

# Mental Habits for Believers

28 Days to New Thought Patterns

*Steps for the Journey Growth and Reflection Questions*

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*Hello!*

If you've purchased the eBook or audio version of *Mental Habits for Believers, 28 Days to New Thought Patterns*, the Steps for the Journey reflection questions might be difficult for you to remember and write down. I want you to get the full benefit from this book! That's why I've created a PDF download for you which contains all the Steps for the Journey reflection questions, beginning with Day Three. I've also included the group discussion questions for all chapters just in case you want to study Mental Habits in a group or eventually create a group after you have gone through it yourself.

Just print the document (or just the parts you need for that day's reading) and use it as your own private reflection journal. Or use the PDF as a springboard and record your thoughts in a separate notebook or journal.

Even if you are reading a paperback version of Mental Habits, the downloadable PDF can be useful for having extra space to write or if you plan to read the book each year or so to keep growing in your mental habits. That will give you a fresh space for new reflections each time you go through the book.

Here's a recap of some helpful points for your journey from *Mental Habits for Believers, Day One* (Do I Have Mental Habits?) Be sure to read the corresponding chapter *before* doing the reflection questions to get the most out of the book.

### *From Day One*

The following list contains some important skills you must bring with you on this journey, skills you already have or are willing to develop:

1. Self-honesty. Many people aren't used to the idea of emotional or personality *growth*. Don't let that idea intimidate you. All it means is to improve some area of your life so that you can live an even *better* life. Honesty with yourself in your private thoughts is an absolute requirement because you can't change a negative mental habit if you won't admit it is there. The more honest you are with yourself, the more you will grow personally and benefit from this book.
2. Awareness of your feelings and mental state. This is a hard one for some people, who aren't used to tuning into their emotions, unless they blow up in anger or fall in love. Once you develop this awareness, you'll be able to catch yourself with a negative habit (or a negative emotion triggered by a particular bad mental habit) and know what to do. Each chapter contains suggestions on changing unhelpful habits. Ask God to help you become more aware of your feelings, thoughts, and habits before you start each day.
3. Persistence. Your mental habits have developed over a long time. Like other habits, these won't change in a day or two. That said, you'll likely see improvement in a short time. Persevere for long enough to go from deliberate, consistent effort (which will be necessary) to a nearly automatic habit. Many experts say it takes 21 days to form a new habit. If you focus on one habit for 3 weeks then move onto the next one, you can develop new mental

habits in all these areas within 6 months. You may wish to focus on just certain ones, where you know you have a weakness or where other people may have pointed out to you that you need improvement.

If you're in a dark phase of life, it might seem more challenging to make these good habits stick, but it's even more vital, so don't give up. Undergird your efforts with prayer and keep moving ahead, despite and through the pain. Decide that you *will* develop healthy mental habits. They won't necessarily remove the discomfort of your current circumstances, but they will absolutely help you get through them with more grace and optimism. Then later, as things calm down, you'll have an arsenal of helpful habits for whatever season of life you are in.

Changing some or all these mental habits will enhance your quality of life for your *entire future* if you are willing to make a time investment now.

So, let the journey begin!

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## **Day Three**

### Can You Change Your Brain?

#### **Steps for the Journey**

Record your reactions to what you just read. Are you surprised? Motivated? Intimidated? God will give you all the help you need to do your own “brain surgery” through His indwelling Spirit.

You’ll learn several positive mental habits in this book. Are there any that come to your mind that you are already aware of or sparked by what you’ve read so far? Make a list of habits you know would be helpful in rewiring your thought patterns.

Are there specific Scriptures that spoke to you in this chapter?

Read the following passages and record how they speak to your heart in view of changing your mental habits.

1 Corinthians 2:8-16 (This is a longer passage, but there’s a lot in it that will challenge and encourage you!)

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

Colossians 3:1-4

Philippians 4:8

1 Peter 3:15

Ephesians 1:21-23

Revelation 1:17-18

What do the previous passages imply about your mind, decisions and will?

## **Habit One: Positive Thinking**

### **Day Four**

#### The Power of the Positive

#### **Steps for the Journey**

Do you tend to think and speak positively or negatively? If you're not sure, notice how you speak to others and what thoughts frequently come to your mind. Write down your observations.

What points in today's reading stood out to you?

Have there been any undesirable results from negativity in your life?

How might change your life to become more positive? (You'll find practical suggestions in this section and the readings for the next two days.)

Are there specific areas in your thoughts that you could identify as spiritual lies embedded in your heart by your enemy, Satan? What are they?

What verses from God's Word contradict these lies?

Take a moment now to renounce the lies and affirm God's truth over them. Do this regularly, to remind your subconscious lies that their days are numbered.



Write a list of at least 8 things that are going RIGHT in your life, things you're thankful for. Reread this list **each day** as you begin the day or before you leave home. Keep a copy in your phone or on an index card to carry with you or post in your house. Refer to it during the day. Add new things as you go along or update your list monthly. After you write the list, thank God for these things.

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

In the coming week, try to become more aware of your patterns of thoughts and speech. If you catch yourself saying something negative, jot it down in a small notebook. Include a phrase about what you were talking about and over time you'll see a pattern. The first goal is to build an *awareness* of your thought and speech patterns to see if they lean toward negative or positive. That way you'll shift them in the right direction!

*"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." Psalm 19:14*

## **Day Five**

### Let's Get Positively Practical

#### **Steps for the Journey**

How much negativity do you observe in the various places where you spend your day?

How negative is your environment on a scale from 1 to 5? (1 is the least, 5 the most.)

Have you noticed you have frequent negative thoughts or comments?

What is the most frequent subject for your negative thoughts and comments?

Is this negative focus just a bad habit or does it reflect deeper fears in your life? If you have deeper fears, what are they?

Does it help you feel less fearful when you think about and express negative things?

What could you do differently with your negative feelings and fears? In what ways can you activate your faith in God in face of your fears?

What if you knew that your current strengths and positive coping skills were the result of a previous hardship you had endured? How would you look at that hardship in the light of this knowledge?

What might God be trying to teach you through your current problems (big or small)? How can you cooperate with His purposes?

Like the example of Laura in the chapter, write the following words on a 3 x 5 card and keep it in your purse, wallet or on your mirror or dashboard: *What is good about this situation?* Look at it frequently and you'll start to build a mental habit of positive thinking. Be creative as you ask, *What's good about this?* Make as long a list as possible. Keep in mind God's promises to make all things work together for good (even if they aren't in themselves good) for those who love Him. (Romans 8:28.)

Pay attention to what influences get into your heart and head. Guard the doorways to your mind. Be careful who you spend time with and the effect they have on you. If you spend time around negative people, try to limit your contact with them. If you can't do this, counter their negative comments with a positive one, or just change the subject. (Don't be surprised if this irritates them.)

Be conscious of what you listen to or watch that might funnel negative messages into your mind. I know a woman who won't go to movies because so many of them disturb her. This may seem extreme and unnecessary to most people, but in her case, she knows she's vulnerable. What are your vulnerabilities? Horror movies or movies in general? News? Political programs? Editorials? Conversations at the water cooler or over lunch?

I should limit my time with . . .

I am especially vulnerable to negative thinking when I (activity) . . .

