

As a Man Thinketh

By Bobby Schuller

Well I have a new book coming out the end of May, and it's called *Change Your Thoughts, Change Your World*. It's based off a sermon series I did about two years ago off of the James Allen essay "As a Man Thinketh," and many of you said that ought to be a book. So guess what, I wrote a book. And if you were the one who suggested it, you better buy one because I took your advice!

But in all honesty, for those of you who are here, and those who are watching on television, if you pre-order this book, it really helps me out a lot because the sales that are predicted at like Barnes and Noble and Amazon, the amount of books that they hold are based largely on pre-sales. So if you want to help out your pastor, please buy my book. It would be great. And I think it'll make a big difference.. I really do think it'll make a big difference in people's lives. In the book is this whole idea that we're not going to be able to get into the spiritual disciplines and practices that lead to a lot of these changes, but they're in the book, very spiritual disciplines at the end of every chapter that can really help you make a difference. So, okay!

Well on that note, we'll just jump right in. We're going to do a series on this over the next six weeks, and today we're just going to kick it right off and we're going to begin with the thesis, which is the title, and

that is.. it's a Dr. Peale quote, "If you want to change your world, change your thoughts." Change your thoughts, you change your world. So many people are upset about the circumstances in their lives, they're upset about their jobs, they're upset about where they are, they're upset about their relational status, but they nurture the thoughts that got them there. So many people have bad circumstances and they nurture the bad thinking that gets them to that place.

Very often we war against where we are in life, but we love the way we think and we forget that our thoughts are perfectly designed to give us the results we're getting in life. If you want to change your life and your circumstances, you have to change your thinking. You have to train your mind; as you would train your body as an athlete, you have to train your mind into discipleship; into the word of God, into good thinking versus bad thinking, and then, and only then, will your life actually be transformed. You want a better future? Have better thoughts. You want to have better friendships? Have better thoughts and this will change everything.

It reminds me there's an old proverb. A man was walking along and he saw a laborer out along a sidewalk. And the man was laying bricks and one after the other, and had sort of a glum look on his face. And the man asked him what are you doing here? And he responded: I'm building a wall. I'm a brick layer. He said okay, that's interesting.

And then he continued to walk along, and then he saw another bricklayer, another man laying and cementing and doing the same type of thing, and this guy looked a little bit happier. And he said sir, what are you doing? And he said: oh me, I'm building a church. Isn't that lovely? He said oh it is, it is lovely.

And then he continued to walk along and saw yet a third man, also laying bricks and laying cement, and he said to this man, sir, what are you doing? And he looked at him and paused for a moment with a big smile on his face and a deep look in his eyes, he said: I am building a house of God.

So now you look at these three men and all three men are bricklayers. All three men are doing the same job, all three men are on the same team, achieving the same aim, but all three are thinking about what they're doing in a different way. If you were a betting person and we had to take a wager, and you wanted to guess, of these three men, who would be in a better place five years from now? That is, who would be happier? Who would be more successful? Who would be achieving more in their life? Who would you bet on? I would bet on the guy that says I'm building a house of God. And even though all three are doing the exact same work, we instinctively know that the thinking, the perspective of hard labor that doesn't pay a lot, that doesn't have a lot of glory, that the way they think about the work they're doing is going to affect their future in a big, big way.

And we should make it our achievement, our goal, our motive when we wake up in the morning to be more like the last guy and less like the first guy. To decide that our parenting, our work, our labor, our study, everything that we do, that it has a greater end than what we're doing, and to furthermore pay attention to our thinking, and to decide that I will nurture the kinds of thoughts that lead to not only discipleship, but lead to achievement, that lead to better relationships, that lead to the kind of life I want. And I will stop waking up every morning and being negative and embittered about the fact that I'm not where I want to be. In the end, if you want a new life, you need new thinking. If you change your thoughts, you will change your life. It all begins here in our mind.

So to that, by the way, I discovered an interesting story about a man named Justo Gallego Martinez who was a Trappist monk during the Spanish civil war. In this picture, he's 93 years old, he's still alive, and he is sitting in a cathedral that he built all by himself. It's unfinished. You can see it's a little sloppy and strange. It sort of looks a bit like gaudy, which is appropriate being that he's Spanish. But this man who went through the Spanish civil war, if you know any of the history of the Spanish civil war, you'll know how horrible an experience that might have been, and as a Trappist monk, his own life was in danger, but he also saw many priests and friends of his who were murdered.

