

THINK DIFFERENTLY

NOTHING IS DIFFERENT UNTIL
YOU THINK DIFFERENTLY

BIBLE STUDY

JAMES MACDONALD

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CONTENTS

THE AUTHOR 4

INTRODUCTION 5

WEEK 1: WHY IT IS SO HARD TO THINK DIFFERENTLY? 6

WEEK 2: DESTROYING THE STRONGHOLDS IN MY DISPOSITION 30

WEEK 3: DESTROYING FAMILY DYSFUNCTION STRONGHOLDS-1 52

WEEK 4: DESTROYING FAMILY DYSFUNCTION STRONGHOLDS-2 72

WEEK 5: ENDING DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS 92

WEEK 6: STRONGHOLDS OF MY OWN MAKING 112

WEEK 7: WHEN STRONGHOLDS START TO CRUMBLE 132

WEEK 8: REPENTANCE BREAKS STRONGHOLDS 154

WEEK 9: WHEN YOU FAIL TO THINK DIFFERENTLY, DO THIS 176

WEEK 10: HOW TO RENEW YOUR MIND 198



THE AUTHOR

JAMES MACDONALD has committed his life to the unapologetic proclamation of God's Word. He is the founder and senior pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel, one of the fastest-growing churches in the Chicago area, reaching more than 13,000 lives each weekend. Heard on the "Walk in the Word" radio and television broadcasts, his practical teaching is also

accessed by thousands online. Through James's leadership and by God's grace, Harvest Bible Fellowship, the church-planting ministry he founded in 2002, has planted more than one hundred churches across North America and around the world.

Born in London, Ontario, Canada, James received his master's degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and his doctorate from Phoenix Seminary. He and his wife, Kathy, have three adult children and reside in Chicago. For more information about James and these ministries, visit www.harvestbible.org or www.walkintheword.org.

Other books and Bible studies by James MacDonald:

Always True: God's Promises When Life Is Hard
Bible study (LifeWay, 2011)

Always True: God's Five Promises for When Life Is Hard (Moody, 2011)

Authentic: Developing the Disciplines of a Sincere Faith Bible study (LifeWay, 2013)

Authentic (Moody, 2013)

Come Home (Moody, 2013)

Downpour: He Will Come to Us like the Rain
Bible study (LifeWay, 2006)

Downpour: He Will Come to Us like the Rain
(B&H, 2006)

God Wrote a Book (Crossway, 2002)

Gripped by the Greatness of God Bible study
(LifeWay, 2005)

Gripped by the Greatness of God (Moody, 2005)
Have the Funeral small-group study (LifeWay, 2011)

Lord, Change Me (Moody, 2012)

Lord, Change My Attitude Bible study (LifeWay, 2008)

Lord, Change My Attitude ... Before It's Too Late
(Moody, 2001)

Seven Words to Change Your Family (Moody, 2001)

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Vertical Church Bible study (LifeWay, 2012)

Vertical Church (David C Cook, 2012)

Act Like a Man (Moody, 2014)

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THINK DIFFERENTLY

INTRODUCTION

A long time ago I memorized Proverbs 23:7, “As [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he” (NKJV). When you think about it, that statement is the ultimate no-brainer. Thinking determines outcome more than anything else. Our actions, attitudes, and self-awareness all flow from the way we think.

This is a study about the way our thinking influences everything we do. This is true even when we are dealing with God and what God asks us to do. We need to ask ourselves what happens when we make decisions or promises but haven’t changed our underlying thinking.

We have a long way to go in these sessions and we’re only beginning to grapple with the truth that nothing is really different until we think differently. At this point, are you content with your old arguments, old opinions, old mindsets, and old patterns? Or, do you find yourself leaning into the possibility of a different, God-centered way of thinking?

I would just like to say prophetically and prayerfully that this series is going to change us. May these weeks be a time when God shows us from His Word that real change ultimately means thinking differently. According to Proverbs 23:7, the way we think in our hearts is the way we are.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY

1. Attend each group experience.
 - Watch the DVD teaching.
 - Participate in the group discussions.
2. Complete the content in this workbook.
 - Read the daily lessons.
 - Complete the learning activities.
 - Memorize each week’s suggested memory verse.
 - Watch for window-rattling, earth-shattering, life-altering encounters with God’s revealed glory and manifest presence.