Sometimes our negative thoughts center on a person (or whole groups of people) who has hurt us or who we dislike. (Yes, even Christians sometimes do this.) We may mentally stew about that person or talk about him or her, assuming evil or selfish motivations. Stop it. Right now. Most of the time you don't know what the person's motivations are, and assuming the worst will stir up your insides with anger and frustration.

As you speak about that person to someone else, you risk stirring up others as well, starting rumors and being seen as spiteful or judgmental. You probably don't want that reputation. *Assume the best about people.* There could be several reasons for the behavior that is bothering you. The short-tempered cashier probably has personal problems that have nothing to do with you. Angry people are often simply hurting people. Try compassion. Believe the best. (1 Corinthians 13:7)

If there has been a conflict or a wrong done, do your best to resolve it by talking it out (not accusing, but by asking questions and talking), especially if it's a close relationship. If this isn't possible, decide that you will let it go. Try to catch yourself whenever you stew over that person.

I am often frustrated with . . . because of . . .

Two different possible explanations for his/her behavior/ comment/action are:

1)

2)

Let love and faith win.

Read the following verses and summarize how they help you think more positively.

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

Philippians 2:14-16

Colossians 1:11

Philippians 3:20

*"The Lord is my light and my salvation---so why should I be afraid?" Psalm 27:1*

*"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Romans 8:28*

## Day Six Intentional Positivity

### Steps for the Journey

Is there any situation in your life that requires, not positive thinking, but change on your part? What is it, and what will you do about it?

How often does conscious positive thinking lead you to increased thankfulness?

Thankfulness will be an enormous help in becoming less negative. It's pretty difficult to be thankful and negative at the same time. If you do find yourself feeling thankful about something, go ahead and thank God at that moment or as soon as possible. Positivity and thankfulness go hand in hand, supporting one another.

Note your current patterns of thinking and a date in your journal. Summarize and date any victories and progress that you observe. Use your notebook to write your lists of positives and things you are thankful for. Read over that list daily (or more than once daily).

#### My victories in overcoming negative thinking

Date:

What happened:

How I felt:

Date:

What happened:

How I felt:

Date:

What happened:

How I felt:

You can find other tools to help you look at your life and the world in a more optimistic, hopeful, and positive way. Being more positive will be infectious. You'll probably notice people wanting to be around you more and more. You'll smile more and generally feel better about your life. Misery may love company with other negative folks, but a positive habit of thinking is what the whole world craves and needs.

*“For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” James 1:3-4.*

*“Live wisely among those who are not believers and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.” Colossians 4:5-6.*

*“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix 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.” Philippians 4:8.*

## Habit Two: Interpretations

### Day Seven

#### Interpretations and Their Impact on Us

##### Steps for the Journey: Interpretations

Identify a situation or two that made you feel embarrassed, frustrated, self-conscious, etc. List your interpretation of what happened.

Situation 1:

My Interpretation:

Situation 2:

My Interpretation:

Using the same situations, write at least 3 *other* possible interpretations for each situation. For example, if your friend at work appeared angry when you came in, she doesn't necessarily dislike you. 1) She could be catching a cold and not feel well, 2) She could be distracted by her own work or problems, 3) She didn't see you, and 4) She was angry at another person or herself.

Situation 1

Possible reason #1:

Possible reason #2:

Possible reason #3:

Situation 2

Possible reason #1:

Possible reason #2:

Possible reason #3:

Do you default to negative interpretations for most situations you encounter?

Do you usually only come up with one possible explanation and it's a negative one?

How does your faith come into your interpretation of those and other events? What changes would this make?

What can you do to develop the habit of *multiple feasible interpretations*? Write your thoughts and ideas in your notebook or in the following space. Then write your specific action plan for changing your interpretations.

*“Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity.” I Corinthians 13:12*

*“Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: you must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.” James 1:19*



## **Day Eight**

### Adjusting Interpretations

#### **Steps for the Journey**

What are some frequent negative situations or interactions you encounter and what are your typical interpretations of those?

How can you change your interpretations?

Practice tuning into your feelings and thoughts as you go through your day. What do you find? Write these down on a notepad and find associations between feelings and mental dialogue. What is the dialogue? (You may need to put a feeling into a statement. For example, discomfort or embarrassment when someone ignores you. Identify embarrassment and shame.)

Change the dialogue in your mind for a given situation. What is the new dialogue?

Make a practice of doing this whenever it happens. It won't be automatic right away. Keep working at it to build this new mental habit.

What random comments do you often make to yourself? What do these reflect of your view of your life, and life in general?

How can the practice of viewing God as benevolent and powerful influence how you feel about your daily life?

Do you need to change your view of God? (Make a decision to do this.) If so, how will you change it? Are there Scriptures you can post, meditate on, or memorize to strengthen your view of God? Find at least 3 and post them somewhere you'll see them.

What are some "shoulds" you frequently hold to? What do these really mean for you? How can you change them or abandon them?

What is a situation that has bothered you for a while? You've thought of different interpretations. It still bothers you, even though you admit you aren't absolutely sure what happened.

*Let it go.* Are you willing to let go the painful or frustrating interpretation and admit that you simply aren't sure what really happened? This takes both humility and wisdom.

Practice the following phrases to yourself each time something similar happens: "I'm not sure what was really going on. It probably doesn't matter." You can even shrug for good measure! Or "I'm sure she had her own reasons that have nothing to do with me." Or "These employees have so much to do, they're bound to make mistakes once in a while."

If you get into the habit of explaining to yourself in this way, your tension will decrease, and you'll be more patient and gracious (and Christlike) with people.

This is a habit well worth developing. It will save you sadness, disputes with friends and loved ones and cranky moods. And it's what God wants for you. Let this sink in. He'll help you if you let Him.

You'll build the habit of giving a positive, neutral, or uncertain interpretation to small problems that erupt. This good habit will go with you during every season of your life.

*Believe the best.* The fruit of this will not only be increased peace, but better relationships with others. You'll have more peace inside, more confidence in yourself, and people will be more drawn to you. Best of all, you'll have a more positive outlook on your life, finding positive elements and stronger faith in even difficult seasons of life.

## Day Nine

### Making Mindframes Work for You

#### **Steps for the Journey: Mind Frames**

What are some negative mind frames you frequently visit? (Write the situation and corresponding interpretation).

How have your interpretations affected your emotions, getting you into a negative frame?

How else could you interpret the situation?

During an emotionally calm phase, mentally walk yourself through trying the mind frame exercise described above. Imagine yourself doing this. In what ways will you distract yourself from the emotion? What can you fix your attention on when this happens? What activity can you do to pull yourself into another mind frame?

When you have runaway emotions again, remember the “dress rehearsal” you did and try to do the same exercise to change your mind frame. Record how it works for you. How can you make this more effective?

List five things you can do to pull yourself out of a negative frame.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

In the space below, record your continued progress on recognizing, questioning, and changing your interpretations.

*“I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety.” Psalm 16:8-9*

***Key Thought: Change your interpretation and you change your experience.***

## Habit Three: The Habit of Self-Esteem

### Day Ten

#### The Vital Importance of Self-Esteem

##### Steps for the Journey

Answer the following honest questions.

