

## LESSON 4: THOUGHTS & WORDS: THE BATTLE FOR OUR MINDS

**Objective:** In our thought life, we are commanded in scripture to look for anything that is virtuous or praiseworthy – to think on that which is good. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. If we have good thoughts, it will be reflected in our words. The believer who can bridle their thoughts and words, and thus not render offense, is a perfect person.

**Mosiah 2:49:**

But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe to **keep the commandments of God**, and **continue in the faith** of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish.

**Romans 12:2:**

And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . .

**II Corinthians 10:4-5:**

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to **the pulling down of strongholds**. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

**Psalms 139:23-24:**

Search me, O God, and know my **heart**; try me, and know my **thoughts**. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

**1 Peter 5:8:**

Be sober, be vigilant; because **your adversary the devil**, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

**Alma 9:22-26:**

. . . if we have hardened our hearts against **the word**, insomuch that **it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful**, for then we shall be **condemned**. For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless. And our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare look up to our God. And we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us, to hide us from his presence. But this cannot be: **we must come forth and stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame, that all his judgments are just**.

### THOUGHTS

**Alma 12:110:**

And Ammon said, Yea, and he looketh down upon all the children of men: and **he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart: for by his hand were they all created from the beginning**.

**Psalm 139:1-10** (God's omniscience and omnipresence):

**O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.** Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou **understandest my thought** afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not **a word in my tongue**, but, lo, O Lord, **thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.** Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

**Hebrews 4:12:**

For the word of **God** is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of body and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, **and is a discernor of the *thoughts* and intents of the heart.**

**D&C 3:6d:**

Thus **Satan thinketh to overpower your testimony** in this generation, that the work may not come forth in this generation;

In every believer, there is an ongoing battle between the forces of good and evil to dominate that person's thought life. Think of a person who is newly baptized. The next morning he wakes up, and perhaps he is confronted by a spiritual battle. The thoughts inside his head replay past experiences. He is reminded of old wounds and failures. He can't get those thoughts out of his mind. He becomes focused, even obsessed, about those past experiences.

In just one day, he's gone from feeling a sense of forgiveness and relief, knowing that Jesus is his Savior, to a sense that things are hopeless and that turning to Jesus will not help. How did that transition from hope to a sense of futility occur in such a short time?

**It's because there is a spiritual battle constantly going on inside each person.** We are all susceptible. And when we become disciples of Christ, the intensity of that struggle over our thought life becomes even greater! The problem is no one ever instructed that new believer what to do when spiritual battles arose, when they would be under attack by spiritual forces that wanted them to fail.

There are many hurting people in the world who lost this same spiritual battle years before they ever knew Christ. They were captive to negative thoughts and emotions. They resigned themselves to the idea that they had lost at life, that there was no hope, that there were no answers to be found.

Many people in the world are trapped in patterns of thinking that bring them to depression, sadness, self-pity, loneliness, anxiety and hopelessness. Once they become Christian believers that struggle doesn't necessarily end.

There are so many people in the world who do not feel loved by God or perhaps do not feel that they are worthy of his love. Our perceptions about this are formed by the relationships we have with the important people in our lives. Our relationship with an earthly father can frequently shape our view of our Heavenly Father. We all need that love. We have to be willing to receive God's love.

Spiritual warfare begins when we are very young and we first become aware of possible dangers that might derail our course in life. That is why **little children should receive a *blessing*** from the Lord that will sustain and protect them until they are old enough to make a decision for Christ.

## Becoming a Disciple of Christ

Christian writer Jennie Allen says, “when you and I choose to believe a lie about ourselves, it’s one of these three lies we believe:

- I’m helpless
- I’m worthless
- I’m unlovable.”

Which of these do you most often identify with? Allen goes on to say, “Every lie we buy into about ourselves is rooted in what we believe about God.” Depending on what we believe about God, we let Satan use one of these three lies rob us of joy and peace.

We have to be aware that Satan will not loosen his grip on our souls without a fight, and he does not play fair. This can send us spiraling out of control. Our thoughts can sometimes race and rapidly head in various directions, or we can try to bring them under the control of a loving God who wants to give us peace.