WEEK 1

**WHY IT IS SO
HARD TO THINK
DIFFERENTLY?**

Welcome to this group discussion of Think Differently.

Make introductions within in the group. Take a few minutes to approach the theme of *Think Differently*. Talk together about what it means to change your mind. One of the phrases you will hear repeated frequently in this series is, “Nothing is different until you think differently.” Use the following questions to expand the discussion. Encourage everyone to participate.

Describe a life experience that involved changing your mind.

What were the benefits you experienced as a result of changing your mind?

What were some negatives that could have happened if you had not changed your mind?

This is a study about the way our thinking influences everything we do. This is true even when we are dealing with God and what God asks us to do. We need to ask ourselves what happens when we make decisions or promises but haven't changed our underlying thinking.

To prepare for the first teaching video in this series, read the following verses aloud in unison:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-6

WATCH

COMPLETE THE VIEWER GUIDE BELOW AS YOU WATCH DVD SESSION 1.

Why is it so hard to change my thinking?

Because my battles are not primarily _____ (v. 3).

There are at least five major mental battles:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Because my weapons are not readily _____ (v. 4).

Our immediate tendency is to rely on _____ weapons. .

The weapons God provides for us have the following qualities:

They are _____.

They are _____.

They _____ strongholds.

Because my _____ are not easily _____ (v. 5).

My old _____ made sense.

My old _____ felt good.

My old _____ is opposed to _____.

My old _____ comes naturally.

Because my engagement must be _____ (v. 6).

DISCUSS THE VIDEO SEGMENT WITH YOUR GROUP.

Of the four reasons James gave for the difficulty of being able to think differently, which made the most sense to you? Why?

When James talked about “flesh-weapons,” what weapons in your arsenal stood out to you? When do you find yourself using those weapons?

When he introduced the idea of mental wars and spiritual warfare, James described five areas where we battle: behaviors, relationships, finances, ideology, and morality. Which of these areas seems most like a constant battleground for you?

Based on this session’s teaching, how would you say your thinking affects your victory or defeat in your life? How does this evaluation fit with the challenge James gave: “This is where your best thinking has gotten you.”?

In what ways would you say the teaching for this session has given you hope?

Application: We have a long way to go in these sessions, and we’re only beginning to grapple with the truth that nothing is really different until we think differently. At this point, are you content with your old arguments, old opinions, old mindsets, and old patterns? Or, do you find yourself leaning into the possibility of a different, God-centered way of thinking? Take a few minutes with the group and pray with each other asking for God’s help in learning to think differently during these weeks.

This week’s Scripture memory:

As [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he.

PROVERBS 23:7, NKJV

Assignment: Complete the daily lessons for next week in preparation for the next group experience. Make a note of further questions or thoughts related to this week’s teaching that you can share with other group members. Pray for each member of your group by name. Ask God to help them think differently this week.

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO THINK DIFFERENTLY?

A long time ago I memorized Proverbs 23:7, “As [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he” (NKJV). When you think about it, that statement is the ultimate no-brainer. Thinking determines outcome more than anything else. Our actions, attitudes, and self-awareness all flow from the way we think.

For almost thirty years now I’ve been drilling on this matter of behavior. I’ve been praying, preaching, watching, and waiting for people to change. In the late 1990’s, I first taught a series eventually called *Lord, Change Me*. The messages focused on lessons from Romans 6 and 7. We were asking: *When I get to a fork in the road, why do I always say yes to temptation? Why can’t I say yes to God? How do I say no to temptation and yes to God?* And, we learned that change never happens without God’s help. As the apostle Paul, the writer of Romans, summarized it, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:24-25a).

But as I kept thinking and praying about change, asking the Lord to change me as well as our church, I realized I had to get to a deeper level on the subject. Right around 2002, I preached a series titled, *Lord, Change My Attitude, Before It’s Too Late*. It was a study of five terminally self-destructive attitudes displayed by the people of Israel in the Book of Numbers: complaining, coveting, criticizing, doubting, and rebelling, alongside five God-honoring attitudes that can replace each of the negative ones: thanksgiving, being content, loving, exercising faith, and submitting. The core truth we were confronting is that attitudes are patterns of thinking formed over a long period of time that must be replaced. With God’s help, we put off the old and put on the new.