And so out of that then, he had even a further disappointment – he contracted tuberculosis and was unable to continue being a monk. And he said in his own head, Lord, if you heal me of this tuberculosis, I'll build a cathedral for you. Low and behold, he got better and he decided I have no money, I have nothing, but I'm going to do whatever I can to build a cathedral for God.

And this whole cathedral was part of the beautiful thing of the story: he built it for free. Everything you see in there was donated to him or is trash or was recycled in some way. The beautiful pillars on the outside, for example are made of oil barrels. Many of the bricks and things that were laid were given by nearby construction workers who knew what he was doing and would drop off used or unusable construction equipment. And every day, of course except on Sunday, he wakes up and for about ten hours, he builds his cathedral.

Now the reason I show you this man is I show you somebody who not only went through difficulty in life, but has done something and continues to do something very impressive. And it's a model of even what I was talking about, the difference between the person who lays their bricks and says I'm building a wall, and the person who lays the bricks and says I'm building a house for God; that our attitudes and our thoughts, in our labor, in our work and in our life, make all the difference in the world.

God's going to change your life, He's going to change your circumstances, He's going to make things better in your life, but He's going to begin first by teaching you the simple fact that your circumstances, in large part, are the result of your thinking, and that if you want a new kind of life, you have to have a new kind of thought. This is so, so, so important.

And that in fact if you nurture a type of thinking, it cannot remain secret because the more you think about something, and the more you dwell on something, it'll make itself apparent in every aspect of your life. James Allen, who wrote the famous essay "As a Man Thinketh," who was also a believer and a Christian, wrote this incredible line that I think is absolutely true: "Men imagine a thought can be kept secret, but it cannot. It" (that is the thought) "it rapidly crystallizes into habit, and habit solidifies into circumstance."

If you dwell on unforgiveness all the time, if you dwell on bitterness, if you dwell on negative things all the time, if you're always saying things about yourself that you're a horrible, rotten person, or you're shameful, or all this stuff, it's going to materialize in every aspect of your life: in your work, in your discipleship, in your relationships.

But the good news is God has given us a new way; a new way to think. It's through His word, and it's through mentors and friends who can change our thinking so that we can have a new kind of life. And I want you to know God wants you to know this. God wants you to change

your thinking so you can be a bold, bright and great disciple for His name.

And of course this thinking, the idea that we should change our thinking is not unique to Bobby Schuller. It was truly a big part of what Paul wanted to teach the church, and that's why in many of the Apostle Paul's letters, you see so much of discipleship begins with the pattern of our thoughts.

The most obvious one is the scripture that Hannah read today from Romans chapter 12. And before he gets there, Paul says "O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God." This is in Romans 11. In other words, something to be attained and something to long for. And he says, "How unsearchable His judgments and His paths beyond tracing." And finishes with "To Him be glory forever and ever." And then continues into Romans 12. So there's this desire to have the wisdom, the knowledge and the judgment of God. To have it inside of us.

And then Paul famously says, "Therefore," in Romans 12, "I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice." Now here he doesn't mean literally die, although He does for some people. I think what Paul really means here is a reflection of like what he's saying about running the race, about being willing to submit your body to the kind of discipleship training that's required to have a new kind of life. "Holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship."

And then what? “Do not conform to the pattern of this world,” in other words, everybody in the world does everything the same way, right? Everybody is always in the same pattern, doing the same thing every day. We as believers too often want to just mimic that. Want to just go with the flow of what culture says. But He says, “But be transformed” how? “By the renewing of your mind.”

This word transformed is also an English word. In Greek its metamorphosis. Right? Metamorphosis means you become an utterly new thing. It's the caterpillar becoming a butterfly. It's the tadpole becoming a frog or a toad, right? And this is what God wants for us. He wants us to become this new creature, right? We're still valuable even before we're transformed, we're still loved, we still matter to Him, but when God looks at us, it's like looking at an apple seed or something. You just see so much potential within this little thing that if it yield itself to the death and life of Jesus Christ, that so much can come out of this one thing. That's what God sees when He sees you. He sees just an incredible person that can achieve and do great things for His kingdom that can be full of love, and full of His life and His ideas, that can manifest with real results. But it all, all of it, it starts in your mind. And then he says you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing and perfect will. Okay.

