

Choices and Responsibility

By Bobby Schuller

We are this series on the thought life, and how directly our thinking impacts our behavior and our circumstance, and learning what it means to always refine our thoughts, to manage our thoughts, and to make sure we think about the kinds of things that we want to become.

You know for Christians, thinking has always been at the heart of our faith. Indeed to become a Christian means to think something different than you did before, doesn't it; to believe something. To believe that Christ really was the Son of God, that He really was crucified and raised from the dead; to trust your life to Him. Becoming a Christian means to think a certain way first, and we believe in our faith that when you change your thoughts, you change your behavior. When you change your thoughts, you change your world. And so as believers, Paul, Jesus, our Jewish fathers and mothers taught us the importance of right thinking, and how that thinking impacts our life and our behavior.

Good thoughts always turn to good fruit, always. I've said before that the mind is a bit like a garden, right? Like you plant good thoughts and tend to good thoughts in your mind, and it's going to reap a harvest. If you're a positive, hopeful, big picture person, that's going to benefit you in major ways. If you're a loving, kind, forgiving, compassionate person, that's going to have great benefits in your life. And so in life, if we

want to change our circumstance, we've got to change the way we think.
Amen?

And just like a garden, you can make the world's greatest garden. It doesn't mean weeds are not going to pop up from time to time, right? What you got to do is you got to pull those weeds up. Don't let them take root. Don't let them choke out the great crops that you've planted and tended to for so much time, and in this case, many years. Pull those weeds up. If you have thoughts of wrath and jealousy and anger and sloth and self-destructive talk, just pull those weeds up. Don't let those things take root in your life and squash out all the noble, godly, good things that you learn and you dwell on, amen?

If you dwell on good, godly things, positive things, if you're a hopeful person, your life is going to change dramatically. And you know it doesn't change overnight. You change your thoughts, your world doesn't change overnight – it takes time. You have to meditate on those things. Fix your eyes on them and choose to continue to think what is right and not what is wrong.

Changing one single pattern of thinking in your life will make a remarkable difference in your life. It's like shifting the direction of a sailboat just one degree. Man, nobody on that boat is going to feel you turn that boat one degree, but hours later, that boat will be miles from where it would have been had it not changed that one degree. You change that negative thinking, you change those thoughts that you often

dwell on, change them into the kind of godly thoughts that Jesus teaches us to have, and your life will be miles away from where it would have been months and years from now, and you'll be thankful. You see, the way to change your circumstance is to change how you think and when you change how you think, everything, everything changes.

Today I want to talk about the important role of emotions in our thinking. Anybody here ever allowed emotions to cloud their thinking? This is the holiest church I've ever been to. I mean you guys have got it. You are perfect. You're not like me. I don't know why you're listening to me. I let my emotions get the best of me all the time. Anybody here get hangry? You know what hangry is, right? When you have hungry and angry and you wambo them, you put them together in a word combo, you get hangry. Sometimes I'll be curt with Hannah. I'll be saying this or that, I'll be like where we going? When do I turn left? She won't even answer the question, she'll just ask me another question – darling, are you hungry? A little.

You've got other things, you know, things in your body, habits. You've got things like hormones, which are a major part for men and women. It's always changing, chemicals always changing in our bodies. So you have these things that affect our emotions that can make us feel emotional in certain ways. And these things also can make us feel tired. And when we get emotional, when we feel tired, when we've been really stressed out for a long time, it's easy to allow emotions to keep us from

making the right decisions. But if you hear anything that I say today, it's this – is that no matter what, no matter how you feel, you can always choose to do the next right thing. This is the great power that God has given all of us is the ability to make a choice, to choose, despite how we feel.

And that is the first move, isn't it. Emotions make great slaves, but terrible masters. You know when we get lazy in our thinking it's easy to allow our emotions to make our decisions for us. If you've ever been a slave to fear, a slave to anger. Anger's like drunkenness, isn't it? When we really get mad, we say stuff and do stuff that would normally take a bottle of whisky to do. You just think what did I say? I know none of you drink whisky, and none of you let your emotions guide you. I guess not. Or maybe emotions of sloth, emotions of jealousy. Those emotions can cloud our thinking and cause us to make the kinds of decisions that ruin our lives and the lives of others. Those are terrible slaves, aren't they.