Still, challenging and changing an attitude doesn’t necessarily address where attitudes come from. So, I’ve been wrestling with what really has to change if behavior is going to change, which brings us to this study, *Think Differently*. We’re about to face the reality that nothing is going to change until we think differently. This first week, we are simply confronting the truth that changing the way we think is one of the hardest tasks any of us can take on. We definitely need God’s help.

I would just like to say prophetically and prayerfully that this series is going to change us. May these weeks be a time when God shows us from His Word that real change ultimately means thinking differently. According to Proverbs 23:7, the way we think in our hearts is the way we are.

DAY 1

WINNING AND LOSING IN THE MIND

If you're like most of us, you have probably been baffled by someone's words or actions. Why does Bill lose his temper and yell at his wife? Why does she respond by having a third glass of wine every evening to dull her pain? Why is their daughter deeply involved in risky behavior that never delivers what she is looking for? Why do your own words and actions leave you wondering why certain situations trigger humiliating or hurtful responses from you?

The reason is the way they—and you—think. God's Word states the problem in Proverbs 27:3, but Scripture also gives us direction and powerful hope in these verses:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-6

Underline or circle every word in these verses that you want to understand better. Summarize your initial response to this passage by writing at least one question you want answered during this study.

OUR SITUATION

If just changing the way we think causes real change, the lasting change, and the big change—why aren't more people changing? Here's why: Because it is terrifically difficult to change the way you or I, or anyone, thinks. Second Corinthians 10:3-6 helps us not only see why changing our minds is difficult it also shows us how God wants to help us in the process.

Take a moment to pray about your participation in this study. Ask God for an open heart and mind—a willingness to change as He works in you. Then ask God to show you one or more areas where you may need to start thinking differently. Sit quietly and write down below any areas that come to mind.

This week we're going to review four reasons that explain why it's hard to change our thinking. Let's start by looking closely at the current state of our thinking. In order to do that, let's revisit several other examples mentioned in the video lesson.

Why does Kevin blow up every relationship that gets too close to him? Because he believes proximity equals pain. That's what he thinks. So as he moves close to a person, eventually he'll find a way to wreck the relationship because he doesn't want someone to get close enough to hurt him.

Is he right about that? No, he's wrong. It is the way he thinks. Part of him longs for intimacy with others, yet the fear of pain part of him always interrupts and destroys his relationships. And nothing will be different until he thinks differently. You may see a lot of yourself in Kevin. Or, maybe you struggle in other areas.

Why is Kim so secretive and so private? Why is she so afraid to make herself known? Because she has been rejected in the past and she doesn't want to experience it again. She thinks keeping all her superficial relationships will protect her. Is she right? No, but her actions are flowing from her thinking. Nothing will be different until she thinks differently. Until then, to paraphrase Proverbs 27:3, as Kim thinks in her heart, so is she.

It's hard to question our own thoughts. They must be right, right? But maybe not. The fact is, we think wrong thoughts all the time. And often, having them challenged and corrected is a gift that rescues us from ourselves.

Complete the following statements:

I once thought lying was a useful way to get out of trouble. Then ...

I once thought being an adult would be easy. Then ...

I once thought I was good enough to deserve entry into heaven. Then ...

Maybe there is dysfunction in your family and the way they think distorts or blocks efforts to be loving toward each other. You might be asking, "When is my dad going to stop with all of the stoic stupidity and start telling me he loves me? I think he feels it, but why can't he say it?"

Well, there are some things going on in the way your father thinks about being that open. People say, "I love you," all the time, but he thinks that saying "I love you" is an awkward vulnerability he can't handle. You may be able to press him on Christmas Eve and get the words out, but they're not going to flow freely the way you want them to until he actually starts to think differently about expressing what he feels.

After reading the following examples, consider how each of them is going to have to change their thinking. How are they a product of what they are thinking in their heart?

Linda is hypercritical.

Lance is lazy. He changes jobs like most people change their socks.

Lisa is an overeater.

Lyle is an overachiever.

