

Ebenezers vs. Mental Monsters

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

I'm stopped at a red light. I glance in the rear view mirror. A man in a dark blue uniform is getting out of the white car behind me and walking up to my window. My heart drops into my stomach as I roll down the glass. The man in the blue uniform says, "Is O'Charley's Restaurant down the road to the left or to the right?" I'm so relieved I can hardly speak. "T-t-to the left...I think." I can't stop laughing. He wasn't even a policeman. I think he was a plumber.

Be honest now. You would have thought the same thing I did... "What did I do wrong?" Right? We human beings are so prone to think of the negative, aren't we?

Have you ever heard about "The Power of Positive Thinking"? Do you have trouble buying into that whole philosophy? Well, **you should**...but be careful you don't throw the baby out with the bath water. That mass of cells between your ears is a "fearfully and wonderfully made" piece of equipment (Psalm 139:14). God thinks it is very important and talks about our mind and thinking processes many times in His Word. In fact, there are **more than 500 references** in Scripture to the mind, thinking and remembering.

One of the most pointed statements is found in Proverbs 23:7, *As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.* Wow! That's powerful. If **we become what we think**, then no wonder our thought life is so important to God. The way we think determines our emotions, our attitudes and our behavior. It follows then that if we simmer in negative thot-talk, our attitudes, emotions and behavior will be negative. And if we simmer in positive thot-talk, our **attitude** toward life and God and other people will be positive. The **way we feel**

about what is going on around us will be positive. And the **way we act** toward others will reflect our positive attitudes and feelings.

In Romans 12, Paul states how important it is that we **renew our minds**, for only then can we **stop** conforming to the world's pattern for living, and **start** conforming to God's will for our lives. But how do we go about renewing our minds? How do we stop simmering in the negative? How do we change?

In 1 Peter 1:13-16, Peter gives us four **action points** to accomplish this transformation. First, he commands us to ...*gird up the loins of your mind* (KJV). Just like an ancient soldier would gather his skirt-like garment, pull it up through his legs and tuck it into his belt, so we are to gather up our thot-talk (our thoughts) and tuck them into the belt of Truth (Ephesians 6:14). Now our mind is ready for action, not wandering off into self-pity or self-gratification.

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Peter also commands us to ...*be sober* (KJV), be awake, alert, and watchful; remember who your real enemy is. Then ...*set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed* (NIV). We get to choose who or what we put our hope in. And finally, Peter says, *As obedient children, do not conform [to the way you used to live]...But...be holy in all you do.* In other words, obey God's Word.

When we decide to **renew our minds** and **set them on God** and His Word, God promises us something very valuable – *perfect peace*. Is perfect peace something you want? Isaiah declares in chapter 26, verse 3, that God will keep us in perfect peace

if our minds are stayed on Him. To *stay your mind on God* means you believe He is faithful, dependable and worthy of trust; and so you decide that you are going to trust Him – **period**. It echoes Peter's words in 1 Peter 1:13 — ...*set your hope fully*.... And what happens when we do this? God gives us perfect peace... **peace of mind**.

This reminds us of something David Schwartz wrote in his book The Magic of Thinking Big. "I was closely associated several years ago in Chicago with a firm of psychological consultants. They handled many types of cases, but mostly marriage problems and psychological adjustment situations, all dealing with mind matters.

"One afternoon as I was talking to the head of the firm about his profession and his techniques for helping the seriously maladjusted person he made this remark: 'You know, there would be no need for my services if people would do just **one thing**.'

"What's that?" I asked eagerly.

"Simply this: destroy their negative thoughts before those thoughts become **mental monsters**. A person can make a mental monster out of almost any unpleasant happening,' my psychologist friend went on. 'A job failure, a jilted romance, a bad investment, disappointment in the behavior of a teenage child – these are common monsters I have to help troubled people destroy.'

"It is clear that any negative thought, **if fertilized with repeated recall**, can develop into a real mind monster, breaking down confidence and paving the way to serious psychological difficulties." (The Magic of Thinking Big, pages 52-53)

So, it seems **we have a choice**, doesn't it? We can *stay our minds* on

the Lord and have peace, or we can build mental monsters and be miserable. Let's look at two men who chose to destroy their mental monsters and see what happened to them.

David laments in Psalm 42:4-6, *These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.* (He then dramatically changes direction.) *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you....* David's **mental monster** was his yearning for what used to be, and that miserable monster had his **emotions** and **attitude** wallowing in self-pity. But then David decided to "gird up the loins of his mind" and set his hope in God, and look what happened! His emotions and attitude changed. His **behavior** also changed. He began to praise God instead of bellyaching'.

Jeremiah is feeling lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut in Lamentations 3:17-24. *I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord."* [Sigh] *I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.* (Then he too dramatically changes direction.) *Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."* Jeremiah's **mental monster** was his stewing over the pain of the past, and the miserable monster had him almost drowning in that painful stew. But look what happened when

he chose to "stay his mind" on God. He started to have hope and peace. His whole **attitude** changed, didn't it?

