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Win the Battle of the Mind

by Harold & Bette Gillogly

Would you say a topic is important if the Bible speaks about it over 300 times? If you do, then this subject – Thot-talk – is extremely important — to God and to us. It is so important, in fact, that Proverbs 23:7 states, *As a man thinks within himself, so is he.* If what we think makes us who we are, we need to examine very carefully what we think.

What exactly are we talking about? THOT-TALK is your inner **CONVERSATION**: it's what you tell yourself about the people and events in your life. It's how you interpret what happens *to* you and *around* you. Sometimes these thoughts are clear statements in your mind; sometimes they are fleeting images or impressions. Some of us have even been known to talk out loud to ourselves. Whichever kind of thinking process you have, you're not alone. Everyone talks to themselves.

It is important that we take a close look at our THOT-TALK, because **it shapes our attitudes, our feelings, and our beliefs**. How do we get to **feel** certain ways? We get there by the process of THOT-TALK. We interpret what is happening around us and draw conclusions based on our interpretation.

Most people believe that outside events, other people, or circumstances cause and shape the way we feel, our behavior, and our responses. But that's not true! Our THOUGHTS – our conclusions – are the source! When we first discovered this, we didn't like it one bit. "Wait a minute," our self-defenses wailed, "if this is true, we can't blame anyone else for how we feel, what we say or even what we do! *We* are responsible!" You might not like this any better than we did, but hang with us. It gets worse... and then a **whole lot** better.

Here are some truths we don't act like we believe. There is a very good reason we don't want to believe these truths. They force us to face our personal responsibility. These truths are:

- Most of our **EMOTIONS** (OUR FEELINGS) — anger, hurt, depression, guilt, worry, happiness, sense of well-being, contentment, etc. — are home-grown in our THOT-TALK. Whether the emotions we are feeling are good or bad, they **start in our minds**, and they **grow in our minds.**
- The way we **BEHAVE** (OUR BEHAVIOR) toward our spouse is shaped by our own THOT-TALK — **not by our mates' behavior.** We make assumptions and judgments about what's going on and why, and then act on them. **We cannot blame our spouse** for the way we act toward them. Oh, dear, this one is *really painful*, isn't it?
- **WHAT** we say and **HOW** we say it (OUR WORDS AND ATTITUDES) are motivated and driven by our THOT-TALK. Think about this for a moment. Our feelings, our behavior, our attitudes and even the way we talk with others (That just about sums us up, doesn't it?) all come from our THOT-TALK. WOW! No wonder the Bible speaks about it *so often* and even states specifically, "As [I] think within [myself], so [am I]."

Negative THOT-TALK has at least two things in common:

(1) It is almost always **UNTRUE**.

We usually wind up feeling badly and acting hurt because we focus on what we simply don't *know* to be true. There are exceptions, but most of the time, our negative THOT-TALK is simply not true.

(2) It **FOCUSES** our attention on ourselves, not on our mates or family.

Focus...a very important word. Did you know you can hold a nickel so close in front of your eyes that it looks bigger than a new SUV? Which would you rather focus on? That's right, the one that's worth more. When we let our negative THOT-TALK control us, we become so focused on ourselves that we overlook all the great things about our mate and family.

We are commanded to think on the POSITIVE — Philippians 4:8 — *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.*

We can't get any plainer than that. There is no room in this command for negative THOT-TALK, is there?

Let's look at each of these eight things we are commanded to focus on, making sure we understand what they mean:

1. True — truthful; conforming to reality.
2. Noble — honest; honorable.
3. Right— just; righteous; living up to God's standard.
4. Pure — free from defilement; uncontaminated.
5. Lovely — pleasing; agreeable.
6. Admirable — known to be worthy of admiration.
7. Excellent — virtuous; having moral excellence.
8. Praiseworthy — worthy of affirmation and praise.

So now let's apply the verse to your marriage: "Finally, brothers and sisters, *whatever* is true about your mate, *whatever* is noble about your mate, *whatever* is right about your mate, *whatever* is pure about your mate, *whatever* is lovely about your mate, *whatever* is admirable about your mate – if *anything* about that man – if *anything* about that woman is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things."

