

26. THE ENEMY WITHIN

A person wearing a black hoodie and grey pants is sitting on a ledge. Their hands are clasped together in front of them, and they are looking down. The background is dark and blurry.

If there is no enemy within the enemy without can do you no harm.

#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Romans 12:2: "And be not conformed to this world; but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may be prove of what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Life has become very hard hitting and sometimes very dangerous and unpredictable. There are going to be times in your life when you will have to face some pain and adversity. How you handle those situations has a lot to do with how you think about the situations. There are afflictions and pain all around you, and it will be good to study some of the Bible characters like Job and his wife to find out what it was that brought the one to her knees while the other one was still okay.

I've often wondered what made the difference in their experience, their attitude and the way they acted. Because Job is so in our foreheads, we sometimes forget about Mrs Job. We think of Job and everything he lost, but we forget he had a wife who basically lost everything that he lost as well. She also lost her children. The livestock that was destroyed, killed, burnt or captured, was also hers. The servants who were killed or taken captive were also hers. We forget that the effects of life also took its strain on her.

We see two very different responses to the trials of life in these two people. When we read Job 1:20-22, we see Job's reaction after all the bad news of the destruction came to him and the mayhem that had been left behind.

THERE ARE GOING TO BE TIMES IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU WILL HAVE TO FACE SOME PAIN & ADVERSITY. HOW YOU HANDLE THESE SITUATIONS HAS A LOT TO DO WITH HOW YOU THINK ABOUT THE SITUATIONS.

Verse 20 says: *“Then Job stood up and tore his clothes in grief. He shaved his head and threw himself face downwards on the ground.”* It sounds very negative, but then what he said in verse 21 is very different: *“I was born with nothing, and I shall die with nothing. The Lord gave, and now He has taken away. May His name be praised!”* Very interesting reaction that came from Job. An apparent loss, but then a victory in how he reacted and responded. Then Job 1: 22 says: *“In spite of everything that had happened, Job did not sin by blaming God.”* Job’s response was positive to a very negative situation. We do not read much about Mrs Job, but there is one passage in the book of Job that tells us how Job’s wife responded to this apparent grief and destruction and mayhem that followed in their lives. Job 2:9 says Job’s wife went to him after he became ill and while he was sitting on the ash heap busy scratching his sores in the dust. She said to him: *“You are still as faithful as ever, aren’t you? Why don’t you just curse God and die?”*

Job answered: *“You are talking nonsense! When God sends us something good, we welcome it. How can we complain when He sends us trouble?”* Even in all the suffering, Job said nothing against God. It is a very interesting reaction. The sentence where Job’s wife spoke to him might seem very insignificant, but think about the implications of it. If it was your wife asking why you are being a good little boy? Why you are being faithful to your God? Why you don’t just curse God and let Him kill you? How would you feel if your wife asked you why you don’t just die? Why you don’t just let God kill you?

IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED, JOB DID NOT SIN BY BLAMING GOD. JOB’S RESPONSE WAS POSITIVE TO A VERY NEGATIVE SITUATION. EVEN IN ALL THE SUFFERING JOB SAID NOTHING AGAINST GOD.

There definitely was conflict between the two of them and their responses were completely different. Her response was very negative while his was somewhat positive. There are three factors that made a difference in their reactions, namely their **emotions**, their **thoughts** and their **actions**.

Let us consider Job first. What was Job's *emotions* in the loss that he suffered? He was sad and I believe he was shattered. We see in his actions how shattered he was. He was so saddened that he shaved his head, he fell down to the ground and he tore his robe. His emotions were very realistic for the situation that he found himself in.

But then his *thoughts* were very different. His thinking pattern was more rational. He spoke out loud what he was thinking. He said what happened was very bad, but he came into the world with nothing, so who was he to complain when everything was taken from him. He came in naked and he would leave naked. So his mind and his reasoning were very positive.

His *actions* were clearly seen as he shaved his hair and he fell on the ground, but he spoke of God's justice. He was not completely irrational in the sense that he saw everything as positive. He was very well-balanced in his mind, saying what he experienced was bad, but God can do what He wants. He did not sin against God through his actions.

Mrs Job on the other hand showed her emotions, thoughts and actions differently. I am going to interpret a bit here. I believe that she was very resentful in her emotions.

**CIRCUMSTANCES ARENT ALWAYS
THE REASON FOR YOUR DOWNFALL.
JOB AND MRS. JOB BOTH SUFFERED
GREAT LOSSES YET RESPONDED
VERY DIFFERENTLY.**

She felt angry towards Job because of him acting so pious in that very difficult situation. Maybe, for all we know, she wasn't acting very pious. Her words revealed that she might have been reacting very negatively and she resented Job. She was surprised by the fact that he was still holding on to his integrity. Maybe she felt overwhelmed by the situation and she couldn't see any other way out for Job than to just curse God and die.