But emotions make great masters. I mean, some of the greatest leaders alive are very emotional people! When someone is passionate about their project, when somebody is overflowing with joy. People who laugh a lot, who hug a lot, who are full of energy and emotion, when they've mastered their emotions; and mastering your emotions doesn't mean shoving them down. Mastering your emotions means they work for you, not against you. That you use them to lead people, inspire people, encourage others. When emotions become your slave, when you've

mastered them, when they work for you, that becomes a tremendous gift to you and others, amen?

So when we change our thinking, the way that we do this is we decide before we feel emotional that when I feel emotional, I will choose to do what is right and not what is wrong. I will choose. I will decide now with sobriety of mind that when I'm drunken with anger (not literally drunken, of course) but drunken with anger, or any other emotion, that I will choose, despite how I feel, I will choose to do what is right. And when you do that, very often, your emotions begin to get trained and to come in line with your choices.

So do the next right thing. Just choose to do so. Choose to forgive, even though you don't feel like forgiving. Choose to apply yourself, even though you don't feel like doing anything. Choose to say no, when you need to say no, even if it's hard. Choose to say yes, even if you're scared. Choose to ask for help, even when you think you can't be helped. Choose to learn when you've got frustrated with the process. Choose to rest when you think you have to work till you're dead. You have a choice. You always have a choice, and you always have more choices than you think. You have the ability to choose what is best for you. Or you have the choice to do nothing, which is a choice in and of itself. See not choosing is a choice. We know that.

Jesus lays before us, in the Sermon on the Mount, two roads. The path of least resistance is a wide gate. A wide gate and an easy road and

He says this road leads to destruction. But narrow is the way and difficult is the path that leads to life and few choose that one. So choose that one. See the path to life is most often the most difficult path. It's the one that emotionally we often don't want to take. It's the one that is often the most difficult. And God is telling you today choose the path that is right, even though it's difficult.

You can make of your life anything you choose to make of it. You have way more power than you think. And there's nothing like feeling powerless or feeling like I don't have a choice. It's easy to get there, isn't it? When you feel exhausted, when you feel tired, you feel like I don't have a choice. I am a product of circumstance. You're not. You have the power to choose.

So change your thoughts, right? Change how you think, and this is what Joshua teaches us. All the scripture affirms this, of course, but one of my favorite bible verses is Joshua's final sermon as an old man. The story goes like this: the Jewish people made covenant with God and God wanted them to show the world what it's like, what the kingdom of heaven is like, and what it's like to live according to God's word, and what a people who are loving like God would be like in a community on earth, and so He called this people to be a, not only a people, but a place, Israel. But they went through a lot of trials: captivity, enslaved for hundreds of years, and of course we know the story, if you've seen the

Ten Commandments with Charlton Heston. Come on. Of course you have, it's the best one. Anyway.

So Moses leads the people out of Egypt, they go through the desert, Moses is unable, through punishment to enter the Promised Land, and He hands off His mantle to Joseph. Joseph is a young man and he leads this army, and there's this long conquest where they go in to conquer the evil Canaanites, who killed children. This is the Canaanites, not the Jews, I need to clarify that.