Larry is complaining every minute of the day.

Lou is losing to sexual temptation.

Lauren is once more leaving her loved ones in the lurch.

Why? Are those things right? No, but simply telling them “this is wrong; this is what’s right” isn’t going to fix it. Take it from someone who spends his entire life saying to people, “Not this. This,” but unless the change happens at the thinking level, external conformity will only be short-lived.

DAY 2

BATTLES BEYOND THE PHYSICAL

As we explore 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, which is what I consider to be the most concentrated passage in the New Testament about our ways of thinking, let's keep an important question in mind: If a change in thinking is the way to make lasting change, why aren't more people changing?

It can be hard to change the way people think. Don't you agree? In the Day 1 assignment you had a chance to begin seeing that your mind, like mine, has some deep thinking ruts that are hard to get out of. And, if your response to me saying that it's hard to change your thinking is, "James, I change my mind all the time. In fact, I change my mind multiple times every day," let me point out that you are describing a troublesome way of thinking, not a change of thinking. Continually changing your mind is a pattern the Bible calls "double-mindedness" (see Jas. 1:7-8). That's a pattern of thinking that stubbornly resists change. This study can help you confront this pattern of thinking. Let's think about the particular difficulty Paul laid out in 2 Corinthians 10:3:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.

What are some of the obvious differences to you between the pictures of "walking" and of "waging war"?

The Corinthian Christians seem to be especially challenged by walking in their faith. As a congregation, they could be a sexually-indulgent church, overlooking or excusing sin as well as behaving sinfully in other ways. Conflicts and false teachings caused more problems in their church. In his letter, Paul reminded the Corinthians that the Christian life is about battles that are not primarily physical.

The word *walk* was used more than thirty times by Paul as a way of referring to living or moving through life. This means we can usually substitute the word *live* where we read the word *walk* in verses like Galatians 5:16, “But I say, walk by the Spirit [live by the Spirit], and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh,” and Ephesians 4:1, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk [live] in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”

Why is walking a good way to describe moving through life?

In 2 Corinthians 10:3, Paul also used the word *flesh* twice. It’s the Greek word *sarx* that the Bible sometimes uses to refer to your old, sinful nature. But here it simply means your body, your physical reality, your way of dealing with things.

Do you understand that you are not just a physical being? There is a part of you that will live forever—with God or separated from Him, based on what you do about the offer of salvation to you from His Son, Jesus Christ. The most important part of you is not the physical part. The most important part of you is made up of your mind, emotions, and will, all of which compose your soul. If you’re saved, that part of you, your soul, is the part of you that will live forever with God.

What are some examples in your own experience that convince you that you are not just a physical being? How do you know you have a soul?

When Paul said, “For though we walk in the flesh,” he meant that even though we live our lives in this physical reality, we are not primarily fighting a physical battle. The reason why *primarily* is there is because we need to acknowledge the real physical problems that affect our lives. For example, one of the mistakes that Christians make when they start talking about thinking is that Christians are famous for not acknowledging the reality of mental illness. Mental illness is real. If you have a mental illness, just as when you have a physical illness, it’s time to see a physician. Once you take away any problems around you that are physical (flesh problems), many of the rest will have to do with the way you think. Those thinking battles can create your mental wars. Here are some of the battlefronts:

BEHAVIORAL

Your and my behavior can feel and look physical, but our behaviors may be coming from the way we think. You may be battling various behaviors in yourself and in others, but nothing will change much until your thinking changes—not for you or those you love.

What is one behavior battle you know you've been losing?

RELATIONAL

You may think that you should never admit when you're wrong or that you have to be perfect. Maybe you can't see that your behavior is hurting others. Maybe the way that you relate to others is working against what you long to experience in relationships.

How are your current relationships affected by the way you think?

FINANCIAL

Do you think that money and things will increase your happiness? Check out Philippians 4:12-13.

I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

**Happiness is in no way tethered to what you have or don't have.
Describe one financial issue that feels like a battle to you right now.**

IDEOLOGICAL

Ideology is your filter through which you interpret reality. Every person has an ideology, a mix of many different aspects of thinking. Another term for this is worldview.

When you describe your basic outlook on life, what three or four terms do you use?

