

Winning the War Within
By Ashley Chesnut
Romans 12:1-2

Context of Romans 1-11

- Romans 1-3 describes how all people – Jew and Gentile – need God’s salvation.
- Romans 4 declares that salvation is and always has been by faith. It was never by works.
- Romans 5 informs us that, just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam), righteousness is available to the world through a second Adam (Christ).
- Romans 6-7 describes how we as believers are released from the law yet that we still struggle with sin.
- Romans 8 reminds us that, despite our sin, there is no condemnation in Christ. Despite our sin nature, God has given us life, the Holy Spirit, an inheritance, a future glory, and His everlasting love.
- Romans 9-11 explains how God sovereignly chooses who will be saved, and He has provided a way of salvation for both the Jews and the Gentiles.
- Illustration of a tea kettle
 - When on the stove, the kettle gets hotter and hotter until it cannot keep from whistling.
 - As Paul writes Romans 1-11 and describes God’s plan of redemption, he reaches a point where – like the tea kettle – he cannot keep from exclaiming in praise of God (Rom. 11:33-36).

God Knows and Perfectly Orchestrates all Things for His Glory (Rom. 11:33-36).

- As he reflects on all that God has accomplished, Paul explodes with praise of God.
- Theology should lead to doxology and to duty. If we get these out of order, we put the cart before the horse. If we only have head knowledge but lack adoration of God and obedience to God, then we are unfaithful hearers of the Word.
- Our response to God should mirror Paul’s response to God and to His work.
 - Theology (Romans 1:1-11:32)
 - Explain that theology is the study of God – who He is and what He is about.
 - We have to start with a proper view of who God is. We have to know His truth and know Him.
 - Doxology (Romans 11:33-36)
 - Doxology is praise.
 - Duty (Romans 12-16)
 - Do not misunderstand the word “duty.” It’s not that we “have to” obey as though we’re resigned to do so because of what God has done. It’s joyful obedience, glad submission to the Father because of all that He has done for us.
 - From Romans 1-11, Paul has done more *describing* than anything else – describing who God is, who we are, and what Christ has accomplished. There have been few – if any – commands up until chapter 12, but Romans 12-16 contains scads of imperatives. In fact, Romans 12 alone contains 34 of them!
 - Why is this important? It points to how we should live in light of what God has done.

- “depth and riches” (v. 33) – Paul describes God’s riches, wisdom, and knowledge as a bottomless treasury. We will never plummet the depths of God’s wisdom.
- “wisdom” (v. 33) – God directs all things to their best end.
- “knowledge” (v. 33) God knows the end. He knows all things.
- “judgments” (v. 33) – His judgments are the decisions that He executes in the world, and they are based on His knowledge and wisdom.
- Read Isaiah 55:8-9 in light of Romans 11:33-35.
- Romans 11:36
 - “From him” – He is the ultimate Giver or source, and He alone knows exactly what to give you. Trust Him with His gifts even if they are not what you expected.
 - “Through him” – He is the sustainer/medium of all that He gives.
 - “To him” – He is the ultimate goal.

God’s Mercy Compels Believers to Worship Him by Wholeheartedly and Sacrificially Serving Him (Rom. 12:1).

- “Therefore” – This word points us back to everything that Paul has been describing thus far in Romans. Paul begins a shift in the conversation to the Romans. He’s told them what God has done, and now he tells them how God’s work in salvation history affects them and how it affects us as believers.
- “by the mercies of God” – In light of God’s mercy, this is how we should live. Because God has *not* given us what we deserve (an eternity separated from Him), we should live lives of gratitude, faith, and obedience in relationship with Him.
 - God’s mercy should utterly disrupt our lives similar to how a baby’s birth utterly disrupts the lives of the parents. Everything changes. Our life is no longer centered on ourselves and what we want. It now centers on God. In a good way, the gospel should change everything about us – how we live, think, and treat others.
 - God’s mercy should be what motivates us.
 - “The greater our comprehension of what God has done for us, the greater our commitment should be.” –R. Kent Hughes
 - As the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” states, “Love so amazing, love so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”
 - What does this look like in your life? What sacrifices are you making? How has the gospel changed you? How would you describe your commitment to God? What does your life indicate?
- The first description that Paul gives of how we should live is that of a sacrifice on the altar – a living sacrifice.
 - This “present your bodies as a living sacrifice” is *not* something that is done just once. The verb used indicates that the action is supposed to be continual, something done over and over.
 - What does it look like for you to be a living sacrifice? What are you *not* wanting to sacrifice to God? Why?
- “Holy” and “acceptable to God” describe the sacrifice. Is your life holy or distinct from the world? Is your life – the things you think about, the way you spend your time and money, what you do, where you go, what you say, etc. – acceptable to God?
- It is this continual offering of ourselves to God that is described as true worship. This is what God desires from us.
 - He does not want our ritual. For the Israelites, ritual meant sacrificing animals in the temple, keeping the religious feasts and traditions, circumcising their children, and obeying the laws. What are our rituals? What are things “good” Christians do? Why

do you do them? Does God truly want you to do those things, or does He desire you to grow in your relationship with Him and be changed by Him?