She experienced her situation as hopeless and her *thoughts* could probably have been in the line of what happened was too much to bear, the suffering was too terrible for herself and especially for her husband. Because she thought there was no way out, and having those overwhelming emotions, fueled by her resentment towards Job who was so pious, she could not control her thoughts.

Mrs Job's *actions* were very destructive. She went to Job and had a quarrel, a disagreement, an argument with him. She told him to curse God and that it was better if he just died. She could have ruined her marriage. She basically told her husband to kill himself. This was a very negative outcome because of her negative thinking and her negative emotions that followed suit.

Psychology tells us this type of chain reaction that took place in Job and Mrs Job, is exactly what happens inside us when we are faced with trials and tribulations and when we go through difficult times in our lives. When something happens, whether good or bad, we have an *emotional* reaction. We have certain *thoughts* about this event that has taken place.

**WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS,
WHETHER GOOD OR BAD, YOUR
FIRST REACTION WILL BE AN
EMOTIONAL REACTION. TO THINK
BEFORE ACTING IS WHAT IS NEEDED.**

Then we go over into *action*. These things trigger one another. Our emotions trigger our thoughts and our thoughts trigger our actions. We need to analyse this chain reaction we are going through.

Psychology also tells us there is nothing you can do about your first emotional reaction after a tragic event. When you hear bad news, you are going to burst out crying, or you are going to feel sad or shocked. There is nothing you can do about it. This is the body's reaction in order to protect itself. But something you can control in this chain event of reactions are your thoughts. If you can control your thoughts, then your emotions after the thoughts can be more controlled.

When something bad happens, you are sad. After the initial reaction, you start thinking about it. The more you think about it you may not be sad anymore, but you may become irritated. And the more irritated you become, the more negative thoughts you have. And the more negative thoughts you have, the angrier you become. Your thoughts and your emotions feed one another. Before you go into action, you go in a circle where the emotions affect the thoughts and the thoughts affect the emotions. Usually when the emotions are very negative, the thoughts are negative. And more negative thoughts cause more negative emotions. There is this **vicious little circle inside your brain** before you go over into action. If you can control your thoughts then your emotions will be less negative and your thinking will be less negative, which means there is a high probability that your actions will be less negative and more constructive, rather than destructive, like that of Mrs Job for example.

**OUR EMOTIONS TRIGGER OUR
THOUGHTS AND OUR THOUGHTS
TRIGGER OUR ACTIONS. IF YOU CAN
CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS, THEN YOUR
EMOTIONS AFTER THE THOUGHTS CAN
BE MORE CONTROLLED.**

Her actions were very destructive because of her negative thoughts which followed her negative emotions.

There are several verses in the Bible indicating that our thoughts are very important and that we need to control it. Proverbs 23:7 says: *“For as a man thinks, so he is.”* In Philippians 2:5, the Bible tells us what type of thinking we should be doing: *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”* What kind of mind and what kind of thoughts did Jesus have? The answer is found in Isaiah 55:8 where God speaks to His people: *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways.”* So, if you want to know what God would think, just settle for the **opposite** of what you are thinking right now.

The Bible does give us an idea of the type of thoughts that should be filling our minds. Philippians 4:8 is a well-known verse that says: *“In conclusion friends, whatsoever things are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honourable, think on these things.”* The Bible is warning us to control our thinking. We need to advocate positive and right thinking about the things that are good and not focusing on the bad. In every situation, no matter how bad, there are still things that can be counted for good, even if they are small. Focus on those things and work with those things, is what the Bible is recommending.

The Bible is advocating that we rather think about the good things versus saturating our thoughts with the bad. We need to have God's mind, to think how God would view a situation and how He would think about that.

**THE BIBLE IS WARNING US TO
CONTROL OUR THINKING. WE
NEED TO HAVE GOD'S MIND, TO
THINK HOW GOD WOULD VIEW A
SITUATION AND HOW HE WOULD
THINK ABOUT IT.**

If we don't do that, it will change us because our thoughts and emotions become our actions and our actions make up our **characters** and we end up being very negative and pessimistic people.

Jeremiah 17:9 warns us to be careful of our thoughts. In the Bible the word 'heart' is very often used interchangeably for the word 'mind'. *"The heart (mind) is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can trust it?"* The Bible is saying that the mind is deceitful and we must not trust our own thinking. First test your thinking.

