

Taking Your Thoughts Captive

STEP 1: SEPARATE YOUR THOUGHTS

- Many Christians are quick to label their thoughts as either sinful or good. But often our thoughts are neutral and only gain moral value based on how we choose to interact with them.
- In her book, A Still and Quiet Mind, Esther Smith suggests imagining that your thoughts as trains. Each has a particular starting point and destination, a track they follow, and speed at which they travel.
- As each train of thought rolls into the station of our minds, we have the ability to choose what trains we take, which we get off, and which we allow to simply pass us by.
- For example, consider Jesus' teaching on lust in Matthew 5. The train of thought that a woman is beautiful is a neutral. However, in stepping on the train and lustful after her, the thought becomes sinful.



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STEP 2: EVALUATE YOUR THOUGHTS

- In selecting which trains of thought to board, it is important to use discretion. If we step on the wrong train, we could end up far from our intended destination.
- Again, Esther Smith offers helpful insight through questions to ask when evaluating our thoughts:
 - Is this thought true?
 - Is this thought helpful?
 - Is this thought appropriate?
 - Is this thought complete?
- If you are still struggling to determine if you should board a train of thought, or if the thought is persistent, consider these further questions:
 - Where did this train come from?
 - Is this conviction or condemnation?
 - Where will this take me?
 - Will this help me honor God?
- Once you have evaluated a train of thought, it is time to decide if you will board the train, step off if you are already on, or allow it to leave the station without you.



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STEP 3: REPLACE YOUR THOUGHTS

- Once you have determined that you will not be boarding a particular train of thought, it is important that you board a better train. Otherwise, that unwanted train will eventually loop back around and reenter the station, tempting you to step on.
- This is where the truth of Philippians 4:6-9 comes in and we choose to board a train that honors God. Practically, this can include:
 - prayer
 - listening to worship music
 - reminding yourself of truth from the Word
 - focusing on a task
 - exercising
- The train that you choose does not always have to be spiritual in nature, but should at least move you toward your ultimate destination of honoring God.



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S U M M A R Y

Step 1: Separate Your Thoughts

- Remember that thoughts are often neutral until you engage with them.
- Imagine your mind as a train station and your thoughts as trains rolling in and out of the station.

Step 2: Evaluate Your Thoughts

- Where did this thought come from and where will it take me?
- Is this thought...true, helpful, appropriate, or complete?

Step 3: Replace Your Thoughts

- Resist boarding a train of thought that is harmful through prayer, reading scripture, worship, taking a walk, etc.
- Choose to board a better train of thought that leads you toward your ultimate destination of honoring God.