MORAL

Moral thinking involves questions. Is there a right and wrong? Can sin be resisted or is it inevitable? Can sin be defeated, atoned for, and forgiven? Our thoughts about meaning and purpose in life fall into this area.

What has shaped your thinking about the central themes of life?

I'm asking you to embrace a certain truth. It is that the battle for your priorities—for your prodigal child, for better prospects in your marriage, for better prospects in your life, all of those battles—are shaped, won, or lost by the way you we think.

Take a moment to thank God today for opening your eyes to the truth that your thinking affects everything else. Continue to ask Him to help you think differently.

DAY 3

WEAPONS OUT OF REACH

As soon as Paul said that our warfare is not primarily physical, he went on to warn us in the next verse that our weapons are not readily accessible.

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4

This verse tells us there are weapons to help you change your thinking. The term *warfare* here literally means our strategy for the campaign. But there's a problem: The real weapons are not readily accessible weapons. The arsenal on hand, the one that we tend to depend on, is actually the most ineffective. It is our set of flesh weapons.

Don't forget this: When our first thought in a spiritual battle is to reach for our flesh weapons, the war is already lost.

What might be the problem with using flesh weapons in nonflesh warfare?

Do you want to know what qualifies as flesh weapons? They are the desires of the flesh. Galatians 5:16-17 tells us this:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Make no mistake, there is a war going on between the physical and the non-physical. It's a battle. What does Galatians 5 tell us about the nature of flesh weapons?

Remember what Jesus said to the disciples:

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

MATTHEW 26:41

The flesh is weak in terms of resisting sin but strong in terms of demanding its own way. There isn't a person whose heart is sincere who wouldn't say that his or her behavior doesn't always match what he or she believes to be true. That person is NOT fully living what he or she believes to be true.

So, here is a list of some of the flesh weapons:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

GALATIANS 5:19-21

How many weapons did Paul mention specifically in this passage?

How could a couple of these be used as weapons against others?

We use flesh weapons to react to offenses or to act in offensive ways. They are readily available to us and we think of them as effective ways to defend ourselves. They are not. And if those patterns go on in your life uninterrupted, you're sinning. You're not serving God. The proof of salvation is the progress in our sanctification, becoming more like Christ.

When we are describing God's work in sanctifying and changing us, we often say, "Not perfectly, but increasingly this is the Lord's work in changing me. It starts with changing my mind."

You just read the statement, "The proof of the salvation is the progress in our sanctification." How does your life currently demonstrate how God is doing the work He started in you with your salvation?

Now that we've looked at the flesh weapons that are at hand but useless, let's think a little about the effective weapons God offers to us. Second Corinthians 10:4 is a little frustrating here.

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

I thought that Paul would tell us what the weapons are, but he doesn't list our weapons because he wanted his readers to stay focused on how effective these weapons are. Our awareness of weaponry comes from elsewhere in Scripture. In Ephesians 6:10-17 we find all this defensive armor, but the only weapon to win the battle in your mind is what verse 17 calls "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

The first way I change my thinking is the renewing of my mind (see Rom. 12:2). The Bible calls it in Ephesians 5:26 "the washing...with the word." The Word of God cleanses our thinking. You have to have the sword of the Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 6:7, Paul talked about the "weapons of righteousness" we have. We have the righteousness of Jesus: "Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ," (Phil. 3:9). It's the fact that no matter where you've been—or no matter what you've done, or no matter what you regret—if you have turned from your sin and embraced Jesus Christ by faith, your Creator God, through your faith in His Son Jesus, declares you to be righteous. He sees you as righteous. The righteousness of Jesus becomes our "weapons of righteousness."

We take up the weapons of Christ's righteousness by faith in Him. As John declared, "And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4). Nothing will get your thinking to a better place than rejecting what seems to you to be true and embracing what God declares to be true. Turn away from your righteousness as a useless flesh weapon and take up the righteousness of Christ, a weapon which cannot be overcome.

What does it mean to, by faith, take up the righteousness of Christ rather than relying on your own? In what situations are you doing that right now?