- He wants our hearts to be changed and dedicated to Him. He desires outward obedience that occurs because we have been inwardly transformed (1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 51:17).
- Outward obedience will occur if our hearts are changed and if we are seeking to grow in our relationship with God. If the tree is alive and growing, it will bear fruit.

Be shaped by God and not by the world (Rom. 12:2).

- “Conformed” – The idea of conforming is that of fitting a mold (like dough in a cookie cutter).
 - Paul exhorts the Roman believers to not let the world shape them.
 - Does your shape – the way you live your life – look more like Christ or the world?
 - How are we molded by the world?
 - Music
 - Social media
 - Ads
 - TV
 - What we read
 - Friends, family, co-workers
 - The person we’re dating/engaged/married to
 - What are you allowing to influence you? What influences are you exposing yourself to?
 - We cannot avoid all of these influences because we do live in the world. But are we striving for holiness in what we subject ourselves to? Are we sensitive to how the world affects us and our worldview?
- “Transformed” – Transformation occurs out of necessity because of an inward condition or change. It is more than conforming; it is a complete change.
 - When we trust in Christ for salvation, He gives us a new heart. We are new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).
 - However, it is a process of spiritual growth for this heart change to ripple out and affect every area of our lives. Sanctification is a lifelong process of the Holy Spirit changing us and making us more like Christ. This change of heart should result in a change of thinking, a change in our affections, a change in our will, a change in our relationships, and a change in our purpose.
 - The world has thinking patterns that are different from Christ and are antithetical to holiness and spiritual growth.
- As we renew our minds, God transforms us from the inside out. As we are changed by the Holy Spirit, we are better able to discern God’s will and can respond with faith and faithfulness. This is a cycle.

Renewing the Mind

- The primary battleground for sin is the mind.
- We are transformed as our thinking is altered.
- Is our thinking with regards to dating, marriage, money, sex, work, etc. different or the same as the world?
- Thoughts are like the start of a chain reaction.

- Thoughts lead to emotions and actions.
- We feel the way we do because we think the way we do. We act the way we do because we think the way we do. Therefore, if we want to change the way we feel or the way that we act, we must change the way we think.
- If our minds are in the gutter, then our lives will reflect it. We live what we believe, and we reap what we sow (Gal. 6:8). So whatever thoughts I allow to linger will affect how I live.
- Keep in mind that we cannot do any of this on our own power. We cannot pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, heal, and deal with the root of depression or anger or an eating disorder on our own. We need the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the people of God to help us. Seek the Lord in prayer, asking Him to help you. Dig into God's Word and learn the truth.

