

# Visions and Ideals: The Moral Mind

*By Bobby Schuller*

Well we're in this series about the mind, it's called As a Man Thinketh, and it is the belief that you literally are your thoughts. The Proverb says "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." And part of the Christian worldview is that our mind requires training.

The mind is so powerful, isn't it. Amazing what the mind can do. And so as believers, we must be the kind of people who pay attention to our thoughts. That we are the kind of people who know that thinking changes reality. The invisible always affects the visible. And in that way, we want to become the kinds of people who foster the kinds of thoughts that lead to victory. As I've said many times, the mind is like a garden. If you plant good thoughts and foster good thoughts, your life will have good fruit. If you foster base or fearful or wicked thoughts, your life will bear that kind of fruit. Every cause has an effect and 90% of the circumstances in your life are the result of your thinking.

There does come that time like the hurricanes of the world. We're praying for Hurricane Irma. And you know things like happen with Chad and Hilary, things like that, difficult, horrible suffering, sickness. It has nothing to do with your thinking but 100% of your ability to endure the

suffering and the challenges of life unto victory has to do with your thinking. With fostering thoughts of hope rather than fear. Fostering thoughts of love rather than envy or jealousy or bitterness. And this is why Paul tells us that we are to put on the mind of Christ. That literally means we're supposed to think like Jesus thinks. We're supposed to see the world through His lens. We're supposed to control our thoughts because our thoughts become our reality.

Therefore, if you're under the sound of my voice, I just want to encourage you to never allow thoughts of envy to find a place in your mind. You know the Ten Commandments, the Jews are very much about like what you do and not what you feel or think. When you read the Jewish bible, the Old Testament, it's actually surprising that when you read the Ten Commandments, the last command is the only command I know of in the Old Testament that is about thoughts. And it's the final command of the last Ten Commandments. Anybody want to guess what it is? You shall not covet. That is a command on what you think. And the reason is, I believe, that coveting can lead to breaking most of the Ten Commandments.

So many of us, we foster envy in our minds, we foster thoughts of wrath, we foster thoughts of fear, thoughts of lust, thoughts of greed and avarice, and yet we wonder why we are where we are circumstantially. And if you learn anything during this series, it's my hope that you pay

attention to what you're thinking about, and you choose to think about beautiful things; that you choose to foster a big vision for your life. That you choose to harbor thoughts of love and joy, thoughts of hope. That you grow in knowledge. That you recognize almost every single problem in your life is a knowledge problem and that you have way more power than you know to ruin somebody's life or to save somebody's life. And that the thoughts that you foster make all the difference in your reality and your future. I believe if you change one base or negative thought into one godly thought, just one, in your habit, that five, ten, even one year from now you're going to be in such a very different place than you are now. Thoughts are the cause of our reality. Amen? So pay attention to your thoughts. They're important.

I also believe that you have more power over, and I keep saying this, but more power over your thoughts than you do over your actions. I know I said this before, I did it again four days ago. Double stuffed Oreos. My weakness. Let me just say, first of all, that double stuffed Oreos should be called Oreos, and regular Oreos should be called diet Oreos. Okay, let's get that out of the way. All right? But it's like once you start on double stuffed Oreos, if you got a big glass of ice cold two percent organic grass fed milk right there. In every package of Oreos there's three columns. Each column, I believe, has 12 cookies. And recently, I actually haven't done the math, but I ate two and a half

columns and now that I'm doing the math, I believe that's.. I'm pretty sure that's 30 double stuffed, we're just going to call them Oreos.

Do you ever do something that you didn't want to do? I mean you wanted to do it, but you didn't want to do it. I believe that we have more power over our thoughts than our actions. And so often the worst decisions that we make in life that we regret later, they're the result of the kind of thoughts that we've been nurturing. Whether you run away or you give up on your marriage, or you quit your job rashly, or you say something stupid that you regret, you buy something you can't afford, these are the results of nurturing the kind of thoughts that go towards those decisions. Therefore, I implore you to pay attention to what you think about. That if you put on the mind of Christ and trained your mind into godly thinking, you're going to bear such tremendous amazing fruit in your life.