Dallas Willard famously said that “A person is a mind with a will.” If you want to be a different person, you need a different mind that leads

to different choices. Okay. So a new person, a new you. If you really want a new you, it begins with your thinking, what you think about.

I remember years ago when I got my first job at Pueblo Viejo in Tulsa Oklahoma, I was 16-years-old. And on the totem pole in restaurants, at least it was this way at the Mexican restaurant I worked at, at the very top, other than the manager, the coolest person in the restaurant, we all know is the bar tender. We all know that. For whatever reason, bartenders are cool, everybody knows they're cool: they have their own little club over there, you're only allowed to talk to the.. and then just below them you have the waiters, the senior waiters, and then you've got like the host and hostesses, and the busboys, and then just under them at the very bottom, the bottom scrapers are these people called the expeditors. This was my first job. My job was an expeditor, which literally means to make things faster, to bring the plates out. But it also means you get to do all the other jobs that everybody hates; cleaning the toilets when someone throws up their Mexican food, for example. That actually happened, among other things, and it's not a proper for church to go into these things.

But really, I remember once like for me as a person, feeling very often taken advantage of, and ignored, and like my job didn't matter, but I did my best to just apply myself and do well. I remember one time, one night, I cleaned the kitchen, and cleaning a kitchen in a Mexican restaurant, I just won't get into how difficult that is with all the grease

and the lard and the Massa flour and everything. And I'm cleaning up this kitchen, and it is spotless, it's gorgeous, everybody's ready to go home, and this guy, this waiter forgot to bring in some random plate full of cheese and rice and stuff, and he takes it and he kind of plops down because he's in a hurry, and it spills on the counter and it falls onto the floor, and then he's starting to run and he's like 'oh, so sorry but I got to go.' And I'm like what? And then my boss comes in and he comes in and he goes, 'Schuller, clean it up. I want to go home.' And inside was this volcano of emotions. Just so much happening inside of me.

And I thank the Lord that at the time, my parents had been taking me to Willie George's church, Church on the Move, and Willie George talked a lot about the importance of our thinking, and the value of our work. And this is just such a gift that keeps on giving in my life. I remember it's attributed to Luther, although I think it's not really Luther who said it, but this idea of something like a maid as she sweeps the floor honors God with her life, just as a monk does in his prayers, not because she sings a hymn, but because God likes clean floors. And then he says the shoe maker does his Christian duty as a pastor would, not because he puts little crosses on his shoes, but because God appreciates good craftsmanship.

And I remember Pastor George saying if you're ever doing work that you feel like is unfair or you don't want to do, just do it for the Lord. And I remember just being like all right, I'm going to let go of my

bitterness and my anger, and can I tell you normally, what would have happened is I probably would have been steaming all night. The next day would have been awkward between me and this guy. Either I would have challenged him directly or been more like a Christian, which means passive/aggressive. You know what I mean? And I would have had like some bitterness in my heart and some issues to work out and I certainly would not have slept well. I would have been thinking of all the comebacks I could have had and things I could have done, but instead I took Pastor George's wisdom and I said Lord, I'm just going to clean it for you.

And I just began to clean up, and I thought this is for Jesus. I'm just going to do this for Jesus, and I truly meant it. As a 16-year-old, it was a big change for me to make this shift as a kid. And I remember I finished, and it was fine. And I went home with peace in my heart. And I slept well and I honestly forgot about it the next day. But I think that you can see how thinking, your thinking in your work, your thinking in your relationships, how little changes like that when you're stuck in something that's unfair, to just give it to the Lord and even do it as worship to the Lord, and to decide to not get embittered, to not be unforgiving, to not be angry or passive/aggressive, but to do it for the Lord. It made a big difference in my life.

Can I tell you that there are many ways in which we think in life that we change our thoughts just a little bit, it can make everything so,

so much better. And maybe the greatest endeavor of our life is to figure out what those thoughts are, and how we can train our minds to think those things more, and the other things less. You change one little thought in your life today, just one negative thought into a positive thought, one bad or evil thought into a good thought, your whole life will be different five years from now than it is now. That is a promise.

I remember we used to work on boats a lot when I was in college and in high school. I was in Dana Point Harbor a lot, and there was one ship that has this thing called a fly bridge, which is where you drive the boat from, and up top there's this giant silver looking chrome steering wheel that no one ever used. No one ever used the steering wheel, even though it worked. What everybody used was this little janky navbox right next to it that was a little computer that had little plastic dial and a number on it that had coordinates. And if you moved that dial just a centimeter one way or the other, the nav would change and the direction of the boat would shift. And actually if you just changed it just one tick, you wouldn't even feel the boat, you wouldn't even be able to see a difference on the horizon, but I'll tell you something – if you did that, you would find yourself miles away from where you were before if you hadn't made that one little change.