How to Win the Battle of the Mind

Keep TRACK of your Thot-talk:

2 Corinthians 10:5b — *...we take captive **every thought** to make it obedient to Christ.* Recognize the type of THOT-TALK you are having. Catch yourself at it and take note of what you're telling yourself. If necessary, write down your THOT-TALK each time you become aware of it.

COUNTER your Thot-talk:

1 Peter 1:13 — *Gird up the loins of your mind.* Romans 12:1, 2 — *Let God*

transform you by changing the way you think (NLT). Challenge them. Bring your thoughts to trial and examine the evidence. The Judge is God and His Word. How does your THOT-TALK measure up to that? If it doesn't conform to what God says, **it must be a lie**. Throw it out! Say out loud, ***God, by Your power, I am not going to think that. It is not true.*** Or make up your own phrase to counter your thoughts. Memorize it. Keep it on the tip of your tongue. Be prepared to challenge your THOT-TALK.

The Power to CHANGE: Lamentations 3:18-24 —Jeremiah challenges his negative THOT-TALK and, instead, fixes his mind on the truth —

So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord."

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is down-cast within me. ***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."*

What a powerful Scripture! Jeremiah had a choice. Was he going to nurse his gloomy thoughts and drown in self-pity? Or was he going to counter his negative THOT-TALK and speak truth to himself? We have the same kind of choice…every day. We can capture our thoughts and make them obedient to Christ. Or we can let the devil have a field day with our minds and drop kick us into anger or despair.

It is time to CHOOSE: Do you want closeness with your mate? Then you must *choose* it. Do you want an intimate marriage? Then you must *choose* to take control of your thoughts instead of letting them control you.

We know you want to stop telling yourself lies about your mate and family, and even about those people at the church. So each time a choice arises, **you must be ready to choose the truth**. And remember, *God commands* you to capture your thoughts and make them obedient to Him, and He will empower you to obey.

PERSONAL ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago, we needed a 4-wheel drive vehicle because the area where we lived was mountainous and snowy. We looked for quite awhile before finally finding a used 4-wheel drive station wagon. It was yellow...lemon yellow. We should have taken that as a sign.

I (Bette) didn't feel "good" about buying that car. I couldn't put my finger on why, but my woman's intuition was flashing warning signals. Harold, on the other hand, after considering all our options, felt strongly that we should buy it. I held out for days while he tried to *persuade* me. Finally, I "gave in."

Immediately, the car began to fall apart — the oil seal, the engine, the battery, the clutch. With each new problem, my THOT-TALK went something like this: *This is all his fault. If he hadn't badgered me about this stupid car, we wouldn't have all this trouble and expense.* Was I telling myself the truth? Absolutely not! **I had a choice.** I could have explained my reticence to Harold even though I didn't understand it. I could have suggested that we pray about it longer. Instead, **I made the choice** to "give in." Now, I was determined to make him pay for it.

As I confronted my problem (my THOT-TALK, not the car), I saw that I again had a choice. I could continue to punish Harold for wanting that car in the first place, or I could stop telling myself a lie and speak truth to myself. After some emotional struggle and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in my heart, I changed my THOT-TALK to this: *We are both responsible for buying this car. I must take responsibility for my choice to give in. Lord, I claim your power to stop blaming and punishing Harold. Give us grace to hold on together and do the best we can with this car, because it's what we've got right now.*

Every time the old lies would rear their ugly heads, I would consciously replace them with the truth. Within a few days, there was a change in my attitude, and that precipitated a change in my behavior. *Both choices* in that experience really were **mine** to make. Not only that, I alone was responsible for each choice. And I had to take responsibility, even though I didn't want to, for my choices, my attitude and my behavior. We aren't saying this is easy. Obeying God is seldom easy. But He gives us the power to obey Him, and it is so much better than believing the devil's lies.

REFLECT TOGETHER: Re-read Philippians 4:8-9 and Lamentations 3:18-24.

PRAY TOGETHER: Dear Father, we see how important our thoughts are. Help us learn to apply Philippians 4:8 in our lives and become compassionate mates.

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