Alma counseled his son, Helaman:

### **Alma 17:69:**

Yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest, let it be in the Lord; yea, **let thy *thoughts* be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever; counsel the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good.**

One way to prepare ourselves for the daily battle we will confront is to “direct the thoughts and affections of our hearts to the Lord and ask the Lord before we do anything.” He promises he will give us direction. We must trust him and act on this promise.

### **1 Corinthians 2:11-16:**

. . . **the things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God.** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but **the Spirit which is of God**; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. . . . **which the Holy Ghost teacheth** . . . For who hath the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? **But we have *the mind of Christ.***

As new Christians we often find that, even after being baptized and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, we are confronted by forces that attempt to derail the commitment we’ve made. We are sometimes shocked or surprised. But as time passes, we begin to understand that spiritual battles will never cease in this life. The only question is, “How will we choose to respond to such attacks on our thought life?” In the midst of this spiritual battle, we have to remember that **“we have the mind of Christ.”**

### **2 Timothy 1-6:**

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou **stir up the gift of God, which is in thee** by the putting on of my hands.

With regard to that spiritual warfare, we are susceptible and the believers around us are as well. We are weak. We need the power of God’s Holy Spirit to teach us how to fight spiritual battles over our thought life. This skill doesn’t just come to us automatically once we are Christians.

### **D & C 85:19a:**

. . . cast away your **idle thoughts** and your **excess of laughter** far from you.

In other words, God is saying I want you to soberly consider a different way of thinking.

**Moroni 7:51:**

And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, **is not easily provoked, *thinketh no evil*, and rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth**, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth.

We have to remove the toxic thoughts that we're helpless, worthless or unlovable. We must learn how to let the gift of the Holy Spirit teach us to love to such a degree that we are not easily provoked, we cease to think evil of others, we begin to establish habits of not relishing sin, and we learn to love the truth. This is the instruction that we must give to new believers.

**2 Timothy 1-6:**

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou **stir up the gift of God, which is in thee** by the putting on of my hands.

This **struggle over our thought life** is something that will be with us throughout our lives. This is the process by which we must allow the gift of the Holy Spirit that is in us to **bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”**

Mosiah 7:51 addresses what we *cease* to do in our thought life, but what do we strive to put in its place?

**Philippians 4:8:**

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are **true**, whatsoever things are **honest**, whatsoever things are **just**; whatsoever things are **pure**, whatsoever things are **lovely**, whatsoever things are **of good report**; if there be **any virtue**, and if there be **any praise**, ***think on these things.***

In this passage the apostle Paul advises us, in every situation to look for that which is:

- Virtuous [always look for that tiny amount of good in something], and
- Praiseworthy [find a way to speak words of blessing to others].

In every moment of life, even if there doesn't seem to be much that is good to focus on, I must try to find something good about the situation I am in, try to find something that I can praise God for. This will lift my spirit and give me hope. This is how Paul made it through stonings, shipwreck, beating, persecution, imprisonment, etc. If he can do that, by the grace of God so can I.

Along with that, Paul advises us to always look for things that are:

- true,
- honest,
- just,
- pure,
- lovely,
- of good report.

**This is what we should be thinking about.** This is instruction that should be given to every new believer! We should all memorize this passage to steel us for that moment when Satan attacks, when he attempts to discourage and tell us there is no good in the world, that our lives have no value, that we are going to fail in our mission.

How we choose to view circumstances can dramatically alter the direction of our lives. And yes, our thought life is a choice. We are not simply victims of every wind that blows by us in the battle for our minds.

### WHAT THOUGHTS FROM MEDIA SHOULD I ALLOW TO ENTER MY MIND?

We all begin our walk of faith with noble intentions. We want to be more like Jesus. But then our old lifestyle takes over. If we were previously in the habit of listening to a particular news program on the way to work before we were baptized, we fall back into that habit. If we were watching streaming services every day before we were baptized, we tend to regress into that habit. Same methods, same outcome. The information and influences that we previously allowed in our lives often remain the same unless we choose to do something about it.

If we want to alter our thought life, it requires a different mindset and consciously choosing different influences that we allow to surround us. How many of us want the Lord to come and dwell in our homes? Is there a scripture that talks about television and media influences?

#### **Psalm 101:1-8:**

**I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. Oh when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.** A froward heart shall depart from me; **I will not know a wicked person.** Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off; him that hath a high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. **Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.** I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.

#### **2 John 1:9-11:**

**Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.** He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. **If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed.** For he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds.