Today I want to talk about the importance of keeping before your mind big dreams, big vision and integrity. I am someone, by the way, that loves idealism. That makes me sound like a mean, judgmental person, doesn't it. But it's not. I believe in positive idealism. That there is, in our mind, a world, a life that is ideal. A marriage is that is ideal. A business that is ideal. A church that is ideal. And we keep that vision before our mind and we decide that despite the fact that probably

nothing will ever be perfect, we are going to build our life in such a way that we will move in the direction of the ideal.

So I love idealism. I love tradition. I love names, I love places, I love belonging, I love the songs that we have, the stories we tell, the books that we read. And so many people have been burned and hurt by bad religiosity and bad religion that they throw everything out. But there's bad religion and there's good religion. There's bad idealism and there's good idealism. There's a bad vision and there's a good vision for your life. And God wants us to be the kind of people that foster before our minds an ideal world that inspires, not only ourselves but others. And He wants our integrity to come from a deep conviction that we will live someday in that kind of world. Can I get an amen?

So I just want to begin today to say that dreamers are the saviors of the world. Dreamers save the world and we are full of.. the world, I just feel like, has become a more judgmental, angry, embittered, a lot of realists, a lot of negative people, and the negative, judgmental, bitter people are right a lot of the time. But it's the dreamers who change the world. It's the optimists who change the world. It's the people who inspire and don't manipulate that change the world. It's the people who give grace and mercy not judgment that change the world. It's the people who reach across the aisle that change the world.

And so cherish your dreams, cherish your visions. I believe you are a dreamer. You are a visionary. And the more you nurture the visions, the ideals and the dreams that God has given you, the more nourished your soul will be. Therefore, when we think about the kind of thoughts we keep before our mind, you should keep in every moment that you can, a vision, a mission for your life before your eyes at all times. You should see in your life what your ideal family would look like and move in that direction. You should build, in your mind, what an ideal job would look like and move in that direction. What an ideal church should look like and move in that direction, knowing full well none of these things will ever be perfect. You still keep before your mind the ideal, the vision, how can we be better, how can I do better, how can I pursue something that is bigger than myself. See friends, that's what every human being needs. We need to live for something we're willing to die for. The moment we don't have at least one of those things is the moment we begin to die on the inside.

But not you. You're a dreamer, you're a visionary, and let me just tell you, that your dreams and your visions, though they're imperfect and sometimes they need tweaking and changing and reviewing and peer review and all this stuff, that your dreams come from God. That your creativity, that what you do with your creative time, that all of these things are from the Lord and they're like air to your soul. And that to go

a week, a month or a year without a dream in your heart is to like to go a week, a month, or a year without air, without water, without food.

Dreams nourish the soul. You need them. And being a pastor for years, and being in the church my whole life, I have seen that when ideals, morals and Christian life is separated from dreams, visions and a big life, those moral people become very immoral. They become almost the worst kind. They become pharisaical. And that's why when our integrity is separated from our dreams and our vision, our integrity becomes brittle. It's hard to do the right thing day after day when you don't know why. And very often what happens when you don't know why you're supposed to do this moral thing, you begin to get judgmental and angry and embittered and dead because that's what legalism does, it kills.

You see I think you will rise and fall with your vision, with your mission for your life. And the more clear you know where you want to be and what you want to be, the more your life will change in a positive direction. If your vision for your life is bigger than where you are now, you're going to move in the direction of a bigger, more awesome life. If your vision for your life is smaller than where you are now, your life is going to shrink. And I think one of the reasons we don't have a lot of big dreams before our minds eye, and the reason we don't hold these dreams in our heart, sometimes for months, even sometimes years after years, we don't hold them before our minds, is because there's this tension that

we feel. That I want to be there but I'm not there yet. Why? You compare yourself to other people in your life and think how did they get there so fast? And he or she is so much whatever, better looking, or wealthy, or they have the ultimate relationship, or I don't have what they have, or I'm not where I want to be, and so what happens is there's this like shame. And when that shame sets in, we have the ability to choose to let that go, and to have grace on ourselves and say rather than giving up on my dream because I feel ashamed, I'm not there yet, I'm going to be okay and at peace with the tension between me and my destiny. Can I get an amen to that? Those of you who have had great victory in your life have known that great victory sometimes takes years and years of persevering, failure after failure after failure, and especially persevering shame: being embarrassed in front of your family and your friends that you made some goal, some dream, you wrote it down or you said it out loud, and after all these years they mock you and they simply call you a dreamer. And they think like oh you're never going to get there.

