powerful ways to focus on what really matters.

What visual reminder can you put up in your home or your workplace?

- Maybe you can print a stylized poster of your favourite Bible verse.
- Maybe you can post a sticky note with the word "Beloved".
- Maybe you can set-up a special wallpaper on your phone or laptop.
- Maybe you can buy an art print like Rembrandt's The Prodigal Son

At the end of our Identity Workshop, there's a time for participants to think about what truth impacted them the most. Each person receives a laminated Identity Card. On it, they write down the word or phrase that God has given them.

Here's my Identity Card from four years ago.

[PPT – Identity Card]

I keep this in my office where I always see it. Because it's easy when things don't work out for me, or when someone lets me down, or when ministry isn't going well to fall back into my old mindset that I'm not good enough.

That's when it's helpful to have a visual reminder. I see this and remember that the most important thing about me isn't what I do, it's who I am. I am God's beloved child.

This Identity Workshop is probably the most powerful ministry that I've been part of as a pastor. At the end of September, we'll be offering an online version of this Identity Workshop. We'll be offering it on two dates.

If you're interested in learning more or signing up, check out the URL on the screen.

[PPT/Online Hosts: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/identity-in-christ]

The fourth strategy for fighting the battle in your mind is to **Read God's word regularly.**

Many people have a favourite Bible verse.

- Joshua 1:9 - Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.
- Romans 8:28 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
- Philippians 4:13 - I can do all [things] through [Christ] who gives me strength.

Memorizing Bible verses and creating visual reminders are great ways to fight the battle in your mind with God's truth.

But how many of you know that the Bible is more than just a bunch of inspirational verses? It's primarily a story. A story of God's faithfulness. A story of God's activity throughout history. A story of his mission to redeem the world through his people.

And you know what? That story is your story as well. And the only way you will ever know who you are is by discovering how your story fits in to God's story. That's when you'll find your true self and the purpose for which you were created.

But to do that, you need to know that story. You need to read God's word regularly. You need to allow God's truth to shape your thinking.

This year I'm reading through the Bible in a year again. For some of you, that might be too much, which is fine. But how can you make it a habit to read God's word regularly?

There are a lot of great resources out there. One resource we recommend is the **Read Scripture App**. You'll get a year-long Bible reading plan that's supplemented by creative animated videos that explain every book of the Bible along the way.

[PPT/Online Hosts: www.readscripture.org]

But whatever reading plan or resource you use, disciples of Jesus read God's word regularly.

So how do you fight the battle in your mind?

1. Name the lie
2. Replace the Enemy's lies with God's truth
3. Create visual reminders
4. Read God's word regularly

Your mind is a battlefield. Satan is trying to steal your identity.

Maybe some of you are that elephant. You were hurt when you were young. The Enemy seized on that moment to whisper a lie:

- You're not good enough
- You're unloveable
- You don't matter.

Even though in Christ, God says you are loved with an everlasting love, that lie has stolen your identity.

Maybe some of you have a distorted view of God. Through a painful moment, the Enemy convinced you that God:

- is an angry God.
- a condemning God.
- a distant God.

You know that's not true but after years of thinking this, your brain has created God into that image.

How do you break free of those strongholds? Jesus says if you hold to my teaching, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Truth isn't just a concept. Truth is a person and his name is Jesus.

Jesus, the son of God went to the cross. There he disarmed the powers and principalities. And he triumphed over them. We were once prisoners but the good news is Jesus has set us free! And if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

This morning, if you need Jesus to set you free, if you need him to forgive your sins, free you from the lies, break the strongholds and renew your mind, would you call out to him right now and say "I need you Jesus." If you're watching online, click the button in the chat.

[COP Moment: I need you Jesus!]

When we fix our thoughts on Jesus, Jesus breaks our ropes and gives us back our identity. The lies begin to fade and we hear God's voice telling us who we really are.

That's what we're going to do now. At this time, we're going to prepare for communion. If you're watching online, go ahead and get your elements now.

Communion is a time to remember Jesus. We remember his love, his sacrifice and his victory that sets us free.

Let us prepare our hearts and minds to meet with him now.