How do you generally feel about yourself?

Do you feel adequate for life? Are you lacking in some ways?

Do you generally accept yourself the way you are, even with your needs for improvement?

Would you say you have low, medium, or high self-esteem? Is there room for improvement in this area?

How do you feel about the topic of self-esteem and improving it? (Guilty? Hopeful? Desperate to do so? Eager to get started?)

As you look more in depth at this area for the next few days, you'll likely have some insights into your life. *Take this very seriously*, since improving this habit is important for your future success.

## Day Eleven

### A Self-Esteem Assessment

#### Part One

Reflect deeply about each period of your life. Take each part one at a time and remember what you can, both your *overall thoughts* as well as *significant events*. Be sure to include both general and specific memories for each phase of your life. Start with early and late childhood, then adolescence, then young adulthood. Include everything up to the present time.

Write a short paragraph about what you remember in each period, including positive and negative events and their impact on you. Don't stop to censor your thoughts or evaluate anything. Just write freely. When you are finished set this aside.

Later that day or the next day, go back to what you wrote and read it carefully. Note any patterns that may have affected how you view yourself. Did parents, teachers, or friends tell you things that stuck with you in a negative way (and may have even influenced how you behaved afterward), or were there events in your life that have left a black mark on your self-image? Write these down in detail.

How have you felt about yourself in those areas and overall since that time? What other observations do you want to write down and consider? Write freely whatever comes into your mind following this exercise.

Note any mistakes you have made as well as anything you are proud of. Did your mistakes have an influence on how you currently feel about yourself and your potential? Write these things down and how they affected you.

Tell yourself you did the best you could at the time. The results might have been quite positive or not so great. *Every* life includes both and yours does too. Your brain may acknowledge God's forgiveness, but you won't fully receive it until you forgive yourself too. Picture yourself giving yourself a big hug of acceptance and forgiveness.

Maybe you have negative messages running through your mind, but you aren't sure where they come from. As you re-read your life story, do you see any patterns that may have triggered these negative messages or images? Write them down.

Once you have identified some of the causes of your negative self-image, you'll have a place to start working on it. This will be a process. At certain points in that process, you'll notice accusations you're holding onto in your mind that you need to refute. Write them down.

Identifying wrong beliefs we've held onto for a long time is a powerful and vital step toward changing them. Mentally take them to court and cross-examine them.

Take some time now to write a phrase to refute each negative belief about yourself. For example, "You're not very smart, are you?" spoken by an admired adult can create a scar that never heals. Refute it and turn it into an affirmation. "I am at least as smart as everyone I know, or smarter," or "I'm more gifted in science (or art, or languages, or math) than anyone I know." Continue refuting all your negative messages, replacing them with positive affirmations. Then re-read the positive affirmations (never the negative ones) daily.

## **Part Two**

Write out a list of all your strengths. You may have difficulty with this at first. Many people do. Write what comes to mind, or what people have told you. Leave plenty of space below this list because additional thoughts will come to your mind, and you can add them later. Be honest with your strengths.

Write a list of your weaknesses. Don't exaggerate them, and don't use derogatory words for yourself. They will be part of the tapestry that is your view of yourself. Work on these and try to change some of them, but for now you're just recognizing what they are.

Think of one person without weaknesses. You'll find there aren't any. Embrace the weaknesses you identified. Of course, you'll want to change them if you can, and you should try to improve them, but don't beat yourself up for them. Imagine buying a home you really like. You know it needs new paint inside and a new kitchen and heating system, but the strengths and overall value outweigh the weaknesses. Besides that, you'll see the potential of it renovated. Imagine *you* are that house. Overall, you're fantastic and of great value to God. But you have a few renovations to do, and with time you'll do them. Focus on your strengths and overall value. And don't forget, God will help you with the renovations!

What effect has your conversion had on your self-esteem? Has this been positive or negative? Do you see in yourself any of the following images? As a redeemed child of God? As a prince or princess, heir to God's kingdom? Favored and forgiven by God Himself?

Or do you see yourself as a filthy sinner saved by grace, but sitting on the back porch of heaven? Always falling short of God's perfect standard? Notice your emotional response as you read the previous phrases. What does that tell you?

Which image accurately reflects God's grace and love for us, based on His Word? How can you revise your images of your relationship to God, if needed? Make sure your image is based on His truth and transformation of your life.

What is the general atmosphere of the church you attend? Is there a lot of emphasis on sin and falling short? Is low self-esteem prized as a virtue? How much emphasis is there on God's grace and forgiveness?

Do you think God values you just as you are, as a human being He created, with all of your qualities and weaknesses? Does He accept you? What are your reasons for your beliefs? (Are they Biblical?)

Write out a short summary of the factors that have negatively affected your self-esteem during your life. In other words, what have you learned, realized, or remembered about yourself?

How might your life could be different if you improved those negative beliefs and thoughts about yourself?

What do you think God wants for you in this area of your life?



Read the following Scriptures to learn more about how God wants to empower you to improve your life.

Philippians 2:13

Philippians 1:6

Philippians 3:12

Jeremiah 18:3-6

*“O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me...You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book...How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered!” Psalm 139:1, 16-17*

## Day Twelve

### Transforming Self-Esteem

#### Steps for the Journey

Try Affirmations. Give them a try, even if you are a doubter. Try two or three affirmations, repeating them several times each day in the silence of your mind or as you get ready in the morning. If you read them regularly, they will change the way you feel about yourself. Changes will gradually occur in the way you see yourself. In fact, the first few times you may feel awkward, but keep going. Take ideas from your list of strengths. Refer to the examples and borrow some, as well as create your own to add to the list. (Here are some more to get you started.)

I am worthy of the best life has to offer. (Remember your value as God's creation.)  
I am not helpless.  
I am loveable just as I am.  
God loves me just as I am.  
I don't have to impress anyone.  
I am satisfied with the person that I am.

Read the above list of affirmations and your list of strengths each day before you leave home or sometime early in the day. Do this every day. Try it and see what happens. Write down any observations of positive change in your journal. After using affirmations for at least three weeks, add some Scriptural affirmations, such as "I am God's beloved child," or "God loves me unconditionally. He calls me valuable and precious."

Guard your thoughts. Be aware of your daily thought patterns. This is where the battle will be won or lost. Keep your thoughts pointed in a true, positive direction and stay the course. Don't neglect this, letting your thoughts be sucked back into the black hole of negativity. By this time, you have identified and hopefully debunked those negative statements about yourself. You'll slip once in a while, but don't go back to them in a regular way. Building a habit of thought takes time. Read your positive statements each day for three weeks, minimum. Record observations in your journal.

Feed your mind the right foods. Continue to fill your mind with positive information, inspiring reading, self-help, and encouraging books. Surround yourself with positive people. Identify the negative complainers and spend less time with them. (Don't *be* one either!) What will you read to encourage positive thoughts? What kind of people you spend time with? What other changes can you make to gradually turn your self-esteem around? Record your ideas, then be intentional.

Jot notes in your journal about patterns you still struggle with. Pay special attention to your negative self-talk and replace those negative statements. Don't let your journal be far from your reach. Review what you are learning on a regular basis and record your victories. Record positive changes and put a date on them. When you get discouraged, reread your progress, and renew your determination to reject the negative messages.