Jeremiah 17:10 reads as follows: *"I, the Lord, search the heart (mind, thoughts), I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways (actions), and according to the fruits of his doings (actions)."* In this verse the Lord is declaring that He will search your thoughts to see what you are thinking. Then He will give you according to how you act, because God understands that your *thinking* leads to your *actions*.

In demonstrating that thoughts are just as dangerous as actions, Jesus said to His disciples if a man has looked at a woman in lust, then he has committed adultery. It is as if the man already did the deed, because God knows that thoughts lead to actions.

It is clear that our emotions and thoughts control our actions in the end. Where do emotions come from? From our hearts? The answer is no. The only thing that the heart, the organ, does, is to pump blood. The heart is not responsible for emotions. Emotions originate in the part of the brain called the limbic system.

**IT IS CLEAR THAT OUR OWN
EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS CONTROL
OUR ACTIONS. IDENTIFY WHAT YOU
ARE FEELING & THINKING, BUT
RATHER LET GOD'S WORD GUIDE YOU.**

Our thoughts and emotions come from the brain and it's usually our thoughts that spark our emotions to become worse and that gets us into trouble. This means that our brains need to be controlled.

There is a saying: *'from out of the mouth, comes the abundance of the heart.'* In other words, the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. The word 'heart' in the Bible can be replaced by the word 'brain or mind'. (Remember your heart is not responsible for anything except for pumping blood.) It is your brain that is responsible for how you are going to act or speak. If I could interpret the saying a little bit differently, it says, *'for the mouth speaks what the brain is full of'*, because the brain is the seat of the emotions and the thoughts.

Another famous saying is: *'The greatest battle that will ever be fought is the battle against self.'* Now I understand this expression. I've realised that the battle of self, is actually a battle with the brain, the thinking and the emotions. We are constantly fighting them. We really have a war raging inside us. A war of the will and the mind. The will is that which controls, which decides what we want to do. What we end up doing, is what our mind, through our thoughts and emotions, has told us to do.

I have decided that I am going to name the enemy within me, the enemy I need to fight. If I give it a name it is easier to realise that I am fighting this battle against my mind. I've decided to call my brain, **BOB**. So, when I speak of Bob, I'm speaking of my brain. I've removed myself from my brain and I see my brain as another person.

THE GREATEST BATTLE THAT WILL
EVER BE FOUGHT IS THE BATTLE
AGAINST SELF. AGAINST YOUR
OWN FEELINGS, THOUGHTS AND
DESIRED ACTIONS.

A person that is trying to control me. I am in a battle to get this person to the point of not controlling me. Bob causes a lot of nonsense and Bob needs to be controlled. Bob needs to be trained. In order to make life a success, our thoughts must steadily be fixed on the object of life and not left to wander off and be occupied with unimportant things. We need to teach Bob to focus. We need to teach Bob not to control us, but we must control him.

There is nothing that will cause you so much pain in life than Bob and your own thoughts. Your brain, Bob, is like a terrorist and you need to train this terrorist to be on your side.

When it comes to hardships like the COVID-19 pandemic we are facing or the losses that Job had faced, ask yourself, "How do I want to respond? Do I want to see the positive? Do I want to be able to make it through? Do I want this situation not to get to me?" After you've established the answers, you ask yourself: "How does Bob, the terrorist, want me to respond?" In other words, "What am I feeling and thinking? Is it very negative? Is it bad and destructive? Am I, at this moment, having thoughts of suicide or revenge or hate? Am I having feelings of anger and frustration and hopelessness?" The answers you get are from Bob. Bob is the one that is having these thoughts and emotions. You then need to tell Bob: "Listen here, Bob. That was what you were thinking and feeling, but I want to see the positive in this. I want to be able to get through this. I do not want this to affect my thoughts and my emotions in such a negative way that will end up making me act and behave in a very destructive manner."

**THERE IS NOTHING THAT WILL
EVER CAUSE YOU SO MUCH PAIN
IN LIFE THAN "BOB" (YOUR BRAIN)
AND YOUR OWN THOUGHTS.
MASTERING YOUR MIND IS THE
GREATEST BATTLE.**

There is a saying which you might have heard: *'If there is no enemy within, the enemy without can do you no harm.'* In other words, if your brain is not your worst enemy, the situation around you will not seem as harsh and you will be able to get through it.

Paul said the same thing when he exclaimed that the things he wanted to do, he didn't do, and the things he didn't want to do, he did all the time. He realised that there was a battle raging within him, a battle between him and Bob, him and his mind, him and his brain. The Bible says we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Therefore we need to start controlling our minds, to recomposition Bob, to train our minds to change and to be transformed, so that we can also be transformed.