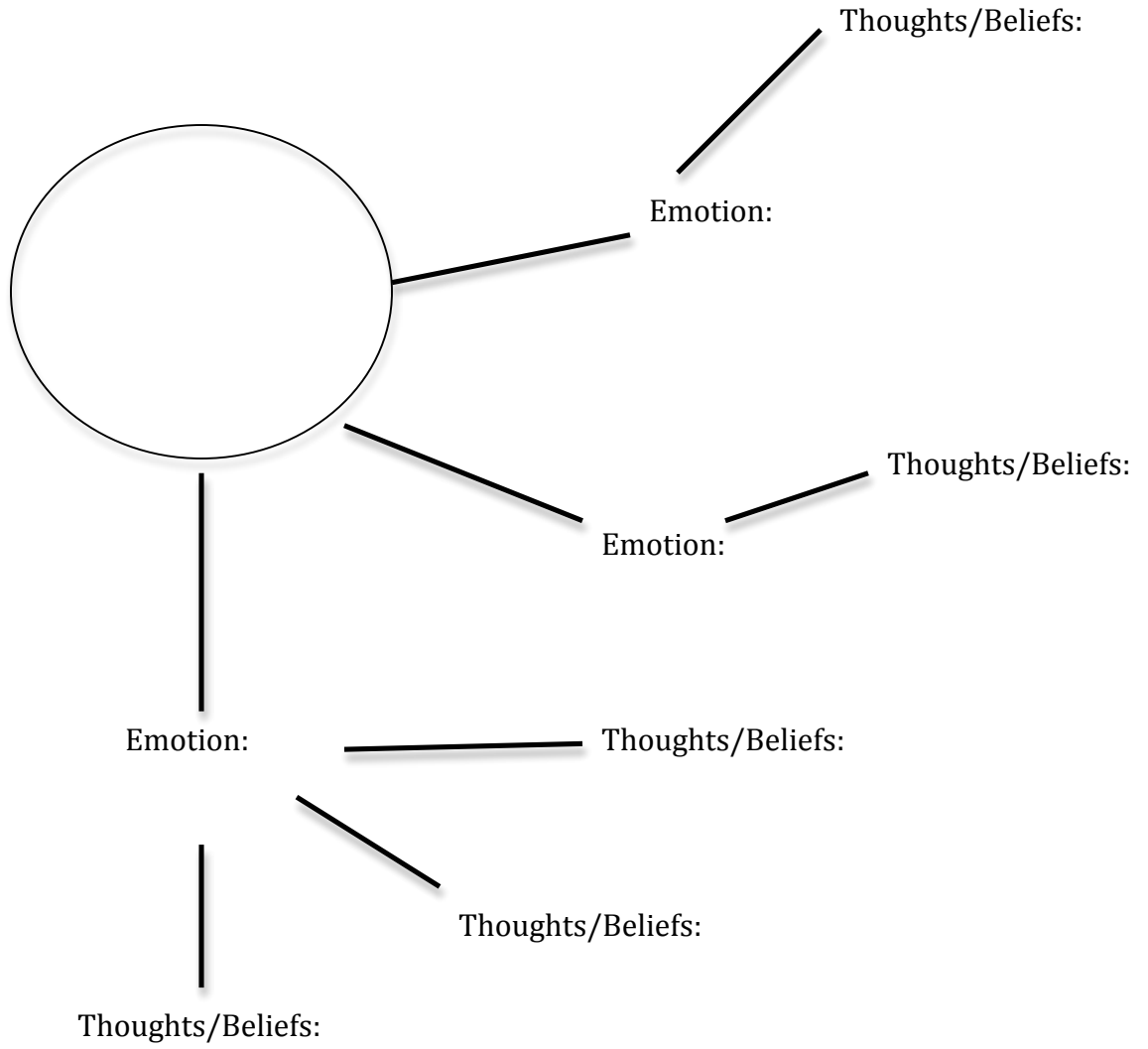
Remember the ABCs...

(Use the graphic organizer in this handout as you walk through the ABCs and explain how to use this tool to renew your mind and to combat sin in your thoughts.)

- **Actuating Event** (Example: a breakup, your parents' divorce, a mean comment)
 - Actuating events are the trigger or the beginning of a chain reaction.
 - Most often, the actuating event is beyond our control. For example, I cannot control what someone else says about me or what someone does to me.
 - I cannot control what has happened in my life, but I can choose how I think about it.
 - It is helpful to identify the circumstances that prompt certain thoughts and emotions in order to identify areas of weakness, things/people to avoid, or where to establish guardrails for ourselves with regards to temptation.
- **Beliefs/Thoughts about the Event**
 - Usually it is easier to identify the consequence first then to backtrack and identify the thoughts and beliefs motivating the consequence. For example, if the actuating event is a breakup, a girl is likely to recognize how she feels (lonely, angry, etc.) before she can recognize why she feels those emotions.
 - What emotions do the actuating events trigger?
 - What thoughts are behind those emotions or are associated with those emotions?
 - Keep asking yourself "why." *Why* do I feel this way? *When* do I feel this way, and why does this emotion pop up in *that* circumstance? This may or may not be done in one sitting.
 - Sin occurs when we believe that what we want is better than what God wants.
- **Consequences of Those Beliefs**
 - Consequences are emotions and actions that result from thinking the way that we do.
 - Our beliefs lead to consequences. Our actions are always a reflections of our thoughts.
 - If I am angry at God because He permitted a relationship to end, then that anger could lead to bitterness, depression, etc.