Ask yourself the following questions. Reflect honestly about your answers and record them in your private journal.

How do I feel about myself at the start of this process? What do I struggle with?

One month later (record the date): What changes have I seen in my self-esteem?

Three months later (record the date): What is my self-esteem like right now? What changes have occurred?

How has using affirmations affected my thought process and my emotions?

How has having a higher self-esteem changed things in my life for the better? Write down the positive results you've seen in the way you feel about yourself, the way you interact with others, or circumstances that have changed for the better as a result of improved self-esteem.

What can I do to maintain my self-esteem? Make a specific plan for what you'll think about and/or what influences you'll allow into your life to maintain what you've gained in more positive self-esteem. Again, be intentional. This is crucial, because you won't just drift into a better self-esteem without effort.

## Day Thirteen

### Continuing the Self-Esteem Journey

#### Steps for the Journey

Look back at each of the above helpful principles for continuing the journey of transforming your self-esteem. For each one, decide on a step of action you will take for your life.

Take some time to consider your identity in Jesus Christ. As a believer, you have a new identity. Meditate on the following truths about who you are as a child of God.

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:10

“Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.” Romans 6:5-6

“So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.” Colossians 2:10

“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” 2 Corinthians 5:17

“So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children.” Romans 8:15-16.

***Key Thought: Your self-esteem can be changed. It isn’t selfish to try to improve it!***

## **Four: The Habit of Living in the Present**

### **Day Fourteen**

#### Definitions and Habit Distractions

#### **Steps for the Journey**

How are you doing at living in the present? (Be honest . . .)

What factors make it difficult for you?

What are some of your habits that give clues that you might have difficulty in this area?

Is there an area where you need to do more or do better? If you haven't done it, what barriers exist, either inside you or outside? What are steps you can take this week to improve in this area?

List a few things to help you strengthen your view of God's care over your daily life. Find verses about His love and power and tape them to a mirror. Pray with a friend. Ask Him to help you trust Him more with your fears.

Make a list of what is positive in the present in your life. (And thank God for them!)

What are some opportunities you have today that you may not have in the future? (People, work opportunities, leisure, travel, etc.)

List some simple things that are yours to enjoy every day, as you drive or ride to work, as you walk in your neighborhood, visit friends and family, or enjoy your favorite hobbies or sports.

How can living in the present with heightened consciousness help you tune into God's direction for you?

How can this habit help you accomplish some of your goals in your life?

## **Day Fifteen**

### The Intrusion of the Past

#### **Steps for the Journey**

Do you tend to dwell on the past, regret past events or decisions? If so, what are the issues you focus on?

What effect has this had on you?

Has this affected your attitude about your life and/or opportunities?

Are you bitter or unforgiving toward another person or people? If so, who?

What negative results have shown up in your life from not forgiving that person? Have you gained anything from not forgiving?

Are you willing to forgive that person in order to free yourself (and be obedient to God)?

Is there anything you need to let go of? A regret from the past, whether something you did, or something done to you, a missed opportunity, or a grudge against someone? Write these on a piece of paper. Take the paper and throw it away, burn it, or bury it somewhere in your yard or in the sand. Concentrate on releasing these memories and emotions as you separate your life from that piece of paper. Record your feelings and the date you did this.

Release these matters into God's hands and ask Him to keep these things far from your mind. They will come occasionally, though, so have a strategy to break off the thought before it takes over your mind and emotions.

## Day Sixteen

### Worry and the Future Trap

#### Steps for the Journey

Do you feel dread or anxiety for the future? Do you picture the worst? What is your fear? What is so bad about this? Is there anything you can do now to plan for this, just in case, then release it? Write your plan.

Do you have difficulty trusting God with your future? Why might that be the case? Write out some reasons.

Take time to read the following verses from the Bible. They all affirm God's guidance of each one of His children. Write a one-sentence summary of each one and refer to them often.

Isaiah 48:17

Psalm 138:8

Jeremiah 29:11

Psalm 139:16

Psalm 32:8

Psalm 16:7-8

John 10:27

Isaiah 30:21



How much time do you spend planning for the future and anticipating it? Is it too much? How can you balance this?

Stop to notice what is around you. Develop your sense of observation. Too often we walk right by a beautiful or noteworthy scene. Don't get lost in your head and miss what is happening. The French have an expression, "passer à côté," which conveys the idea of overlooking something, but literally means "walk next to" without noticing. How many things do you walk right by every day without seeing or enjoying them? Write a list of all you notice once you make the effort to *see*.

Living in the present doesn't only pertain to enjoying the things around you. It also means full focus on the things that are important to you. What about your work? Are you doing your best, living in the present, giving full value to your job? Suppose you hate your job and find it difficult to do this. How active are you in pursuing a better situation that will make you more content and validate your talents and experience? Making these efforts in the present will change the outcome of your future.

What about your close relationships? Are you the proverbial parent who doesn't spend enough time with the kids or listen when they want to tell you something, or when they are going through a tough period in their lives? Do you appreciate the moments when they're still at home? Are you spending enough quality time with your spouse? List any changes you'd like to make in this area. Be specific.

Are there relationships that need to be repaired, that you have let go long enough? Are there people who need to hear how much you care about them, love them, respect them, and think they are good people? Are there words of encouragement that could be said in the present that you have put off saying until a more convenient time? List the names of these people and write what you'd like to say to them. Then plan a time when you can tell them in person or in a letter.

When you speak to someone, stay focused on that person. Ask a question. Then really listen to the answer. They'll be blessed by the attention you gave them, and the relationship will be enriched and strengthened. Try this with people you're meeting for the first time, people you've known for a while, casual acquaintances, and significant others. How did this make you feel? Record any observations and changes you plan to make.

### Try this exercise

In the morning set aside 5 minutes. Sit still in a chair. Feel your toes, feel your legs, arms, fingers, all the way up. Concentrate on your body and the fact that it is there. Hear your breath, feel it. Take deep breaths and feel the air coming and going inside you. Think of how healthy you feel.

Look around the room you are in. Notice everything. Where did the objects come from? What does everything look like? What kind of light is coming through the window if there is one? Cloudy? Sunny? Rainy?

Then think of the day ahead and note the date. Remind yourself that this date will never again occur in history. What is going to happen today which will (or may) never happen again? What circumstances won't happen, except for today? If this is a difficult question to answer, check in at several points throughout the day, taking note as you go along. This day won't happen again.

Take a moment to be thankful for what is there, big and small. What you see, what you have (your health, your job, your family, your significant other, your car, your upcoming vacation), what you don't have (a disease, a financial problem, a lawsuit, a plumbing problem).

Don't write anything in your journal until later, and only if you want to. Instead, simply savor the moment and the day ahead. Don't focus on tomorrow or next week. Don't spend any time on the future. If something comes to mind you need to remember or do, jot it down quickly but don't think further of it. You'll have time for that. For now, just BE.

Fully there, fully observant.

Be, and be in the present.

