

6. Creativity and Intentional Thinking

We have mentioned in other topics that we can think in at least three ways. We can think like the world, which thinks negatively because of sin, and we will be critical and judgmental like the world. We can learn to think positively by learning to obey Ephesians 5:20-21, which says: “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Then, we will think with a positive and thankful attitude. Third, we can learn to think Biblically. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” We learn to think Biblically by meditating on the Word of God so that we think, understand, and apply Biblical principles in our daily living.

It is this third way of thinking that truly makes us think counter-culturally, because the higher thoughts and ways of God cause us to think and act creativity. In Philippians 4:8-9, we read, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” In these two verses, we have some important keys in the development of Christians who are restoring their God-given creativity.

Intentional thinking is thinking with a purpose. When the world thinks, the purpose is usually to satisfy self. Since the world thinks negatively, people in the world often spend much time thinking on the things that others have said or done to hurt them. At other times, they think about things they can do to get their own way. 1 John 2:15-16 summarizes such thinking, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” Such thinking, if it has a purpose, is to satisfy self and can only lead to sin. Many Christians still have their thinking conformed to the way the world thinks.

True intentional thinking is thinking with a positive purpose. Such intentional thinking will bring glory to God, not to self. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Here, we see that we are to do all we do to bring glory to God. This includes our thinking. Godly spiritual leaders must become intentional thinkers, asking God to teach them Biblical principles and how to apply those Biblical principles to their lives and ministry. This kind of thinking will turn problems into opportunities to see God work in and through our lives.

Christ gave Philip an opportunity to learn to think intentionally, in John 6:5-6. Those verses say, “Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.” Instead of thinking intentionally, Philip thought negatively. His answer is given in John 6:7, which says: “Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not

sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.” Philip did not even answer the question, because he could only think negatively at that point. As a result, he gave a financial report and said they could not afford to do anything.

In contrast, Andrew heard the same question and gave a very different answer. In John 6:9, Andrew said, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?” Instead of looking at what they did not have available, Andrew chose to look at what they had available and at who was asking the question. Andrew told Christ that they had a boy with a lunch, and his lunch was available. Christ took that lunch and performed a miracle. John 6:12-13 tell us the results. Those verses say, “So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.’ Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.” Andrew did some intentional thinking, because he realized that they had a lunch, and they had Christ.

Christ gave the disciples another opportunity for intentional thinking when He heard that their friend Lazarus was sick. Christ told the disciples that they were going to Judea. John 11:8 shows the disciples were controlled by negative thinking again. That verse says, “The disciples said to Him, ‘Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?’” Thomas shared a different thought, but he also thought negatively. John 11:16 says, “Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’” Christ went anyway and raised Lazarus from the dead. John 11:45 says, “Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.” The disciples saw the problems. Christ saw the opportunity to bring glory to God.

However, as the disciples learned to depend on the Holy Spirit, and grew in their spiritual lives, they began to become intentional thinkers. This transformed thinking caused them to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to work through their lives. In Acts 3, Peter and John met a man more than forty years old who had been crippled ever since birth. Acts 3:6-8 says, “Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.” Peter and John saw an opportunity for the Lord to work, instead of seeing a problem.

When the religious leaders saw the man who was healed, and heard what had happened, they put Peter and John in jail. Peter and John continued to pray and practice intentional thinking. Acts 4:13 shows the results, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” The religious leaders then commanded them not to speak any more in the name of Christ. Because they were praying, and being intentional in their thinking, Peter and John responded, in Acts 4:19-20, “‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” They were certainly thinking and acting in a way that was counter to the religious culture.

Peter and John then showed all of the other disciples how to practice intentional thinking. Peter and John reported what the religious leaders had said. This immediately led to a prayer meeting. Their prayer shows that all the disciples had learned to think intentionally, even though it meant going against the culture. Acts 4:29-30 says, “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” Instead of going into hiding, the disciples prayed that the Lord would help them to witness with boldness.

The answer to this prayer is shown in Acts 4:31, which says: “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” The boldness with which they shared the Word of God eventually got them arrested again. The religious leaders said to them, in Acts 5:28-29, “‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!’ But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” The disciples were very intentional in their thinking and were going to please God whether or not the religious leaders were happy.

The religious leaders were filled with negative thinking and were ready to kill the apostles. Gamaliel warned them that in doing so, they might be fighting against God. As a result, we see what happened in Acts 5:40-42. “And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” Instead of conforming, the apostles gave thanks for the privilege of suffering for Christ. That is really counter-cultural in thinking.

They were intentional in their thinking, so they just looked for new ways and places to share the message about Jesus Christ. They did this daily in the temple. They did this daily in homes. They knew the difference between church work (doing the necessary things to help the church function) and the work of the church (taking the Gospel to people wherever they met them). As we help developing leaders becoming intentional in their thinking, they will also become equipped to do the work of the church by sharing the Gospel with people wherever they meet them. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Christians become intentional in their thinking, so they are able to do the work of the church in creative ways.