I have come to know a few of my mental monsters, and when I start to yearn for what might have been or start to rehash a painful episode in my life, I know that misery is not far behind. Like David, we all have yearnings for how it used to be or how we wish it had turned out, and, like Jeremiah, we all have painful memories from our past. We also, like David and Jeremiah, have a choice whether we will feed and **empower our mental monsters** to keep us in their miserable grasp; or "stay our minds" on God and the truth of His Word and have **peace and hope**. Our choice.

One hot day a couple of summers ago, (and if you know Nashville, you know how hot the summers get here) a shopper noticed a woman slumped over the steering wheel of her car in a grocery store parking lot. The first woman didn't want to disturb her, after all, she might be praying, so she went on into the store. About an hour later, as she wheeled her groceries past the woman's car, she noticed the woman was still there slumped motionless over the wheel in the steamy summer heat. She knew something must be wrong when she approached the car and saw the woman's hand grasping the back of her head. "Oh, I'm so glad someone finally came to help me! Call an ambulance. I've been shot in the back of the head and my brains are falling out!"

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When the paramedics arrived, the whole story was discovered. After loading her groceries carefully in her back seat, the woman had gone into Wal-Mart to do a little shopping. When she came back to her car and started to turn on the ignition, she

heard a loud BANG and felt something hit the back of her head. When she reached back to feel around the painful area, she felt something gooey, so she concluded she had been shot and her brains were falling out. What had really happened was that a can of biscuits had exploded in the back seat, shooting the lid at the woman's head with a gooey biscuit right behind. When she felt the supposed wound, what she was really feeling was the doughy biscuit. And so, for several hours in the sticky summer heat, she had sat motionless, holding her "brains" in, not daring to move, in desperate fear for her life. **As she thought, so was she.** Her thot-talk shaped her **emotions, attitude** and **behavior**.

Poor lady! She needed help in thinking what was right, didn't she? And so do we. That must be why God gives us so many **visual reminders** of His love and faithfulness. In Matthew 6, Jesus reminds us to look at the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. "If I take care of them, I will take care of you." God gave a rainbow as the visual reminder of His covenant with Noah and all generations to come that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood (Genesis 9:15-16). In Deuteronomy 6:5-9, God even tells His people to *...Tie [His commandments] as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.* Even if you take this command symbolically instead of literally, this is still a very visual scenario.

Time after time in Old Testament Scriptures, when God showed His faithfulness to His people, they would **set up an altar** to remind everyone of what God did, and give them **hope** for the future. *When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. They said to Samuel, "Do not stop*

crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.” Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel’s behalf, and the LORD answered him. While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the IsraelitesThen Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far has the LORD helped us.” (1 Samuel 7:7-12, NIV)

We have an Ebenezer at our house. It reminds us everyday *Thus far has the Lord helped us.* The night before her **fortieth** birthday, the doctor told Bette she had cancer and had only a few months to live. The night before her **forty-first** birthday, after our family had experienced God’s healing, our oldest daughter Elicia gave her Mom a Grandfather clock. “One year ago today,” she said, “the doctor told you that you had no more time. Every time this clock chimes, it will remind you of **the time God has given back to you.**” So that beautiful clock is our altar named **Ebenezer**. Every time we see it or hear it chime, we remember God’s faithfulness and love, and **know we can trust Him**

for the future.

Do you have an **Ebenezer**? A **visual reminder of God’s faithfulness** that helps you “stay your mind” on Him and trust Him for the future? A future free of mental monsters? A future full of hope and peace? That’s the kind of future God wants for you.

What are your dreams and goals as you look toward the future? We’re not talking about big houses and fast cars. We are talking about that burning desire God has fanned within you which gives your life **meaning and purpose**. You might say your **dreams are your life purposes**. They are big, over-arching desires of your heart for what God wants for your future.

Goals, on the other hand, are day-by-day **progressive steps** toward your dream or life purpose. They are your **plan of action**. This is where most of us get into trouble, because we forget that our day to day choices lead us somewhere whether we want them to or not. If we are not choosing goals which lead us toward our dreams, then we are **floundering** around with no plan of action, without purpose, and are all the more susceptible to building mental monsters. But if we know the direction we are headed, it is harder to get lost.

Say your life purpose or dream is to have a marriage full of closeness, harmony and love – a God-designed relationship. In order to achieve your

dream, you would have to set goals which would be progressive steps toward the dream. You would need to **follow a plan of action** which would include things like reading God’s Word together regularly, praying together, and getting active in church together. If, instead of setting goals, you simply carried on with your life with no plan of action, letting things happen as they would, not working toward closeness in your marriage – do you think you would realize your dream? Probably not. If you can’t **see** the target, you can’t **hit** it.

Think of your dreams. What does God want you to do? What does God want to do **in** you? He *is* at work in you, accomplishing His purposes. Do you believe that? What are the goals you must set in order to move toward your dreams? What is your plan of action? Now... what **Ebenezer** can you use to visually remind you to **stay your mind on God** and trust Him for the results?

Some friends of ours told us they wanted an Ebenezer to help them see their target of faithfully doing **Experiencing Oneness**, which would get them into the habit of reading the Bible and praying together regularly. The Ebenezer they chose was a rock for the middle of their kitchen table. A big ‘ol rock in the middle of the table *would* be kind of hard to miss, don’t you think? So...what’s going to be your **Ebenezer**?

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