*“Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which*

*exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-9*

*“Many people say, ‘Who will show us better times?’ Let your face shine on us, Lord. You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine. In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.” Psalm 4:6-8*

***Key Thought: The present is a gift. Live it fully, and you’ll improve the future at the same time.***

## Habit Five: The Habit of Specific Thinking

### Day Seventeen

#### Specific vs Global Thinking

##### Steps for the Journey

As you read the section for today, did you identify any patterns of thinking in yourself? Do you tend to specific or global thinking?

Write down some examples of each one from your life. If no instances of specific thinking come to mind, maybe it's an area you need to improve.

Global thinking examples:

Specific thinking examples:

List any negative outcomes for you or others of having a global outlook.

Take a sweeping survey of your life. Do you consider it to have one overriding quality, such as good, bad, boring, or difficult? Identify the word you use most often. Then underneath that word, write five *other* words (not synonyms of the first one) to add different aspects to the description of your life.

Write a list of up to 5 things you consider to be wrong in your life. Then write at least 10 things in your life that are good and you're thankful for—positive, pleasant, or promising. Look at both lists. Can you see that your life is made up of both positive and what you perceive as negative? Every life has both. This helps to normalize the negative, putting it back into perspective. Maybe you'll see that the good things hold more weight than the bad things, which tend to be more temporary.

What's Wrong?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### What's Right?

- 1
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Think of 3 situations that have happened or could happen to someone, real or hypothetical, that are *worse* than yours. Write them down. Consider each one in detail. Live in it mentally for a moment, as if it is happening to you. Now review your situation. Does it feel less “bad”? Less dramatic?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List several situations, attitudes, issues and/or people in your life that you don't like and feel negatively about. Write one phrase about why you don't like them. Then mentally break each one into parts, both positive and negative. Write at least two positives for each one. Look at your list of both negative and positive aspects of the person or situation. Doesn't that change your feelings? Can you honestly admit that some positive or potentially positive aspects exist in that person or situation?

- 1.

2.

3.

When you catch yourself thinking globally about a situation, stop and jot some notes in your journal or in the space below. Be honest with yourself. Compare your habits with the plumbline of Scripture. How does God want you to react to each of these global attitudes?

Break that situation down into several parts, making sure that you include some good things in the list. Look over the list and begin to develop the habit of seeing life as a collection of specific things, not a global mass of badness. Record how this makes you think or feel differently than before.

## **Day Eighteen**

### Critical or Emotional Thinking?

#### **Steps for the Journey**

If you haven't done this already, evaluate each day for several days. Identify the high points and, if you have any, the low points. You may be surprised to see fewer low points than you thought. And they may strike you as minor compared to the high points. Record any notes here that you find from this reflection.

What changes would you like to make to encourage specific thinking in yourself?

How does this habit tie into the habit of positive thinking?

How does this habit tie into the habit of interpretations?

As a Christian, do you sometimes judge others who aren't like you?

Do you ever fall into black and white thinking (i.e., everything Christian is white and everything else is black, or to be avoided)? Be honest. Jot down typical situations where this occurs.

Do the people you most often spend time with encourage divergent opinions, critical thinking, or expressions of your unique personality? Do they prefer that you agree with them? Or do you prefer that they agree with you?

How likely are you to accept what another believer has said without reflecting on whether it's even true? (They might be misinformed, jumping to conclusions, or exaggerating, for example.)

How do process information you receive? For example, news from a political or news program, a bit of gossip about a friend or family member, information from an article, website, or other source. Do you usually form an opinion quickly based on what you've heard, or are you more likely to see both sides of an issue? Test yourself for the next couple of days to see what your reflexes are.

Try the following experiment for several days. Carry around a small notepad or something else on which you can jot notes easily. Be aware of situations where you are receiving information throughout the day. Some possible sources: Morning news, editorial program on the radio, coffee pot conversations with colleagues or after church, any expression of opinions or opinions *disguised as facts* (be careful about this one) coming from friends, family, or colleagues. If possible, stop for two to three minutes to jot down the situation and reflect on what else could be going on aside from what was presented. Practice this famous advice: Don't believe everything you hear. Your notebook will be full of interesting versions of news by the end of a week.

If you have difficulty thinking critically about a news program you watch regularly, refrain from watching or listening to the program for one or two weeks. Then pretend you are someone who has no background on the program and listen to it with a more neutral stance. What do you observe?

Once in a while, try to mentally step outside of the context you're in and look down on it as objectively as possible. What do you observe?

As believers, we're told we have the mind of Christ. How does this apply to the habit of specific thinking?



*“Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.” Ephesians 4:2*

*“The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand.” Psalm 37:23-24*

***Key Thought: Look at life in its separate parts, and gain a wiser, happier perspective.***

## **Habit Six: The Habit of Self-Responsibility**

### **Day Nineteen** Agents or Victims?

#### **Steps for the Journey**

What are your initial thoughts after reading this chapter? Do you agree, disagree?

Consider your way of thinking about your life. Do you lean more on the victim side or the agent side? Do you tend to let solutions come from outside or to let problems persist for a long time before acting? Or do you tend to take action quickly?

How do you think God interacts with human will? What does He expect of you in solving your problems or pursuing your goals?

What changes do you need to make in this habit?

What are some areas of your life where you'd like to be more of an agent than a victim?

Identifying these will be a start to a positive process. What results do you want from the area you identified? Isn't that a great reason to be proactive and take responsibility?

List two things you'll do first for that area.

## Day Twenty

### More Powerful Than You Think

#### Steps for the Journey

In her book, *Codependent No More*, author Melodie Beattie asserts that we are responsible for our own happiness. Do you agree? Disagree?

Do you think that God wants this for you? (Hint: See John 10:10)

What are some ways you can improve your level of contentment with your life?

In the same book, Beattie states that we are responsible for our physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial well-being. In which of these areas do you need to take more initiative, more self-responsibility? Apply this not only to problems but also goals you may have.

Consider the following passages as they relate to your action balanced with God's sovereign will for your life.

Psalm 37:3-6

Proverbs 3:5-6

Commit your goals to God in prayer. He will give you the strength and wisdom to follow-through.

## Day Twenty-One

### Make Your Life Better

#### Steps for the Journey

Make a list of at least four situations that frustrate you. Under each item, list at least two things you can do about that situation.

Here's an example: Problem: My neighbor makes noise and disturbs my sleep every weekend. What I can do: 1) talk to him, 2) after talking to him, go to police. Second example: I need new software for my business but don't know what to get. What I can do: 1) Do research online, 2) ask knowledgeable friends, 3) ask at an office-supply store what they recommend, 4) ask someone who does the same work that you do what kind of software they use and how they like it. Choose one or more of these options until you make your decision.

If you break down the steps, they don't seem too overwhelming.

#### Your turn:

Problem:

What I can do:

1)

2)

Problem:

What I can do:

1)

2)

Problem:

What I can do:

1)

2)

Write down one or two circumstances you don't like as well as ways in which YOU created or contributed to the problems. Be honest and don't skip this part. Then write one or two (at least) plans for what you will do about this.

Situation:

My part:

What I can now do:

Situation:

My part:

What I can now do:

Journal a few sentences recording your response to this section on self-responsibility.

## Day Twenty-Two

Decide to Decide (Trust is a Choice)

### Pursue Your Dreams

You can also do something about your dreams and the direction of your life. Consider your dreams. What are they? A new career? A dream vacation? Writing a book? Having a new home? Creating or participating in a particular ministry or reaching out to someone or a group of people? Or you may even want to completely redesign your life.