If we want more of God's power in our lives, the key that unlocks that power is humility. Grace is "the desire and power to do God's will."

#### **James 4:6:**

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, **God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.**

If God's power were more evident in our daily personal devotions, we would be so excited that we couldn't wait until the next time we could pray and study scripture. If God's power was resident in our worship services, we couldn't wait until the next time we got back to church. That's what individual and corporate worship will be like in Zion!

To get to that point, we have to stop being "double-minded" and consciously choose what influences we want in our homes.

## WORDS

### Mosiah 2:49-50:

But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not **watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds**, and observe to keep the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, **even unto the end of your lives**, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

### Luke 6:45:

A good man **out of the good treasure of his heart**, bringeth forth that which is good. And an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil; **for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.**

## THE POWER OF THE TONGUE: EVIL SPEAKING

### James 3:

- 1 My brethren, **strive not for the mastery**, knowing that in so doing we shall receive the greater condemnation.
- 2 For in many things we offend all. **If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man**, and able also to bridle the whole body.

In these first two verses, James seems to be talking about times of conflict where both sides perceive that there must be a winner and a loser. We must be careful not to offend.

- 3 Behold, we put **bits in the horses' mouths**, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.
- 4 Behold also the **ships**, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are **they turned about with a very small helm**, whithersoever the governor listeth.
- 5 Even so **the tongue is a little member**, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

In verses 3-5, James marvels that a little part of the body like the tongue can determine the direction a person will go and can even determine their fate.

- 6 **And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.**

In verse 6, James then says something very profound about the tongue that we do not find stated this clearly anywhere else in scripture. When someone chooses to disparage another person, to impugn their motives, to diminish their character, we call this “evil speaking.” With a strong wind a wildfire can spread as fast as one football field per minute. Using this metaphor, we must all become firefighters who seek to extinguish evil speaking before it can spread.

- 7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind;
- 8 **But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.**
- 9 Therewith **bless** we God, even the Father; and therewith **curse** we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

- 10 **Out of the same mouth** proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.
- 11 **Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?**
- 12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

We all are engaged in a great struggle to subdue our tongues and keep them from uttering conflicting messages. We need to focus on speaking words of blessing to every person around us. How can I bless them with my words today?

- 13 Who is **a wise man** and endued with knowledge among you? **let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.**
- 14 But if ye have **bitter envying and strife in your hearts**, glory not, and lie not against the truth.
- 15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.
- 16 For where envying and strife is, there is **confusion and every evil work.**
- 17 **But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.**
- 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of **them that make peace.**

In **verses 13-18**, we are called to display the “meekness of wisdom.” We’re told that the following are earthly, sensual and devilish and cause confusion and evil work:

- bitter envying and strife in our hearts
- seeking glory
- being deceived by lies

But God’s wisdom results in the following:

- purity
- peace
- gentleness
- being easily entreated by God
- mercy
- good fruits
- impartiality (treating everyone alike)
- an absence of hypocrisy
- peacemakers.

### **Titus 2:7-8:**

In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, **sound speech, that cannot be condemned**; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

### **WHAT IS THE PROPER REACTION WHEN WE HEAR “EVIL SPEAKING”?**

When we hear evil speaking from another person, the best thing to do would be to invite them to come with you and speak directly to the person they were talking about. We all need to be “firefighters.” We need to help extinguish such activity.

What this world needs is a mighty change in our thinking. We need to be reborn through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and receive his image in our countenances – to be new creatures.

### **Alma 3:25-32:**

. . . a **mighty change was also wrought in their hearts**; and they **humbled themselves**, and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, **they were faithful until the end**; therefore they were **saved**. And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, Have ye spiritually been **born of God**? Have ye **received his image** in your countenances? Have ye **experienced this mighty change** in your hearts? Do ye **exercise faith** in the redemption of him who created you? Do you **look forward with an eye of faith**, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God, to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body? I say unto you, **Can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you**, in that day, Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?

### **1 Peter 2:21-24:**

For even hereunto were ye called; because **Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps**; who did no sin, **neither was guile found in his mouth**; who, when he was reviled, **reviled not again**; when he suffered, **he threatened not**; but **committed himself to him that judgeth righteously**; who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, **that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness**; by whose stripes ye were healed.