But I think you will. And even in the small chance that you won't get there, I believe that dreams make people better because they move people towards heaven and away from hell and that's a good thing. So keep before your mind's eye a mission for your life, a vision for your life, a purpose for your life and you will grow. You always move in the direction of the thing you secretly love.

So you have a choice. When you're not where you want to be in your life, when you haven't achieved your ideal life, whether it's your ideal marriage or family or church, please don't move churches. Just kidding. When you haven't reached the ideal, it's easy to cast that thought away from your mind, but one of the best things you can do with your life is to focus your mind on where you want to be someday, and to just hold onto that patiently. Don't replace it with thoughts of fear. Never replace it with thoughts of blame. Blame is the number one thing that will ruin your life. Don't replace it with coveting or envy. Simply hold it there and give it to the Lord, and pray for it because I believe most of the time your dreams, your visions, they're from the Lord and whether or not you get there, they're going to move you in the right direction.

Hannah and I were recently in Hawaii, and it was an awesome trip, we were only there for a week, but I think for us there was a little bit of grieving because we brought Haven, our eldest daughter with us, but we left our son Cohen at home. Because of his health issues, really can't fly with him, and so we weighed whether or not we should go to Hawaii. It was originally going to be a trip for just Hannah and me, but then we wanted Haven to go so we got her a ticket, she came along, but then Cohen wasn't there, so I feel like a lot of the time we were there, it was really great, but there was a sadness about Cohen not being there. And

then also this hope, this ideal that someday the four of us will be able to like go to Hawaii, or travel together.

And so Hannah came up with this great idea and I thought it was wonderful, and the idea was that what if we had a mission for our family. It's not that it has to be perfect, or it has to be that way all the time, but what if we just wrote down what we want our family to be, and we pray for it, and we ask that God would move us in the direction of that kind of family. So Hannah and I, and then later Haven, we put down eight things that we want our family to be. And I'm sure these will change over time, but it fits our family.

You want to hear what they are, or is that boring? Okay you want to hear them? Okay. I never know, everybody likes their family more.. okay. Number one, the Schuller family – we won't allow setbacks to keep us from enjoying each other. Amen. We want to be a family that worships Jesus. We want Christian character to be our highest value. We show strength by being vulnerable with each other. Leadership means serving others. Family is first, family is forever. We will support and develop one another's talents. That's a good one, isn't it. Families don't always do that. And this was Haven's, and its actually my favorite one: We'll never stop believing in miracles. That's right. Good.

So there's an example, I think a way that Hannah and I have tried to practice this idea. What if we write down what we want our family to

be, the ideal for our family. Is it always going to be that way all the time? Probably not. No, it's not. But by writing it down, and saying that this is what we want, do you think we'll move in the direction of that mission? Absolutely. Therefore, keeping a vision for your life, where you want to be, what you want to achieve, what you want to look like, being more like the people you respect, keeping that vision before your mind will move you in the direction of Christ' likeness. Having a crystal clear vision of where you want to go is one of the best things you can do.

The scripture reading today was Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and I think about these three guys, they were Jewish, not Babylonian, but they were in Babylonian exile. Babylonians came down and took the people of Israel captive, and brought them back to Babylon, and it was there that these three men were brought into the king's courts. Did you know their names weren't really Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? They had Jewish names. They were Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were names that honored God, their faith, their countryman, and their story, and King Nebuchadnezzar took these three men, he made them dress like pagans and he gave them new pagan names – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And they endured this embarrassment with dignity until one day, finally, the worst thing that you can do to a Jew - he built this gigantic idol and I always picture in a sort of vast court with hundreds or maybe thousands of people, he

commanded that everyone bow down before that idol or they die. And then you see a sea of people bow down, maybe they sing something, all in one motion bowing down before this idol, except three lone friends standing together who said no.

I remind you that they didn't curse everybody else and say you guys shouldn't be bowing down to us, right? They didn't get judgmental, they didn't say you have to do what I do, they simply said no. I have an ideal, I have something in my life that's worth burning for. You can't take it away from me. You took from me my father's name, you took from me my home, but you will not take away from me my ideals. You will not take away from me the fact that I am Jewish, and that I have a home, and that someday we will go home and God will go with us, so I refuse to bow down to your filthy idol.