Write down some long-term desires you have for yourself. (It's okay if they're really big and you think they're unrealistic. You're just dreaming at this point.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Start now thinking about smaller steps you can do already that'll help you to achieve your dreams. Make your list of the dreams or goals, then for each item, make a secondary list of smaller steps (getting information, getting training, networking with people) you would have to do beforehand in order to accomplish them. Suddenly, the dream seems more realistic and achievable. Pray and commit this dream and the process to God (Psalm 37:5), asking for His leading and will. Then get moving! He will help you!

Write some of your steps here:

Goal:

Steps:

Goal:

Steps:

Goal:

Steps:

What obstacles do you need to consider? (Finances, lack of training, support of family members, the need to network with people). What will you do to move these obstacles out of your way?

How will your life look once some of these goals are accomplished? Consider one at a time.

Commit them to God and His will. Ask Him for wisdom and direction. He promises He will give it!

Read Ephesians 2:10. What does it say about you and how God equips you?

What might be some “good things” He has in mind for you to do, according to the way He’s gifted you? (Spiritual *and* natural gifts)

In Day 16, you read a list of encouraging passages about how our God guides us throughout our lives. Here is that list again to soak in God’s promises of guidance (plus a few more). If you didn’t read and meditate on these passages yet (or even if you did), take time to do it now.

Isaiah 48:17

Psalm 138:8

Jeremiah 29:11

Psalm 139:16

Psalm 32:8

Psalm 16:7-8

John 10:27

Isaiah 30:21

And also:

Psalm 25: 4-5, 10

Psalm 37:23-4

Psalm 18:32-36

We commit our ways to Him, but we trust Him to guide us along the way, even as we exercise our will and self-responsibility.

Record your observations of any different feelings or attitudes you notice once you've begun to develop a mental habit of self-responsibility.

*“The Lord says, ‘I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.’” Psalm 32:8*

**Key Thought: God has His role in your life, and He gives you YOURS. Make the most of it!**



## Habit Seven: The Habit of Openness

### Day Twenty-Three

#### Open vs Closed

#### Steps for the Journey

How open are you? Rate yourself honestly in your journal or the space below.

Here are some questions to help you dig deeper into your activity patterns. Write your responses or just reflect on them.

- In the evening I usually: (e.g. watch TV, read, other, talk on the phone, work on the computer).
- On the weekend I usually:
- How often do I do things that are different?
- What books have I read in the last 6 months? How often do I read or go online in order to learn something new?
- What subjects do I read about? Are they the same ones all within one genre, or a variety?
- What activities do I do regularly? How likely (on a scale of 1-5) am I to try something new? (5 being very likely) How often in a given year do I try something really different? (never, often, occasionally, rarely, never)
- What people do I spend the most time with? How different are my friends from me, culturally, racially, in personality, in social status?

- How often do I meet new people? How different are they from me?
- How do I usually respond when I meet someone who is different from me or whose values are different from mine?
- Do most of my friends think exactly like I do on most issues?
- When I hear new information, have I usually made up my mind beforehand?
- How much am I influenced by tradition, culture, religion, family, or habits?
- How likely am I to listen to someone and give them a fair hearing before making up my mind?
- Do I listen to someone attentively, or do I have the habit of interrupting him or her with my own ideas? Has anyone ever told me that I have this habit of interrupting?

What are my conclusions after answering these questions? Do I need to open up a little more? How?

This is just a start to our reflection on openness, but hopefully it has gotten you interested in exploring this area in greater depth in coming days.

## Day Twenty-Four

### Be Curious. Be a Bridge

#### Steps for the Journey

What are three areas you'd like to learn more about that you find interesting?

What will you do to begin learning about these?

Pick one to focus on in the coming week.

List some ways in the coming week that you can be more open in approaching new situations, learning new things, reading something you don't usually read, or experiencing something for the first time.

What are some new activities you would like to try (but have put off)? List them (at least three). When will you begin?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

From the following list, what category of person do you usually have a hard time relating to, getting along with, or accepting? For example, people who are different in

- Race
- Interests
- Appearance
- Age

- Socio economic status
- Level of hygiene
- Sexual preference
- Religious differences
- Moral choices
- Occupation
- Culture
- Political differences
- Other differences \_\_\_\_\_

What is a new way you can approach this person and think differently about him or her? How can you be more open about and toward this person, showing respect even if you don't share his/her opinion or lifestyle?

Be honest in answering the following questions:

- Do I sometimes get into arguments with people whose viewpoints are different from mine? (Theological, political, lifestyle, etc.)
- Am I more comfortable with people who are very much like me?
- Do I sometimes criticize people who are different from me, or have lifestyles that don't resemble mine?
- Do I have difficulty understanding how someone could like something that I don't like? Or dislike something that I like?

*“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. Colossians 3:14-15a*

## Day Twenty-Five

### A Big World

#### Steps for the Journey

Reread the paragraph about the person who is open (2<sup>nd</sup> full paragraph). How do you respond to this description? Would you like to be like this person? What would be the advantages for you? What would you have to change in your approach or outlook?

Record an honest evaluation of your level of openness. Would people describe you as an open person?

Are there any ways you've kept your life closed to certain areas because of fear or ignorance? If so, what are they? What are you afraid of? Is it legitimate, or not?

What are five steps you will take to become more open? (You can take some from the previous list if any of these piqued your interest.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*“Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.” Romans 6:14*

*“This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is good for you and leads you along the paths you should follow.’” Isaiah 48:17*

**Key Thought: Being more open will enrich your life and open your heart to love others better.**

## **Habit Eight: Knowing Yourself**

### **Day Twenty-Six**

#### The Rudder of Your Life

##### **Steps for the Journey**

To what degree do you feel you know yourself?

Have you ever made decisions in your life which are based on others' expectations instead of what you really wanted? If so, which ones? How could you have decided differently? What difference would that have made for you?

What are the benefits of knowing yourself and who God made you to be?

Record any other reflections before going on to Day Twenty-Seven.

## **Day Twenty-Seven**

### Have You Lost Your Way?

#### **Steps for the Journey**

Do you ever feel “off-center” in any area of your life?

How often? In what areas?

Do you think this reflects a temporary situation that fits in with your desires, or misalignment with your “essential self”?

How did you get to this place? Trace any decisions or steps you made, even unconsciously at the time, to get where you are now.

If you don't believe you have major misalignments, what might be smaller areas where you haven't listened to your heart but should have?

What can you do to get back on the right track, or headed in the right direction?

In the next chapter, we'll dig more into this topic and find ways in which you can better connect with your essential self.

## Day Twenty-Eight

### Glad To Meet Me

#### Steps for the Journey

Take time alone with your journal and ponder the following questions. If you aren't sure what to answer, just give it time and persistence. You'll get to know yourself better.

**List your top ten values.** Answer truthfully for yourself, not what you think your values ought to be. Then narrow these to five. (For example, things like: family, friendships, contribution, recognition, accomplishment, your faith, variety, aesthetics, challenge, security). Then go back and number these in order of priority. Note any surprises or observations.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

My top five values in order:

How large a part do these values play in your daily life and choices? (Hint: If they play a small part, this is a signpost to consider. Maybe your life doesn't correspond to your real self and values.)