- If we do not like the consequences we're seeing, then we have to change what *leads* to those consequences – our beliefs. Otherwise, we'll keep spinning like a hamster on a wheel.
- **Disputing False Beliefs with the Truth**
 - Sin is rooted in a mind, heart, and affections that need to be transformed.
 - On the graphic organizer included in this handout, ask whether or not your thoughts and beliefs align with Scripture.
 - Do you even know Scripture well enough to answer that question?
 - If the thoughts behind your emotions do not align with Scripture, then those thoughts point to root issues and need to be attacked and changed.
 - We cannot identify error unless we know the truth. Study Scripture. Search the Scriptures. If you struggle with anger, use the concordance in the back of your Bible to look up verses that relate to anger, forgiveness, and love.
 - Let verses about God's character and God's promises be what you fill your mind with. This will not be as easy as it sounds, and perseverance will be needed because it is a daily battle to combat deceptive thoughts and to speak truth to yourself.
 - We have to know the truth about our situation, about ourselves, and about God, and we must remind ourselves of these truths.
 - Throughout this process, pray for God to "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" (Ps. 139:23-24). Pray for God to show you the sin inside as well as the lies that you are believing. Pray for His Spirit to give you understanding of Scripture and discernment to distinguish between truth and error. Pray for Him to help you as you fight sin and seek to attack sin at its root.
- **Effect New Consequences**
 - We can experience different consequences – positive consequences – when we dispute false beliefs.

Webbing



Identify

- The first step to renewing your mind is to recognize what is currently filling it. What is the content of your thoughts? Do you even know? What have you thought about today? Have those thoughts fit the cookie cutter of the world or of God?
- What do you dream or fantasize about? Based on the truth of Scripture, is God pleased with the things you dream, daydream, or fantasize about?
- What do you do with the things that “pop up” in your mind?
 - In the early days of Internet, there were always these annoying pop-ups that would come up on the screen. You had the choice to either let them remain on the screen or to exit out of them.
 - Sometimes things just pop up in our minds. We have no idea where the thought came from. But we do have a choice – do we let it remain, or do we replace it?
- What we think about is what consumes us, which is why it is important for us to be aware and to identify what we spend most of our time thinking about.
- Also, identify times when you are more vulnerable to temptation with regard to your thoughts. Do certain people, places, or times of the year (or month) affect you more than others? You can't always avoid such triggers, but being aware of them can help you in knowing what to pray for or what guardrails to establish in your life. It can help you to be more sensitive to sin in your life.
- If you struggle with identifying your thoughts (or with any of these aspects of renewing the mind), ask God to give you wisdom and discernment in order to grow in these areas. Also, the more we saturate ourselves in God's truth, the more sensitive we become to truth and error and the more we grow in discernment.

Filter – Philippians 4:8 Test

- Filters (water filters, air filters, etc.) prevent some particles from passing through. Philippians 4:8 is a verse we should all memorize because it can act as a filter, helping us to know what thoughts should *not* pass through and be entertained in our mind.
 - Scripture in general should be our filter, but this one verse acts as a succinct summary.
 - According to Philippians 4:8, we should think about *these* things:
 - Whatever is true
 - Whatever is honorable
 - Whatever is just
 - Whatever is pure
 - Whatever is lovely
 - Whatever is commendable
 - Whatever is excellent
 - Whatever is worthy of praise
 - A helpful (free) song to help you memorize this verse as well as other passages of Scripture can be found on The Verses Project website.
- If a thought does not meet these requirements, then it is not something that I need to dwell on.
- This is a filter that needs to remain on 24/7.

Questions to Ask Yourself about Your Thoughts

- Is it wise?

- Does it go against Scripture?
- How would it affect your witness?
- Will it draw you closer to God or farther from Him?
- What's your motivation for wanting to linger on that thought?

Replace – Ephesians 4 & Colossians 3

- Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 both use the analogies of “putting off” and putting on.”
 - By renewing our mind, we are taking off the old self – our flesh – and putting on righteousness.
 - In all of this, remember the grace of Christ – grace that He demonstrates in His loving sacrifice.
 - “Such grace should make us so in love with God that we cannot stand whatever our lives re-soils us and offends him. Biblical grace makes us intolerant of evil in our lives.” –R. Kent Hughes
- Think of clothing with these two passages. When you take off your clothes, you do so to put others on. You (hopefully) don't take off your clothes and walk around naked. These passages are saying that when we become Christ-followers, we are to *take off* what is sinful in our lives and *put on* what is honoring to Christ.
 - This involves replacing the sinful with the godly.
 - It is not enough just to stop doing what is sinful or to stop focusing our thoughts on our worries, fears, hurts, anger, loneliness, etc.
 - We must also put on thoughts that are pleasing to God. To know what constitutes as something worth putting on, use the Philippians 4:8 filter that was just discussed.
- Another way to think about the concept of replacing is to think about those times when you get a song stuck in your head (the technical term for this is “earworms”). When a song gets stuck in your head, you keep repeating it and cannot seem to stop. One quick way to stop is to replace the song with a different one. This is what we should do with thoughts that do not pass the Philippians 4:8 filter – we replace it with a thought that meets the filter's standards.