It's inspiring, isn't it that they had deep within their heart something that they're willing to die for, and they said to Nebuchadnezzar, when he said just bow, you know, they said look, God will save us from this. And I love this line – but even if He doesn't, we will not bow because they had something in their mind that they were living for. Personal conviction, a reason they woke up in the morning, and His name was Yahweh.

And so the story goes, of course, that they were thrown into the burning furnace. And the furnace was so hot that the guys that took

them there, they themselves died. And then Nebuchadnezzar looking into the furnace, he asked one of his advisors, shocked and terrified, he says didn't we put three men in there? And they said yes, my Lord. And he says, but I see four and one looks like the son of God.

I think that when we stand for our ideals, oftentimes it moves us away from kings and princes and institutions of power, and many of the things that the world loves, but it moves us in the direction of Jesus. It moves us towards heaven. And I think now, more than ever, when we have been in the muck and mire of hating one another, of just all of the ways in which our country and even churches have been so split up. To have dreamers that emerge from that that are inspiring rather than divisive. To have people that cast a vision for something that everybody can wake up in the morning for. To have people that stand up and say look, they don't curse everybody else, but they say these are my convictions and I'm going to do what I'm called to do. That's inspiring.

And if you're asking yourself what is the difference between idealism, which by the way is a good thing, and legalism, which is a soul killing, horrible, evil thing, the difference is one thing and that is godly ideals inspire and legalism manipulates. If your ideals don't inspire anyone, they need to change. And this is something that I've learned, whether it's in politics, or religion, I've seen that there are lots and lots of people who have ideals that don't inspire anyone, and yet they're willing

to kill for them. And that's why integrity is always rooted in the heart of a dreamer – good integrity. Because when you have a big vision for why you're doing what you're supposed to do, it brings life. But when like in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, churches were saying that makeup or dancing or seeing movies on Sunday's would send you to hell, that idea has totally died because it was stupid.

So in life, right, there is something about either both, especially political and religious people that tend to gravitate towards a sort of legalism. And it becomes.. your ideals are never going to inspire everybody, but they ought to at least inspire you. When we get to a place where our ideals or our principles don't even inspire us, something needs to get changed or tweaked at least.

Jesus, I think, teaches us that the right way to lead is to serve, not to command. The right way to lead is to inspire, not to manipulate. When you inspire people, they'll die for you, if you're a good leader. When you manipulate them, they'll just leave you when things get rough. There's nothing like following an inspiring leader, right? If you've ever been there, oh my gosh. I've been on teams and been part of different organizations where you have such an inspiring leader with a big vision, you really feel like you'd just do anything to make that vision come to pass. You can be that leader for someone. You can be that leader in your family, you can be that leader in your business or your ministry, and all it requires is to

never let negative people curse you for being a dreamer. How can that be an insult? What a great compliment. I hope people call me a dreamer because its dreamers that save the world. Can I get an amen?

So don't ever forget that you are nourished by your dreams, even if they're ridiculous, even if someday you want to build a water slide park in your backyard, and that's your dream. I can just say that as silly as that is, that even the fun-ness of an idea or a dream like that nourishes. Even the dreams that seem petty or simple, very often they're also from the Lord because God is teaching you you can do irregular, improbable, irrational things sometimes, and that's okay.

So dreaming creates a tension between you and your destiny. It challenges you every day to move in the direction of being better, of being more like Jesus. And lacking dreaming leads to a life of mediocrity, and that's not for you. My grandpa used to say if you build your dream, your dream will build you and I know that to be absolutely true.

Many of you, maybe you've gone through so much suffering. The bigger your dream is, the more you have to suffer to see it come to pass. And it is so easy in that 11<sup>th</sup> hour; when that finish line is close, but you can't see it, it's just around the corner but you're not sure, to give up right then and to miss out on something great on your life for great victory, so don't give up on your dream in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour.

And remember that when you're challenged to bring negative thoughts before your mind, thoughts of fear, thoughts of envy and coveting, thoughts of blame, thoughts of anger, keep before your mind the ideal – who you want to be, where you want to be, and a big vision for your life, and you will be nourished. Amen?

Thank you, Lord. Amen.