Psychology says that 80% of success lies in how we think about things. Only 20% of the success is in the mechanics or the actions that follow after the way we have thought about it. *"The mind is its own place and in itself, it can make heaven hell, or it can make hell heaven"*, says John Milton.

Psychology has taught us there is something called 'Cognitive Behavioural Therapy' (CBT). This is something we can practice on ourselves. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy learns that if we can control our thoughts, we can control our behaviour. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy aims to change our thinking patterns, our conscious and unconscious beliefs, our attitudes and ultimately, our behaviour in order to help us to face difficulties and achieve our goals. This system is the brainchild of Aaron Beck.

**BE CAREFUL OF BEING IN YOUR
OWN THOUGHTS TOO MUCH. THE
MIND IS IT'S OWN PLACE AND IN
ITSELF, IT CAN MAKE HEAVEN
HELL, OR IT CAN MAKE HELL
HEAVEN .**

We need to tackle our irrational thoughts – thoughts like that of Mrs Job who thought it was a good idea to curse God and then He could kill her husband. Not very rational to think that way.

There are 11 cognitive distortions or 11 ways how we think, which are not rational. We need to teach Bob, our brain, to ask the question: “Am I thinking rationally about the situation, or am I being irrational like Mrs Job who just wanted to die?” Let us work through some of the cognitive distortions:

1. **Filtering**: Filtering refers to the ability of a person to ignore all the positives and the good things in life to focus solely on the negative. I am thinking of the biblical example of Martha. She was at her house, busy cooking. She came out of the kitchen and scolded Mary because she was not helping with the food. She focused on the negative of Mary not helping with the food. She didn't understand the positive in the fact that Mary was not helping with the food. “*Mary*”, Jesus said, “*has chosen something better than worrying about food. Mary has chosen the true Bread of Life, which is Jesus Christ.*” So, be careful of just seeing the negative in what somebody does or in a situation. See the positive as well. Be careful of filtering, only seeing the negative.

1. **Polarisation**: This is a type of all or nothing thinking. Either I need to give 100 percent or I am giving nothing. We read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. The master gave out talents to his servants and told them to work with it and on his return, they had to give an account of what they did with the talents.

WE NEED TO TACKLE OUR IRRATIONAL
THOUGHTS. BE CAREFUL OF JUST
SEEING THE NEGATIVE IN WHAT
SOMEBODY DOES OR IN A SITUATION,
SEE THE POSITIVE AS WELL.

Most of them developed their talents. Some gave back five, some gave back 10; but there was one who gave back nothing. He had this all-or-nothing thinking. He chose to bury the talent rather than multiply it. Be careful of this way of thinking where you will rather give nothing if you cannot give 100%. The master declared all the servants that gave something, as good and faithful servants. Our talents are different. We are not all going to reach a certain standard that needs to be attained. Some of us are going to have 80%, while others are going to have 70%, but as long as we are improving, we are still good and faithful servants. *Be careful of all-or-nothing thinking.*

3. **Overgeneralisation:** This is something Bob likes. He likes using words like **everybody** is against me; **nobody** loves me; **all** of this is going to turn out terrible. Be careful of those very inclusive words. There is an example in the Bible of how people overgeneralised. Some of the people who came to Jesus when they heard Him preaching and teaching, asked: "Can **anything** good come from Nazareth?" They were overgeneralising. They were saying that **only** bad stuff came out of Nazareth and therefore Jesus must be bad as well. I believe that many of them probably would have lost salvation because they couldn't accept Jesus because of their overgeneralisation.

4. Then Bob sometimes **jumps to conclusions**. Proverbs 25:8 warns us: "*Do not jump to conclusions, there may be a perfectly good explanation for what you just saw.*"

5. **Personalisation:** This is when you tend to think that you are responsible for everything that is negative around you.

BE CAREFUL OF THIS WAY OF
THINKING, WHERE YOU WILL RATHER
GIVE NOTHING IF YOU CANNOT GIVE
100%. BE CAREFUL OF
ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING.

Do not take all the bad that is happening in the world onto yourself, saying, 'if only I did this, then it wouldn't have happened'. Be careful of that. Sometimes you are responsible, but not for everything.

6. **Control fallacies** is the need to control all the negatives around you in order to be happy. In other words, if your environment is not good, then you are not good. You want to control situations to make your environment happy so that you can be happy. Mrs Job was like this. She could possibly have thought that if only Job's misery and suffering could end, she would feel better as well. This is also what happens in many marriages where people say: "If my husband can be more positive, if my wife can be more positive, then I will be happy." You cannot base your happiness and the way you feel on how everybody else around you are behaving. You cannot control situations in order for you to feel better. There are situations that are completely out of your control.