So under Joshua's leadership, the Jews enter into the Promised Land and they take it for themselves, and after this Joshua is now an old man. He has divided the Promised Land amongst the tribes, and he gives them this final speech. He says to them many of you who are here are serving idols and you're also serving Yahweh. You want to serve the God's of the Canaanites, or the gods of Abraham's pagan father, but it is not them who led us to the Promised Land but Yahweh. There is only one God. And so he says to them, "Choose today who you will serve." You must choose. Either choose Yahweh or choose the world, but you must choose. And notice, he doesn't say choose tomorrow. He doesn't say choose a month from now. He says choose today who you will serve. And he says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

God lays before us a choice, always. You have the ability to choose the kind of things you're going to do in your life. You have the ability to choose the narrow, difficult road that leads to life, or you have the ability

to choose the wide easy gate that leads to destruction. You have the ability to choose a difficult life. That's what Jesus said when He said take up my cross and follow me. It's a difficult path that leads to life. And there was the old man Joshua who said choose life. Choose life. Choose what is good, amen? He was an old man and he said choose what is right.

I learned a long time ago when I was a kid that choosing what is good sometimes hurts you in the short run, but is always better in the long run. I learned it about lying. You know one child was asked what is lying, and she said a lie is an abomination to God and a very present help in time of trouble. But I learned as really a teenager, I learned that doing what I believed to be right often didn't benefit me in the short run, but always did in the long run. If you lied to a friend, for example, just because you didn't want to hurt their feelings, that choice would be made down the road. Or if I lied to my parents, I'd be found out eventually. And you realize, not just with lying, but everything in life that if you bend the rules in your business, or if you cut corners in your marriage, or in your parenting, and you sort of try and play both hands, both good and evil, you try and live in this grey zone, you will always pay. There's always a price to pay for the bad decisions. It's like pay now or pay later with interest, and that's what I learned that it's not just morally right, but it's good for you! It's good for your business to have integrity. It's good for your marriage and your parenting to do it the right way. So choose today,

choose today what is good, and though it may harm you in the short run, or be harsh or difficult or embarrassing, still choose what is good. Choice is what separates us from the angels and from the beasts, right? Choice is what makes us human, and in a way, choice is what makes us most in the image of God, as the scripture says.

When God made Adam and Eve, He didn't just make them, He gave them a choice in the form of a tree. At any time, you can choose to turn your back on me and hate me by eating from this tree. See I believe that when God gave us a choice, when He gave us a will, He gave us the ability to truly love. God made us because He wanted a family, He wanted us. He loves us. But He wanted reciprocal love. He wanted us to love Him back. And if we're just robots, then we can't choose to hate God, then we also can't choose to love Him. God's given you a choice so that your love or your hatred for Him, or whatever it is, would be real. And it is one of the most human things about us. That's why slavery, for example, is one of the most inhumane things; taking away someone's freedom, their ability to choose.

And that's why if you're stuck in a place in life where you feel like you don't have a choice, you probably feel like your soul is dying. And I'm here to tell you today that whether it's succeeding in life, or living a moral life, or following Jesus, you have a choice. It begins here. You make a decision in your thinking. I choose today to go a different direction in my life, and I will fix my eye on that ideal, on that goal, and

the longer you hold that idea before you, the closer you will come to your destiny. If you've ever felt like you didn't have a choice, you probably felt like you were dying a little on the inside.

It's easy when you're exhausted and emotional, when you've gone through sickness or financial loss, or when someone you love has died, to feel like I'm at a place in my life where I'm totally helpless. You are not totally helpless. You are powerful. You are called. You are filled with the spirit of the almighty God who made the universe. That's in you. You're not helpless.

It's like this. There's an old analogy, they say that in the circus, they train an elephant from when he was a little baby, they take this little elephant and they chain his leg to just a little stake in the ground and a metal chain, and that baby tries to get away, and tries to escape and it can't, and it learns that this chain and this peg has ensnared him. And as the elephant grows into this gigantic beast, one of the biggest animals on the planet. You know, elephants can tear up trees by their roots. They're humungous and strong. They can easily break a chain. But those elephants are trained in their thinking from a baby young age, this gigantic elephant, all they need is just a skinny chain, and a little peg in the ground, and that elephant feels resistance, a little tug, and it stops and it assumes there's no way. He's been this way his whole life. He's not going anywhere. He has no idea how much strength and power

he has within him. If that elephant just went nope, boop, it would just pop right out.

