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**Part 1**

**2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

Today we’re launching a new series called *Mind Games*. Take a minute to think about these questions:

* Do you find yourself focusing on the problems around you?
* Do you lack peace and joy?
* Are you conflicted?
* Do you have trouble seeing the good things in your life?
* Do you feel despair or depression, despite all the blessings around you?
* Do you blame everyone and everything else for the hurt and pain in your life?

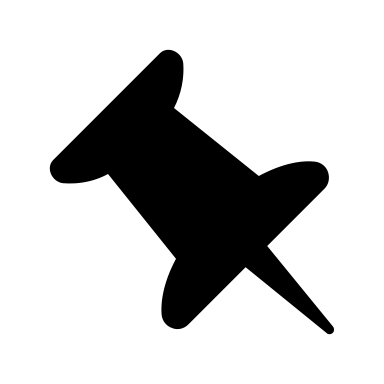
If you answered yes to one or most of these questions, you may be playing mind games. Mind games are those negative thoughts we all battle that feed our insecurities, worries, and fears; the thoughts that lead us to irrational anger or undefined depression.

But I have good news for you: with Jesus’ help, mind games can be won! And it isn’t just up to you or me to win these games on our own. Jesus wants us to partner with Him to overcome the negative mind invaders. That means He’s asking us to take an active role in recognizing, rejecting, and replacing negative thoughts. *And* He’s asking us to take an active role in retraining our minds to keep them from returning.

If you want your life experience to be positive, abundant, joyful, and overflowing with peace; if you want to live a successful Christian life, with a great marriage and a fantastic relationship with your kids, you have to learn how to win mind games.

**It’s impossible to live a positive life with a negative mind.**

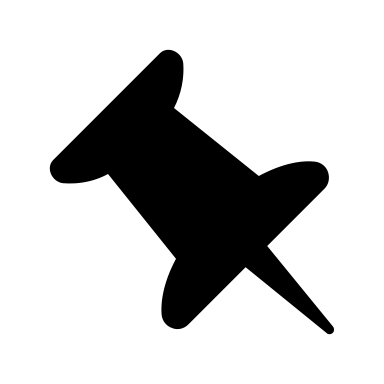
Mind games are nothing new. In fact, they’re at least as old as the Bible. Let me give you two examples.

The first one is all the way back in the Book of Judges, where we read about a man named Gideon, who had to win mind games on his way to defeating the Midianites. It’s a great story—read Judges 6-8 for all of it.

In a nut shell the Israelites were in trouble. Their land had been taken over by the Midianites, and they were feeling the weight of oppression. In the middle of this was a lowly farmhand named Gideon. In **Judges 6:14**, God appears to Gideon and tells him, **“Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!”**

Pretty strong words to hear directly from God Himself. And yet Gideon immediately started playing mind games. In the very next verse, **Judges 6:15**, he replies, **“‘But Lord,’ Gideon replied, ‘how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!’”** Can you believe it? God just gave Gideon a job, and Gideon refuses, saying he isn’t strong enough.

Fortunately, when God chooses you, you stay chosen. Gideon essentially spends the rest of the chapter disbelieving God, and God spends the rest of the chapter convincing Gideon that he is, in fact, the one chosen to rescue Israel from their captivity. And from then on, Gideon finally accepts his role and kicks the negative mind invaders out.

There’s also another story about a man named Joseph, where a negative mind invader almost kept him from marrying the mother of Jesus. When we read the story of Jesus’s birth, it’s easy to see how close Joseph came to messing up God’s plan. The Bible records in the first chapter of Matthew that Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married. Back in those days if you were engaged, you were committed; it took a divorce to become unengaged.