Accountability

- We cannot deal with sin in isolation. We need community.
- We might feel ashamed to confess what we are truly thinking and what sins we are battling, but we all need accountability because of our sinful state. The goal of accountability is gentle restoration, not condemnation.
- Also, accountability is more than just confessing what you have done wrong. It involves praying for one another, encouraging one another, and reminding each other of the truth in God's Word.
 - It also involves helping the person to problem solve.
 - If they confess a sin, ask them why it was a sin, what they should have done, and how they can respond differently next time they face a similar temptation.
 - Does that sin magnify an area of their life in which they need to grow? What steps can they take today or this week to grow in that area?
 - Do they need to establish any guardrails in their life, so they are not even in a position to be tempted to do that particular sin again? If so, what specifically does this look like or involve?

- In basketball, the team plays offense where they are scoring and defense where they are preventing the other team from scoring. For a team to win the game, they need to be skilled at both offense and defense.
- For us to be effective in renewing our mind, we need to be skilled in playing both offense and defense with regard to our thoughts.
- As with basketball drills, the more you practice these skills, the better you are at doing them.

Playing Offense	Playing Defense
<p>Study Scripture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Bible is God’s letter to us. It tells us what He wants us to know about Himself and about how to live. If we’re not studying it consistently, we are not spending quality time listening to Him, and as with any relationship, both people need to spend time talking and listening to one another. How often do you listen to God? ○ Those who are ignorant of the Word are easily deceived and quickly fall when tempted to sin. ○ Know what the Word says, and if you struggle with a particular sin, know what the Word says about your particular sin struggle. 	<p>Dealing with Pop-Ups in the Moment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify the pop-ups when they occur. Use the Philippians 4:8 filter to determine whether or not to linger on a thought. Replace thoughts that are not righteous with ones that are pleasing to God.
<p>Memorize the Word & Meditate on it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Psalm 119:11 ○ Be intentional in filling your mind with truth. ○ Whatever fills us controls us. When someone drinks a lot of alcohol, we say that they are under the influence because what has filled them controls them. It is the same with us. If we are filled with insecurity or bitterness, we will be controlled by insecurity or bitterness. But if we are filling ourselves with God’s Word by memorizing it and meditating on it, then we will find ourselves more and more under its influence. 	<p>Have Go-To’s in Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be ready for pop-ups by knowing what you will do when they happen. ○ For example, if you struggle with thoughts of hurt and anger whenever you think of a particular person, your go-to in the moment of a pop-up about that person would be to pray for them or to remind yourself of what Scripture says about forgiveness. ○ Other ideas for go-to’s include: singing a song, getting up and doing something else, recite a verse that you’ve memorized, pray, journal, speak truth to yourself about that particular thought, read the Bible.
<p>Pray</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray that we will not fall prey to temptation as well as to pray for deliverance from evil (Matt. 6). 	
<p>Accountability</p>	

Be Careful About Your Influences

- What are you taking in? Be wise in what you expose yourself to.
- For example, if you know that you struggle with contentment with regards to wanting a relationship, then it is not wise for you to watch a bunch of chick flicks, read love stories, or listen to sappy music. Do your influences pass the Philippians 4:8 filter?
- Also, be proactive in choosing influences that are positive. If you are surrounded by family members who do not believe as you do about God, purity, etc., then spend more time in prayer, studying Scripture, listening to sermons, etc. when you are home.

- “We don’t have to love something for it to become a god to us. All we have to do is devote our most valuable mental attentions to it. In its most basic essence, worship is simple focus. Voluntary preoccupation.” –Beth Moore, *So Long, Insecurity*

Other Passages on Renewing the Mind

“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” -1 Peter 1:13

“I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.” -Psalm 101:2-3

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” -Romans 12:2

“Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” -Colossians 3:2

“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought captive to obey Christ,” -2 Corinthians 10:5

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” -Romans 8:5-6

“And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’” -Matthew 22:37

“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD God is an everlasting rock.” -Isaiah 26:3-4

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.”
–Romans 13:14

“Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.” –Proverbs 4:25-26