And many of us are like that. Beat down our whole lives, told we're nothing, no good for anything. One bad decision after another, hard luck, loss, I want to tell you that is the biggest lie from the enemy. It is from the enemy who has enslaved your thinking, and today God wants you to know you have a choice and the choice is down the path that is difficult. Obstacles, loss, set back, but if you fix your eyes on who you want to be, and where you want to go, you will get there. Change your thinking you'll change your life, amen?

God has called us to be big people, not little people. God has called us to be overcomers, amen? He chose little people to do humongous things and they did it. And He said to us, "Even greater things than I will you do for I'm going to be with my Father." I believe that what He said is true. Do you? Good.

Change your thoughts. Never believe for a second that you're helpless, because you're not. You always have a choice. And you always have a world of possibilities laid before you. All you lack is imagination and hope.

This starts to remind me a lot of my grandpa, talking this way. I love my grandpa and I talk often about him. Many people aren't familiar, especially my age, with my grandpa. My Grandpa Schuller was a great minister and a mover in the church, especially in the 80's and the 90's,

and right in the middle of that era, when I was 16-years-old, I had a radical transformation to follow Christ. And I got really involved in these groups of sort of Wesleyan holiness, and it was an amazing experience. I loved sort of having a lot of that sort of built into me.

But part of that, there was this kind of.. a lot of people know who my grandpa was, and since we shared the last name, a lot of people would bring this up. And there was about a two year season in my life, and I'm ashamed to say this, where I wasn't sure about my grandpa theologically. I was just a kid, 17, 18, but I mean I would tell people things like yeah, I'm not sure he's really doing God's will. And a lot of the criticisms toward my grandpa were things like he doesn't preach sin enough, he doesn't give altar calls, and things like that. And I levied those same claims, even though I was very close to my grandpa, and he loved me dearly.

I never really told him that, I don't think ever in his life. Maybe I should have. But I remember vividly when it changed as a 17 or 18-year-old, and I still kept that fire inside of me and realized that my grandpa shared that same fire. Young people know everything, don't they? They just know everything. And I remember we were on a fishing boat, and he gave me his new book, *If It's Going to Be, It's up to Me*, a title that annoyed me, by the way. And he gave this book to me, and we're sitting there, and we were very close. I mean he's sitting in his robe, in his

bathrobe and underwear and a cup of coffee. I mean this is my grandpa. Not this robe. It's a different one.

And he hands me this book. He always wanted me to be a preacher, and I hate pressure. I love to do the opposite of what people want me to do. And my dad was never that way, but my grandpa for sure was. He was that way with my dad; he was that way with me. It was like you got to go into ministry. So he was always doing his best to kind of play, you know, try and move us in that direction, but especially when he saw my fire for the Lord, he was like oh I want him to be a pastor.

So he hands me this book, and he says "Read me the title of this book."

"If it's going to be, it's up to me."

He goes, "No! Read it as though you were preaching it." He said, "Read it with passion."

So I said, "If it's going to be, it's up to me."

He said, "No! With passion, like you really believe it!"

And I said, "If it's going.." I'm getting like Shakespeare now.. you know, "if it's going to be, it's up to me." I'm trying really hard.

And he goes, "No, with passion."

So I full on like.. and I wanted.. this was meant to be an insult. He didn't get it. I mean I was trying to make fun of him. I did an impersonation of him, and I go, "If it's going to be, it's up to me." And he looks at me, no lie, that's exactly how I did it, even with the cheesy smile

at the end, the whole kit and caboodle, and he looks at me and he goes, “perfect!” Perfect. If you know my grandpa, he was so dramatic when he preached, but he was like that all the time. He didn’t get like more dramatic on stage, he was always that way, all the time at dinner, at the movies, at breakfast. I mean that’s how he was.