7. **Fallacies of fairness:** This is where the mind literally thinks that everything needs to be fair. We all need to have the same or be the same. Truth of the matter is that this is not true. Life is going to give some lemons, while others are going to get lemonade or pomegranates. We don't all live life in the same way. As a matter of fact, there is an example in the Bible of this. Jesus told Peter that he, Peter, was going to die a martyr's death. Then Peter turned around, looked at John the other disciple, and asked the Lord: "What about him?" Jesus answered: "If I want him to live until I come again, what is that to you?" (John 21:19-21). One lives and the other one dies. Do not sit with this idea in your mind that everybody is going to be treated fairly.

THERE ARE SITUATIONS THAT ARE COMPLETELY OUT OF YOUR CONTROL. LIFE IS GOING TO GIVE SOME PEOPLE LEMONS, WHILE OTHERS ARE GOING TO GET POMEGRANATES. WE WON'T ALL LIVE LIFE IN THE SAME WAY.

It is going to affect how you feel and how you act and how life is going to turn out for you.

8. **Emotional reasoning** is when you evaluate the day on how you feel. If you wake up in a bad mood, everything in the day is interpreted in a negative way. Be careful of your moods and your emotions, because your emotions can make the things that are supposed to be positive, very negative.

9. **Always being right**: There are people who cannot be corrected. They cannot be told that someone may be thinking about something differently. A biblical character who thought he was right, but he then turned out not to be right, with the result that his whole life was messed up, is Judas. Judas thought he was justified in his actions in betraying Jesus because he wanted Jesus to overthrow the Romans and take the Roman throne and be the King of the Jews. He had good intentions and he thought his actions were correct, but in the end he realised it wasn't. He ended up committing suicide. *Be careful of thinking that you are always right, it could lead to detrimental effects.*

Romans 12:2 says: *“Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you can prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* The biggest wall you have to climb is the one that you have built in your mind. Never allow your mind to talk you out of your dreams or trick you into giving up. Never allow your mind to become the greatest obstacle to your success. Get your mind on the right track with the help of God. Confess Bob's wrong doings to the Lord. That is how you are going to overcome it.

**BE CAREFUL OF YOUR MOODS AND
YOUR EMOTIONS, BECAUSE YOUR
EMOTIONS CAN MAKE THE THINGS
THAT ARE SUPPOSED TO BE
POSITIVE, VERY NEGATIVE.**

Tell the Lord what Bob is thinking and feeling that is incorrect and the rest will follow. God will work in you and through you. In Psalms 139:23 David prays: "Search me, o God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts." King David is making a confession when he is saying to the Lord: "Lord, look at my heart my emotions, my brain and my thoughts when You search me, and whatever is wrong, please fix it. Help me to do, to think and to feel what is right." This is a prayer to God that will assist with the transformation of the mind. We must also pray to the Lord to help us in our thoughts and our emotions so that we can become aware of the faults of Bob. Our work is to sit and to reason and to ask whether the mind is healthy and rational. "Am I overgeneralising or am I doing negative thinking?" Then we take all of what Bob is doing with our mind to the Lord and ask the Lord to search our hearts. The Bible gives us another promise. The prophet Ezekiel brings this promise of God to us in Ezekiel 36:26: "I will give you a new heart and a new mind. I will take away your stubborn heart of stone and give you an obedient heart" (Good News Bible). God says He will give us a new mind. He will transform Bob.

'A man's mind is like a garden which may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild. Whether cultivated or neglected, it must and it will bring forth something. So, if you cultivate it, it will bring around good fruits. If you neglect it, there is going to be thorns and thistles. If no useful seeds are planted in the mind, then an abundance of useless weeds and seeds will fall in the mind and it will continue to produce all the bad things that you don't want' (James Ellen). Christian cultivation takes place as we feed the brain or the mind or Bob with the Word of God. Ask yourself today whether you are being transformed? Ask God in prayer: "Lord, please transform my mind, renew my mind, so that my life can be different as well." Let us build our Bobs today.

**THE BIGGEST WALL YOU HAVE TO
CLIMB IS THE ONE THAT YOU
HAVE BUILT IN YOUR MIND .**

Podcast



SCAN ME

To listen to the audio of this episode
on podcast scan this QR code with
your phone.



*Northern Conference, Pastoral Counselling Department
Revive, Refresh, Restore
flemingn@nc.adventist.org
Cell: +27836584296
Author: Nandi Fleming
Editors: Kobus & Adele Beukes*