

Biblical Self-Talk  
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Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor 10:3-5)

Self-talk is a mechanism of our reasoning that includes mental dialogues that can be quite complex. The dialogue can originate solely within our mind, or be influenced by external experiences or discussions. Sometimes these dialogues are pleasant, and sometimes not. And they can approximate reality, or be pure fantasy. The Bible presents a number of passages that address what today would be called self-talk (Gen 17:17; Deut 7:17; 8:17; 9:4; 18:21; 1 Sam 27:1; Psa 14:1; Isa 49:21; Jer 3:17-25; Luke 7:39; 16:3; 18:4). On several occasions, David faced pressure in life that disrupted his mental state and he took control of His thoughts and directed them to God (Psa 13:1-6; 42:1-11; 131:1-2). In these instances, David was his own biblical counselor as he applied God's Word to his own situation and effected stability in his soul.

The mind is a busy place. As Christians, we face competing systems of thought all around us, via sources such a TV, radio, literature, daily discussions, and experiences. The brain needs to be healthy for the mind to work properly. The brain is our hardware and the mind its software. If the brain is damaged, the mind will not work properly. Or, the brain can be operational, but the mind corrupt. Volition tends the gate of our mind, determining what enters, its level of activity once inside, and the duration of its stay. For the most part, we determine what we let into our stream of consciousness. Sometimes—without our being fully aware—we accept antithetical beliefs, which result in cognitive dissonance and fragmentation. The rational mind will recognize incompatible thoughts and seek to find reconciliation, or eventual correction by means of expunging aberrant thoughts that cause trouble. Of course, this assumes a standard by which to evaluate our thoughts and values. For the Christian, the Bible is God's special revelation to us to help us understand truths and realities we could not obtain by any other means.

Self-talk refers to our inner reflections, the mental-dialogues we have with ourselves. But self-talk is never neutral. There's always a bias. A desire to think a certain way. Thoughts align with God and His Word, our personal desires, or the fallen world around us. Often, self-talk pertains to how something or someone impacts us, and what we can do to make sense of it and manage it along with other

activities or pressures. As a Bible teacher, it's my every intention to get into your mind, to promote God's Word in every aspect of your reasoning so that you learn to think as He thinks and that His Word will govern every mental discussion. Others are trying to get into your mind as well. Some are helpful, others hurtful. You must choose what you allow in, and you must regulate the mental discussions you have with yourself.

Sometimes external activities or discussions with others can carry over into mental dramas and discussions we have with ourselves when alone. We create scenarios that play out an emotionally charged debate we had earlier in the day or week.<sup>1</sup> We do this because there's a natural part of us that wants to make sense of what happened, so we replay the scenario in our minds, albeit imperfectly and with a bias. We might even assign a motive that may, or may not, correspond to reality. Often, real people and experiences come into our mental plays, as we set the stage and cast characters in various roles. We write the script of what each person says, how they act or react, and where the story goes. We play a part in our mental productions, either as the victim or victor. Emotions can flare during these staged productions, and this helps push the storyline in various directions, for better or worse. Often, our mental productions are an effort to anticipate how another person will act in reality, and various scenarios allow us to work out how we might respond if/when the real-life situation goes as we anticipate. Sometimes we do this with past experiences, recreating a scenario that is not true to the occasion, so that the outcome is more to our liking. The problem is that perception is never equal to reality, and sometimes we can misperceive another person's words, actions, or motives; and when this happens, it drives our mental production into areas that might actually prove harmful.

Biblical self-talk is where we deliberately and consciously insert God and His Word into our thought processes. The purpose is to produce mental and emotional stability as we orient our thinking to divine viewpoint. This can be very challenging in a culture that excludes God and where the mind is conditioned to think about all matters from the perspective of how things relate to us. The mental stability of the Christian is predicated, to a large degree, on the biblical content and continuity of his thinking. It's not only what we think, but the consistency of our thoughts that

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<sup>1</sup> Emotion is connected to thought, like a trailer to a truck. One pulls the other along. We drive the truck. We determine where our thoughts go, and emotion follows. However, once in motion, the truck cannot stop easily, for when the brakes are applied, the force of the trailer pushes the truck, reducing the braking process. How far we travel to come to a complete stop is determined by how much the trailer weighs, how fast the truck is going, and the external road conditions. I'm sure the metaphor could be developed further, but you get the point. Thoughts and feelings are connected systems that either work for us or against us, but they are never neutral.

produce mental stability. But this is not the only factor, as our mind can be impacted—for better or worse—by things such as sleep, hydration, nutrition, exercise, and socialization. If we're tired, hungry, and have not taken care of ourselves, then we are naturally more vulnerable to the pressures of life.

In personal trials and tribulations, I know God is at work in my life, using the furnace of affliction to burn away the dross of weak character and to develop those golden qualities that reflect His character. God wants me to grow up spiritually, and suffering is a vehicle He uses for that purpose. Suffering is like the manure that helps the plant grow; we don't like its smell, but we understand its nourishing value. Joseph understood this, and even when his brothers treated him poorly, he saw it from the divine perspective and said, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen 50:20). Joseph could not control how his brothers treated him; but he could control his response, which was based on divine viewpoint and the choice of faith. As a Christian, I know that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). Below are some ways to strengthen the mind:

1. **Take control of your thoughts.** Solomon wrote, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Pro 4:23). And Paul stated, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). Your mind is your own, and you must regulate what enters and stays, and what you choose to focus on at any given moment.
2. **Spend time in God's Word.** The person who is daily in God's Word is like a tree planted near water that constantly receives life sustaining nourishment. David writes of the righteous person, saying, "his delight is in the LORD's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers" (Psa 1:2-3). The Lord spoke to Jeremiah, saying, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit" (Jer 17:7-8). It's only in the daily activity of biblical meditation that the Word of God begins to saturate our thinking and flow freely within the stream of our consciousness, permeating all aspects of our lives.
3. **Spend time in prayer.** Jesus taught His disciples "that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1). As Christians, we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Th 5:17). This means our prayer life should never end,

but should be ongoing, day by day, moment by moment. Life can be stressful, but we are to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phi 4:6). As Christians, we are to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

4. **Spend time with growing believers.** Scripture states we are to “encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13), and “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb 10:24-25). Paul wrote, “When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours” (Rom 1:12). When writing to the church at Thessalonica, Paul said, “Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith” (1 Th 3:1-2). Growing believers are marked by love for each other as we seek to encourage each other to love the Lord and to serve Him in humility and faithfulness.
5. **Spend time giving thanks to God.** The psalmist wrote, “Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples. Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; speak of all His wonders. Glory in His holy name; let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually” (Psa 105:1-4). Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phi 4:4a), “and “Give thanks always for all things” (Eph 5:20a), and “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Th 5:18). An attitude of gratitude to God strengthens the heart of God’s people.
6. **Take care of yourself physically.** Make sure you get good sleep, hydration, nutrition, exercise, and socialization. If we’re tired, hungry, and have not taken care of ourselves, then we are naturally more vulnerable to the pressures of life. When Elijah the prophet was threatened by Jezebel, he became fearful and fled for his life, even wanting to die (1 Ki 19:1-4). And God sent an angel to Elijah, not to rebuke him, but to care for him. And twice, while Elijah slept, the angel cooked a meal for him in order to strengthen him for his journey (1 Ki 19:5-8). On one occasion, Jesus told His disciples, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while. For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.” (Mark 6:31). Sometimes, when engaging in ministry, we’re in a better frame of mind to handle those situations if we are rested and taking care of ourselves physically.