What do need in life in order to be happy? Your list can be the first things that come to mind, as well as some of your identified values.



How well are you doing at including these in your life?

These questions will give clues about your current life, indicating if you're on course or not. Do you need adjustments? Have others determined your path for you? What have you learned so far?

How can you know yourself better? Ask yourself the following:

- What do I like?
- What do I dislike?
- Where/when am I happiest?
- Where/when am I most aggravated or unhappy?
- With what kinds of people am I happiest or most aggravated/unhappy?

If someone asks you what you are feeling, would you be able to answer? Ask yourself this question at least 3 times throughout the day. Record your answers in your journal.

Another question to ask is “What do I want *now*?” or “What do I feel like doing right now?” even if you can’t go and do it then, you’ll learn about your authentic self when you take time to consider your answers.

How comfortable or happy are you spending time in your own company? If you have time by yourself, do you enjoy that, or do you go nearly crazy with boredom and loneliness?

Are there certain areas where your authentic self has recently shouted “YES” or “NO” to something? When you wanted to shout, “I *love* this!” or “Will this *ever* stop?” What were those things? What were you doing when you suddenly felt completely alive or happy? List at least three things for YES and three for NO.

My YES:

My NO:

Would you say that things are falling apart or at least not very good in your life right now?

How might your present circumstances and difficulties be *tools* to help you to find your real self?

How often do you say what you really want to say to another person? For example, “I prefer eating salad tonight”, or “I don’t want to do that”, instead of letting the other person decide or saying, “I don’t care”? In more important matters of life, do you express your desires or opinion? What are your patterns?

Are you involved in any ministry activities that are not a fit for you? What keeps you from stopping that activity or looking for something more suited to your preferences and your gifts? Are you worried about letting people down?

Are you really giving people your best self if the activity is not a good fit? How might you plan to change this activity?

How often do you “listen to your gut”? Do you trust what it says? Why or why not? Is it just a habit you haven’t developed, to listen to yourself as a reliable guide? Do you sometimes distrust what your heart tells you? If so, why?

Identify factors that stand in your way of living according to your heart. What can you do to remove those obstacles (immediately or over time, depending on what they are)?

What do you believe God thinks about what your heart is telling you? Does He probably agree or disagree? What is the reason for your answer?

Practice right now saying the words, “I don’t want to do that,” and “I don’t want that,” or “I prefer this . . .” Write them out and say them out loud, using some typical examples from your life.

Of course, if you’re someone who usually pushes for or demands your way (be honest, or ask your significant other or best friend), how can you do the opposite? What can you do to compromise once in a while?

Try stating your opinion or position to someone. Start with a minor situation. (For example, “I can’t get together tonight because I’m really tired and want to rest”, instead of giving an excuse about how busy you are.) Record your feelings and the results.

Stop and reflect on the fact that God knows you thoroughly at a soul-deep level. He loves and accepts you beyond your understanding. He sees it all, the good and the “needs-improvement”. How does that make you feel?

What is this process of exploring this habit teaching you about yourself?

What will you do differently?

*“O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!” Psalm 139:1-6*

***Key Thought: God and your heart together know what’s best for your life.***

## Putting it all Together

You've finished learning about the Mental Habits for Believers, but the journey to incorporating them into your life has only just started. Learning and reading is only one step, but predictably, any habit, including mental habits, will take time to adopt.

As you have read through the chapters, it might have seemed like too many separate areas to work on all at once. You might have felt overwhelmed as you considered the changes you want to make in your thinking habits, those that have always been automatic for you. Or it may still feel awkward to question the way you think and try to change your mental talk to yourself. That's normal and okay!

Your mental habits weren't form over a weekend. They won't be restructured by reading once through this or any other book. To begin building these new habits, you'll need to stop, identify, and evaluate your patterns, then *decide* on a different response. Making that crucial decision over and over again will change the habit.

Start working on just *one habit first*. You'll see some satisfying changes and that'll encourage you to keep going. Then you can attack the second habit. They'll seem like separate tasks for a while. However, as you become more comfortable with new habits of thinking, all of them will eventually blend and become second nature for you. You won't be conscious of having eight different habits running in your mind. Together they'll form a new mindset and a way of approaching your life. You'll see the results in a global way, in your emotions, in your relationships, your decisions, in many areas. They will become natural, like breathing. Don't be frustrated by setbacks. They *will* occur. You are trying to change the flow of a long-term thought pattern. Give it time. And keep going. You'll be glad you did.

You'll likely want to reread parts or the whole book. Read it annually or periodically. There may be some that you know you need urgent help with. Start with those. Consider this book a handbook for your future mental development. And don't forget, God will accompany you every step of the way.

If you've done the *Steps for the Journey* exercises and taken time to reflect on each habit, you've likely seen positive shifts in your responses and emotions, and maybe even in your circumstances. Take some time now to reflect on the eight mental habits that you've been studying and make a strategy of continued growth. Some areas will be bigger challenges than others, but all of them can be improved.

You may have already begun to experience an interesting phenomenon: As you read Scripture, you begin seeing everywhere God's exhortations that can only be accomplished in your *mind*. Mental decisions lead to increased faith. Nowhere in Scripture are you told to change your emotions, but repeatedly, you're urged to change your thoughts (which influence your emotions).

Here's an example from the book of Colossians. Paul has just painted a glorious picture of the blessings Christians receive when they come to faith . . . we are brought into His presence, considered holy and blameless, and are reconciled to Him through His Son (Colossians 1:21-22). Then right away in verse 23, we're told the following: "But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News." That doesn't mean we'll lose the benefits Paul just described. It *does* mean that we'll lose the *experience* of them if we don't keep standing on those truths. We continue to believe by making a mental decision of belief and appropriation.

Take some time now to evaluate the impact (so far) of the book in your understanding, knowing that with time and practice, the principles will become more anchored, more automatic, and more enriching in your life.

Consider the following habits and note your honest responses.

### **Your Essential Habit:**

Evaluate the habit of placing yourself under God's loving authority each day and trusting Him throughout the day. What changes do you still want and need to make in this area? How is your practice of trusting Him and His character, His ability and promise to guide you, surround, and protect you, provide for your future? This is the foundation for all the habits. Start here and commit yourself to drawing near to Him and trusting Him with everything in your life.

#### **Habit One: Positive Thinking**

- Here's how I'm doing
- Here's what I need to improve
- Here's my plan

#### **Habit Two: Interpretations and Mind Frames**

- Here's how I'm doing
- Here's what I need to improve
- Here's my plan

#### **Habit Three: Self-Esteem**

- Here's how I'm doing
- Here's what I need to improve

- Here's my plan

#### **Habit Four: Living in the Present**

- Here's how I'm doing
- Here's what I need to improve
- Here's my plan

#### **Habit Five: Specific Thinking**

- Here's how I'm doing
- Here's what I need to improve
- Here's my plan

#### **Habit Six: Self-Responsibility**

- Here's how I'm doing
- Here's what I need to improve
- Here's my plan

#### **Habit Seven: Openness**

- Here's how I'm doing
- Here's what I need to improve
- Here's my plan

### **Habit Eight: Knowing Yourself**

- Here's how I'm doing
- Here's what I need to improve
- Here's my plan

Other observations, notes, and plans:



You've been challenged toward other ways of thinking, new habits that will change your outlook, alter your emotions, and possibly redirect your future. I hope you have willingly plunged into the chapters and questions, having decided it was worthwhile to invest time and reflection in changing your mental habits.