This is how your life is and will be if you can change some of those bad thoughts to good thoughts. Because good thoughts always lead to good fruit, and bad thoughts always lead to bad fruit. And so we must

figure out what those are and figure out how to train our mind into the right kind of thinking. Amen? We all know it's true.

J.D. Rockefeller is someone that I have always found to be so interesting. Some people call him a wonderful business titan, other people called him a robber baron. Wherever you land on history, you can't deny the fact that he achieved quite a bit with his life, and he's, in fact from a financial standpoint, achieved more than any other person in history. If you account for all things considered, he's probably the wealthiest person who's ever lived, certainly the wealthiest in modern times.

He started a company called Standard Oil, which after an antitrust suit, was broken into 34 companies, two of which include small companies like Exxon Mobile and Chevron. He was a 90% share holder in those companies, by the way. So J.D. Rockefeller, of course, multi, multi billionaire, so wealthy he would lend money to the federal government when they got in trouble. That's true.

So J.D. Rockefeller grew up not in a great circumstance. His father, they were basically poor, kind of grew up with a single mom. He did have a dad who was around from time to time, but he was just a rotten human being. He was a known con man. He had the nickname Devil Bill, right? And Devil Bill had multiple families and multiple mistresses, was always selling elixirs and cheating people out of their money.

And then his mother, though, who truly raised him, was a devout Baptist woman. And she taught him a moral life and he really was a moral man. He said I never took a sip of alcohol, or tobacco, and I always treated my neighbor with compassion, etc.

So he was a good Baptist, right? And one of the interesting things about J.D. Rockefeller is how generous he was, even when he had nothing. So there are all these accounts of him finding his neighbors in need, and finding a way to get money to help them. He would lend people money or give people money outright.

And then he had this tremendous love of work. So in a time where there were these unjust child labor laws and all these horrible things going on that I hate, he got a job at .50 cents a day, which even then was absolutely nothing and was immoral and wrong, and you would think that he would always kind of curse the name of the boss that took advantage of this teenage boy, right? But the rest of his life, J.D. Rockefeller celebrated the day he got that job. He celebrated it as 'job day' until he died when he was 97. Every September 26th he had a party at his house to celebrate his first job he ever got. This is a man who loves work, and who appreciates anyone who would hire him to do their labor. On top of that love for work, so that's a huge shift in thinking that will make a big difference in your life.

He also had a sense of destiny. One day as an adult now, he was, I forget what he was doing at the time, I think he was a clerk, but he was

supposed to catch a train. It was one of those scenes from like a movie where back then, there were no planes, so you had to get around by train and if you didn't catch your train, you'd be delayed sometimes days. And so here he is running down the tramway or whatever you call it, carrying his bags, and you can like see the train pull away. And he's like no! Come back! This kind of thing. Well that same train hours later would get into a terrible wreck and everybody on the train died. So this affected him in a big way. He talked about it a lot. He believed God spared him for a reason, and his whole life, he had these two things: one, a celebration and love of work that he felt so honored to be able to be working and doing work, but the other, a sense of destiny; that every day he woke up.. I mean do you think he knew what his destiny was when he woke up the next morning? Absolutely not. He just knew there was something, and that was enough.

And I believe these two changes in thoughts for J.D. Rockefeller, along with integrity, which he got from his Baptist mother, created, in a way, J.D. Rockefeller. And J.D. Rockefeller is a mind. It's a mind that made certain decisions in life. And whether we agree with all those decisions, and we agree with the life of the man, you can't take away that the result of his life is first and foremost the result of his thinking.

I hate to keep dwelling on money, but it's something that affects all of us. By the way, money is the number one topic in the Bible, did you know that? It's mentioned more than faith, more than love, it's like

incredible. It's all over the Bible because it's such an important part of our lives.

On that, the Kellogg School of Management, which is at Northwestern University, did a study of boys in relation to how much they would make compared to their dads. And within the bell curve, they found that almost always boys make whatever their dads make. Isn't that interesting? So that if you're a boy, your dad made \$30,000, you're likely to make \$30,000. If your dad makes a hundred thousand dollars, you're most likely make a hundred thousand dollars. Now there are lots of boys who are outside of that bell curve, including guys like J.D. Rockefeller.