But then the unthinkable happened, which we read about in **Matthew 1:18: “Before [Joseph and Mary] came together, she was found to be pregnant [through the power] of the Holy Spirit.”** When Joseph found out Mary was pregnant, he knew it wasn’t his child. He also knew Mary’s penalty could be death—it was a horrible disgrace for a woman to be pregnant out of wedlock. His decision? Matthew says in the next verse, **Matthew 1:19, “He had in mind to divorce her quietly.”**

He had in what? He had in mind. Notice how his thinking had gone off course. His mind was on a completely different track than the plan of God. And an angel came along and pointed this out to Joseph. I imagine the conversation went something like this: “Joseph, you’ve got the wrong thing in mind. God’s got a plan going on here and you’re not thinking right. You’ve got to get the right thing in your mind.”

We’re encouraged, as believers, to recognize and destroy thoughts that are inconsistent with God’s thoughts:

Let’s look at today’s theme verses. The Apostle Paul said in **2 Corinthians 10:3-5, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”**

If you listen carefully, certain words leap out of these verses such as “war, weapons, fight, and strongholds.” It’s the picture of the frontline, of a battlefield. You can almost hear the guns firing. You can almost see the bombs exploding. You can almost smell the smoke all around you.

There’s a battle that starts the moment you reach the point where you can begin to think on your own. Once the battle starts, it’s never over until you take your last thought. It’s the battle for mind-control. It’s a mind game. Your mind is like a castle, a stronghold, or a fort. It’s constantly under attack. Both the devil and this world have targeted your mind as the bullseye in this battle.

Why the mind? The answer is very simple. Whatever controls your mind controls you. The mind is the control center of who we are. Let me put it another way. Our beliefs determine our behavior. What we believe is powerful. If we can change what we believe, we can change our lives! The fact is many of us are struggling to control our behaviors and actions because we don't have control over our emotions and feelings. We don't have control over our emotions and feelings because we don't have control over our thoughts. And we don't have control over our thoughts because we aren’t controlling what we believe. Put simply, if we believe wrong, we’ll struggle with wrong thoughts, toxic emotions, and destructive addictions. The good news is, there is a way out of this vicious cycle of defeat. We can win the mind game!

**Proverbs 23:7** says it this way, **“For as a man thinks within himself, so he is.”** You aren’t what you eat, but you are what you think. I heard about a lady who went to see a psychiatrist and she said, “Doc you’ve got to help my husband.” The doctor said, “What’s wrong with him?” She said, “He thinks he is a race horse.” The doctor said, “How do you know that?” She said, “Well he wants to live in a stable, walks around on all fours, and even eats hay.” The doctor said, “I’m sure I can cure him, but it’ll take a long time and it’ll cost a lot of money.” The lady said, “Money’s no object. He’s already won two horse races!”

An old proverb puts it this way, “You sow a thought you reap an act. You sow an act you reap a habit. You sow a habit you reap a character. You sow a character you reap a destiny.” Notice, the first link of the chain is a thought.

It’s the mind that’s the key that unlocks your heart, your hands and your habits. What we’ve got to do isn’t only learn with our mind, but we’ve got to learn about our mind. We’ve got to always make sure that our mind is controlled by the right force. It’s time for us to win the mind game! Here’s how we do it according to our theme passage of scripture.

1. We Must Direct Our Mind.

**2 Corinthians 10:3** says, **“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.”**

**Colossians 1:21** says, **“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds.”**

2. We Must Protect Our Mind.

**2 Corinthians 10:4-5** **“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”**

**2 Corinthians 4:4: “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**

**2 Corinthians 11:3: “Your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”**

**Mark 4:24** **“And He said to them, be careful what you’re hearing. The measure [of thought and study] you give [to the truth you hear] will be the measure [of virtue and knowledge] that comes back to you—and more [besides] will be given to you who hear.”**

3. We Must Connect Our Mind.

**Philippians 4:8** **“Fix** (or connect) **your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”**

**2 Corinthians 10:4-5: “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”**

**Colossians 3:2** **“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”**

**Romans 8:6** **“The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”**

**Ephesians 4:23** **“Be renewed in the Spirit of you mind.”**

**Proverbs 14:30 “A calm and undisturbed mind is life.”**