The weapons, from 2 Corinthians 10:4, that God has given us are:

- **"DIVINE":** The word *divine* with the word *power* literally means the weapons that God has given us to change our thinking are from God. God is the source of the weapons.
- **"POWERFUL":** These weapons are powerful. The word translated *power* is the word from which we get our word *dynamite*. These are powerful weapons. The problem is that we may not believe that the weapons God has given us are actually powerful, and we think that we need flesh weapons to solve our problems. We must change our thinking.
- **"ABLE TO DESTROY STRONGHOLDS":** The word *strongholds* is sometimes translated *fortresses*. This is how Paul described the ways of thinking that keep you from the life that God wants you. Strongholds are fortified mental positions, which we will storm in the sessions to come.

When you think about God offering weapons to defeat internal and external attacks, how hard is it for you to believe and act on that offer?

God doesn't want to trim your strongholds or to limit the effects of your strongholds. The picture here is of a wrecking ball swinging into a tower. Some translations even say demolish. The ways of thinking that are keep us in our strongholds, isolated from what God has for us, must be destroyed.

DAY 4

DAUNTING STRONGHOLDS

If destroying strongholds were easy, everyone would do it. Most people have their thinking so deeply entrenched by the time they're into their second decade of adulthood that they don't change after that. They might change jobs. They might change churches. They might change marriages. But they don't change their thinking. Yet, they're shocked to find the exact same stuff tends to keep happening to them. Why? Because a lot more of our own thinking guides our lives than we are ever really willing to acknowledge.

Briefly review the last several years of your life. What negative patterns can you see? In what areas have you been trying to make changes, only to keep getting the same bad results? These are clues to strongholds.

MY OLD ARGUMENTS MADE SENSE TO ME.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul described the effect of the weapons God provides. They destroy arguments. *Arguments* mean reasonings—our reasons for our actions. However, deeply entrenched patterns of thinking also often become reasons why we do what we do.

- The man who robs the bank.
- The spouse who chooses to cheat.
- The kid who lies.
- The business owner who embezzles.

- The church member who spreads strife.
- The Christian who lives in stubborn independence from the Savior he says he trusts.

We all have our reasons or arguments, but strongholds don't get destroyed until those arguments are refuted and torn down.

When in your life has a longstanding bad habit or pattern been broken? In what ways can you now see that your freedom came because you started thinking differently?

MY OLD OPINIONS FELT GOOD.

God wants to destroy the wrong thinking in you and me. Second Corinthians 10:5 says, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion..."

Do you have some lofty opinions of yourself? What positions have you taken that you're convinced you could never step away from.

Proverbs 3:7 says, "Be not wise in your own eyes." It is very human to be overly confident in our own thinking. And, honestly, Christians can be the most strident, the most difficult, the most inflexible, and the most insistent that they are right about things. Our lives aren't sideways because we're arguing with someone about who Jesus Christ is or if the Bible is God's Word. The problem is that we've taken that doctrinal certainty and applied it to so many issues about which we could be deferential, reasonable, and measured. But somehow we're not. Lofty opinions feel good. They are the false comforts of flesh weapons.

When have you recently been willing to set aside a long-held opinion because you realized it wasn't the only way to look at reality?

BECAUSE MY OLD MIND IS OPPOSED GOD.

Paul tells us that our arguments and lofty opinions are actually aimed “against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:5). At the end of the day, these bad reasons, these old arguments, and these lofty opinions oppose God. That will not change until we see it like it is. When we oppose God’s work, we are opposing God Himself. Jesus suffered our pain to free us from sin. Sin only causes pain in the end. Sin doesn’t help. It isn’t good. It may bring pleasure for a moment, but in the end it destroys. If we think differently, our behavior will change. That’s what the gospel is all about.

BECAUSE MY OLD PATTERN COMES NATURALLY.

Second Corinthians 10:5 continues, “...and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” Every thought that doesn’t go with the knowledge of God will be taken prisoner. They will be taken off the field of battle of our minds. Those thoughts will submit to the Lordship of Christ.

How many thoughts do you think in a day that you didn’t consciously decide to think? What happens when you show your thoughts who is really in charge?

Until noncaptive thinking changes, nothing else is going to change. Noncaptive thoughts are actually lofty opinions, an old way of thinking that feels good to us but opposes God. We have to take that thought captive. We have to decide: No more unfiltered thoughts. No more unapproved, unchallenged, where-did-that-come-from thoughts. Every thought is going to get reviewed.