So I took this book home with me, *If It’s Going to be It’s Up to Me*, and I sort of read it from this point of view, and again, I hate to say this; it’s embarrassing, but I read it from this point of view as like you know some preachers will read other preachers books that they already don’t like in order to find all the flaws in the book and the way they disagree with it theologically, and that’s kind of how I was approaching this work. As I read it, I realized a hundred percent that I was wrong about my grandpa, that he was a brilliant theologian, and I realized even reading it; see the reason the title annoyed me, and maybe it annoys you, if it’s going to be, it’s not to me, it’s up to God. Right? You think it’s up to God.

And what I realized is he was teaching us is hundred percent right, that if I might have changed the title of the book, I might have changed if it’s going to be its up to me now. Because it’s kind of like this – it’s like God has already called you, He’s already made promises to you, He’s already empowered you and now the ball is in your court. We so often think we’re powerless. And the point was to say, and this is my point to you today: you’re never helpless, you’re never powerless, you’re on the

side of good, you've got the greatest being in the universe on your side rooting for you, fighting for you.

It's like this: if Bill Gates were to call me, and say Bobby Schuller, I want to give your church a million dollars. All you got to do is call my secretary, find a time, and take me out to lunch and I'll bring the check. If it's going to be, who is it up to? Listen, I believe that it's now up to me because Bill Gates has made me a promise. He told me over the phone, and I don't have the money in my hand yet, but I believed that what he said is true. That it will come to pass. And now it is up to me to do something so simple, just make a phone call, just meet him for lunch. If it's going to be, it's up to me. I have the choice to be lazy and to not go out, or I have the choice to call and make an appointment.

And I believe the same about the Lord. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, He is the great physician, there is nothing God can't do. At this point, God has given you a promise. He's given you His word. He has called you. He says you're above and not beneath, the head and not the tail. Your cup will overflow. That now if it's going to be, it's up to you. Choose today which path you will go down: the path of least resistance that is easy, that leads to death, or the difficult arduous, set backy difficult road that leads to life and inherit your promise.

You have a choice. This is why faith pleases God. Man nothing pleases God more than faith. I'm surprised how often God uses, in the bible, sinners who are still addicted and in a way immoral, and I'm just

like what is going on here. And they still, they act in faith and God blesses them. God doesn't love immorality, obviously. God wants us to do always what is right, but I'm always so surprised when you see how often faith pleases God.

If you want a new life, you need to choose today that that will be your life. If you don't want to be poor anymore, choose today – I'm going to do what it takes to not be poor any longer. I'm going to learn what I need to learn, I'm going to do what I need to do. If you want to be healthy, if you want to walk like Jesus, if you want a new family, whatever it is that you want, the dream that God has put on your heart, choose today and keep that dream before you, and it will be so. Amen?

Choose today to move forward. Choose today to apply yourself. Choose today to get help with your addiction, or with your depression. Choose today to make new friends. Choose today to walk away from poisonous ones. Choose today to learn to say no and to do what you need to do to live the life God has called you to live. The most important choice you can make, and if you never make this choice, all the other choices in life don't even matter. The most important choice you can make in life is to choose to follow Jesus Christ. So often in life, in our modern age, we have so much information available to us, and it is worthwhile, but it's so easy to think I'm not so sure about this God Jesus thing. Part of me believes, but part of me doesn't. Part of me thinks it can be so, but the other part of me is really skeptical.

And I just want to say to you Jesus did not tell us he who has the faith of a mountain can move a mustard seed. He said all you need is the faith of a mustard seed to move a mountain. Look, if one percent of you, just one percent of you says I believe in the name of the Lord, and the rest of you says I'm not so sure, God can use that one percent. He can use it. Even if you're filled with doubt and you're not sure, if that one percent in you says I believe in Him, and you use that, you leverage that one percent to make a choice, to live a life for God, that's enough. That's enough.

So don't wait to choose. Choose today and you will be blessed. Don't ask God to bless what you're doing, do what God is doing because it's already blessed. Amen?

Lord, we thank you. We choose you, we choose your way, and we thank you that even though we feel tired, or angry, or whatever it is that we're feeling, we decide today to have the right kind of thoughts and to choose what is good, and to move forward in Jesus' name, amen.