So a lot of times we want to ask the question why is that, right? And our natural instinct is to say it's a system, right? It's that poor people stay poor because of a system, but I actually think that it's because of the thinking. Now this is conjecture, I don't have evidence for this, it's just what I think. I think that a boy whose dad makes \$30,000 that that's what I can make. That's what I can make and be respectable. And a boy whose dad makes six figures, that's what I have to make or my job is not respectable. There becomes an expectation on the life of that boy that to be a man is to make this much. Right or wrong, it is that thinking. That's it. That's what I think. I think it's that kind of thinking that leads to those kinds of financial outcomes.

Now I don't think anybody is in church today because they want to make some money, right? Nobody's here to achieve financial outcomes,

but because money is something that affects all of our lives in a tremendous way from governments and churches and schools and our personal lives, it's something that we all think about in measure. And who here wants less money? Anybody here want less money? Anybody? If you do, we'll pass the plate again. We're happy to help you out. Okay?

So to be honest about that and to say that its one very small aspect of a very big life that you're going to live: your relationships, your goals, the things you want to build, the charity work you want to do, the volunteering you want to do, and the personal change you want to go through. You want to be a better dad, better spouse, better grandma, better grandpa, do you want to be a better citizen, you want to be a better Christian, and most importantly, yes, you want to be a better disciple, a more moral person, you want to beat your addiction, you want to live every day in a relaxed spirit, unhurried, loving your neighbor, living honestly, full of integrity and without worry, living within the kingdom of God every day, saturated in His life and love? I mean all of this; all of it begins with the way you think. You want to change your life you've got to change your thinking. You have to.

And then that begins with training. It doesn't come with just trying harder. You have to do things in your life that affect your thinking.

Remember that the mind is like a garden. It requires work every day. I remember my grandpa Persley, when he lived with us years ago he turned our backyard into like a garden, basically. He took these boards

and he made this big sandbox essentially, and in that he like would take all of the stuff, like you couldn't throw away rotten eggs, anything disgusting pretty much could not be thrown away. If it was rotten eggs or rotten bread or coffee grinds or banana peels, he would be like no! Don't throw that away, and like carrying treasure, he would bring it out to his garden to turn this clay filled horrible dirt into real top soil. And he created this amazing garden. It was beautiful and he had tomatoes and all this other great stuff, and when he left, when he and my grandma moved to Springfield, what do you think happened to that garden? I would say it was three or four weeks and it was just like weeds, I mean just weeds everywhere.

And that's what the mind is like. It requires not only caring for in terms of keeping your mind healthy, but it requires pulling of weeds, the planting of seeds, the nurturing of certain kinds of thoughts as you would plants and crops in order to yield certain kinds of fruits in your life. It is the most important thing to do in your life is to guard and to train your mind: in the books you read, the friends you keep, the media you consume, the things you listen to. Being here is a great way of doing that, right? Being a part of a church and a community that wants a godly and good kind of thinking.

So I'm going to challenge you this week to just begin labeling your thoughts. So if you have thoughts that tend to really stand out in your life, maybe really noble, inspiring, brilliant, imaginative thoughts, label it

and just say that was really interesting, or that was really a beautiful thought, or that was a good thing to think towards someone. And the vice versa. If you start having bitterness in your heart, or other kinds of thoughts that you really don't think should be there, maybe if you're struggling with addiction, various triggers or things that sort of make you think about that, I want you to label those, too, and don't do it with shame. Do it like a robot, okay? Don't beat yourself up and be like oh, I'm such a bad person because I really wanted that chocolate cake and I'm so bad. Just label it. Just label it and notice it and begin to think about what you think about. Begin to pay attention to the patterns of thought in your life. Because ultimately it starts there if we're going to change our thinking, right?

You want to change your world, got to change your thinking. You want to change your circumstances? You got to change your thinking. And this is good news. It's simple and yet complex. If you think the way everyone else thinks, you'll get the results everyone else is getting.

Father, we thank you and we love you. We thank you for wisdom and knowledge. And we ask, Lord, that you would help us to put on the mind of Christ. That you'd help us to transform our lives by changing our thinking. God, we love you so much, and we thank you that you're so patient with us. Lord, that just like any other fruit tree, we will bear our fruit in season. It doesn't always have to be right now. And we thank you and we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