I found myself driving with my wife this morning thinking about something. Kathy asked, “What are you thinking about?” I didn’t want to tell her because she has already said, “You have to let that go!” So I just said, “I’m not thinking about it anymore.” I took that thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

The thought was not defensible, biblical, or helpful. It had to go. It had to be taken prisoner. It can’t get into my head unfiltered and unchosen. It must be rejected. It must be if I’m going to get to a better place—but my old pattern comes so naturally and so easily.

DAY 5

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

I remember about five or six years ago, I was going through a really tough few months. I was struggling even to preach. I was really wrestling with some things, so I called up a guy, a Christian man, who counsels people. He had been a friend to me in various ways, so we arranged a time to talk. What he said changed my life.

I told him the story, saying something like, "Well, I did this and then this happened. So I did this, and then THIS happened. NOW look where I am. What is going to change this? How can this be different? I never intended for this mess to happen." And he said, "Well, James, this is where your best thinking has gotten you." BAM! That is an awesome insight.

Before going on, meditate on that statement for a few minutes. Based on what you've learned so far in this week, how is the statement, "This is where your best thinking has gotten you," helpful to you?

We are not actively and intentionally trying to hurt ourselves. We're not trying to make our lives miserable. I'm sure you would never say, "My main goal this month is to get as unhappy as possible!" Most people aren't working on that; most people are working on the opposite. If it's not happening like you know it could be happening, embrace this reality: You are where your best thinking has gotten you.

Maybe you're in a place where it's going to take you some time. I'm just trying to show you the road map here. If you're where your best thinking has gotten you, then you're going to need some better thinking.

You may be feeling a little overwhelmed right now, having second thoughts about thinking differently. Strongholds resist being questioned or called into doubt. If there are situations in your life that just flared under the weight of, "You are where

your best thinking has gotten you,” it is a good time to lean into God’s love for you. Being confronted or corrected can include a lot of grace even in the discomfort.

In Psalm 139:23-24 David concluded an amazing prayer with a specific request: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” As you pray through these verses, put them into your own language and express your heart.

No one can think different thoughts for you. I’m encouraging you to pour yourself into this series, to do the same and to take part in every session during of this study. Then you’ll look back at how God changed your life as He helped you to think differently.

That’s why Paul ends our passage on thinking with these sobering words:

We destroy arguments ... Being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5-6

Paul said to the Corinthians, “I’m coming. I’m going to take care of some things. We’re going to correct some thinking and destroy some strongholds. But I can’t do it until ‘when your obedience is complete.’”

You have to do your part before anyone else can do their part. I can’t change your thinking for you. You have to make it personal. You have to choose to do this yourself. No one can do this work for you.

Like me, you may have the hiccups a lot. I’ve heard about many different remedies through the years: Get someone to scare you (but that didn’t work very well), hold your breath, drink something upside down. I’ve tried them all—unsuccessfully, I may add.

This week I had the hiccups so bad that the chair was rocking, and it wasn’t a rocking chair. Kathy, whom I love so dearly, and in a way that only she could (because she had heard this from someone), came to me while I was hiccuping, just waiting for the next one. She said quietly, “You’re calm. Let it go. You don’t have the hiccups anymore.” And I didn’t.

Those who study the mind would tell you that the reason why there are things like this—so many different remedies around something like that—is because they work. If your mind believes that it works on something like hiccups it will work for you. And everybody swears by a different thing.

Why?

Because they believe that, and it works for them.

Obviously we have truth that is far more than subjective. I'm only just saying that there is so much power in what we think. It directs so many things that we can't even understand. We're going to have a great time studying this together and changing for God's glory as we learn to think differently.

Take a few minutes to pray for the people in your group as you study *Think Differently*. The strongholds each of you will be facing in the weeks to come will be daunting—that's why they are called strongholds.

Ask God to show each participant that the weapons He has provided really are powerful to absolutely destroy the strongholds in order that He can direct new thinking in each of them.

Put the initials of four people you'll be praying for specifically during this study.

1.

2.

3.

4.