You may enjoy getting together with a few friends for discussion and accountability, so you'll learn the habits together. This can add fun teamwork to the experience of changing your thinking. You'll find **questions for group discussion** in the next section of the book.

It'll take concentration and persistence and even a bit of failure at times to see new habits spring to life and become rooted in your daily experience. Don't give up. Repetition and practice are the keys to acquiring any new habit.

If you find yourself at an impasse, in your emotions or in a situation, here's an idea: take out a piece of paper and write down three things you can *do* about whatever is making you frustrated or unhappy. It will orient your mind to what *you* can do. This will automatically reinforce the Mental Habit of Self-Responsibility, and this will help unblock the others as well.

Changing some of your mental habits will bring more peace and forward movement into your life, leading you to a happier more fulfilled life aligned with God's desires for you. That's a worthwhile goal that affects your whole future! God is your guide and your compass in this worthy adventure of changing your mental habits, the rudder of your whole life experience.

*Thank you* for purchasing the *Mental Habits for Believers: 28 Days to New Thought Patterns*. I hope it has met your expectations and begun to transform your mental habits and life!

If you enjoyed the book and found it helpful, please consider leaving a review on the storefront where you purchased it so that others can discover how to improve their mental habits! Thank you!

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Kyle Hunter

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## Questions for Group Discussion

Let's face it, it's difficult to develop new, healthy habits. How much easier, though, if you gather some friends who have the same desires to grow and improve their mental habits. Go through the book together and keep each other accountable. You can share experiences, struggles, and help each other with solutions. You'll have a team of fellow-travelers on the journey, and this will help you all get there faster.

The Mental Habits have been helpful for me personally. When I first did them in a group, we were all amazed and encouraged at the collective insights and shared experiences of each person in the group. It was a rich and rewarding experience, drew us closer as friends, and helped us to do the work together.

With this in mind, I have included some discussion questions in the following pages of the book. Feel free to use these questions as springboards for your discussion.

### Some suggestions for group study of the Mental Habits

- There are probably a lot more questions than you'll have time for in one session. If you are the facilitator of the group (or if you are taking turns facilitating), first read the chapter thoroughly, including the questions. If you have less time, mark the questions you want to cover first and break the session in half. If you find you have time, you can go back to the other questions. If you prefer, though, take the questions in order and get as far as you can in the time you have.
- Each group member should have a copy of *Mental Habits for Believers*. Start the session by asking group members how practicing the habit went for them during that week. Spend the first few minutes sharing before going to the topic for that week.
- Some questions are ideal for brainstorming. Here's how that works. Group members help one member come up with solutions to his or her situation, for example, developing a new interpretation for a situation or dealing with worry. Then the whole group can benefit as each of the others in the group take turns sharing their challenges. This will unite the group in thinking of solutions, which will not only help the person, but will reinforce their processing of the new positive habit. Group members can pray for one another at the end of the session and during the week.
- You can do one or two sessions per habit. Depending on the group's needs, gauge how long to spend on each habit. At least one session per habit is the best minimum. Topics such as self-esteem and knowing yourself might require more time.
- Above all, don't be afraid to be open and share with the group (with a commitment to confidentiality) and help one another strengthen their mental habits. It will help you all individually and bring you closer as you help each other and share your lives together.

### *Do I Have Mental Habits?*

- Would you agree that habits involve thoughts (mental) as well as actions? What are some examples in your life?
- What are some of your good habits? Some negative ones? What makes them positive or negative?
- Do you think the Bible addresses mental habits? What are some biblical principles that might apply? Look at Philippians 4:8, Romans 12:3, and Philippians 4:6.
- How would you define “sound judgment”? Is this only spiritual?
- Psalm 104:34 “Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; As for me, I shall be glad in the Lord.” (NASB version) What do you think this means? How does it look? Is it only spiritual?
- In your opinion, does reading God’s Word regularly automatically give us good habits? What are some examples of what reading the Word regularly *can* do for you in comparison to what it probably will *not* do for you? What is your role? Have you had any experiences that would illustrate this?
- How do you respond to the idea that we have a responsibility for our happiness? Agree, disagree? How and why?
- How can our thoughts affect our happiness or sense of well-being? Can you think of any examples?
- How do our thoughts affect our ability to claim God’s promises?
- The text claims that sometimes it is more difficult to change a mental habit than a lifestyle habit. Do you agree? Why or why not? Some examples?

## *The Habit of Positive Thinking*

- What comes to your mind when you think of the phrase “positive thinking”?
- Do Christians also have trouble thinking positively? Why might that be?
- Do you agree that negative thinking is an epidemic? What effect does this have on the society, and on you personally? Examples?
- Do you think God wants us to think positively? Why or why not?
- Do you think this happens in the church? How often is positive thinking only an outward appearance of faith?
- Philippians 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always”. How do you define this, and what are the limitations? How can we add to this?
- What might be a good balance between realistic thinking and positive thinking?
- What kind of things might underlie a habit of negative thinking and talking?
- Refer to the example of Laura on Day 5. Do you think her solution would work? Have you ever tried something like this? Are you willing to try it?
- STOP now and write out one thing that is not so good in your life. Share it. Now reframe it into something positive. Share it.
- STOP now and share 3 things (write 10 at home) that are going right in your life. Share them.
- Do you tend to think negatively? What kinds of situations trigger this? Discuss this in your group. This week make observations on how often you do this and what is behind it. Then try to reframe those things.
- Are there any factors that influence you toward negative thinking? What are they? Is it possible to avoid or minimize these influences? What can you do?
- In the coming week: 1) Apply the steps in days 4, 5, and 6 if you haven’t already. 2) Notice any victories you have by applying these principles.

## *Interpretations and Mind Frames*

- What is your response to the statement that how you interpret a situation influences your emotions? Could it change the course of our lives?
- Do any examples from your life or someone else's come to mind?
- What is your response to Dr. McGraw's assertion that there is no reality, only perception? (Dr. Phil McGraw, Day 6) To what extent might this be true?
- Where do filters come from? (Day 7)
- What are some filters you might have that influence the way you interpret situations? (A filter can also be an assumption.)
- Are these filters helpful or simply wrong? Are you willing to challenge them? How would you do this?
- Consider the statement: "Events are most often just random and neutral, but you may interpret as either good or bad." (Day 8) Do you agree? Disagree?
- Do you have assumptions about life that guide your interpretations? What are they? Are they helpful? Do you need to change them?
- Think of one situation, how you interpreted it, and then another possible explanation (interpretation) of what happened. Each group member share one. If the person sharing has difficulty coming up with an alternate interpretation, other group members can make suggestions.
- What interpretation (s) do you most identify with? 1) Life is a daily struggle, 2) It's up to me to make things work, 3) Generally, life is pretty good. Can you add others?

- Are there any specific situations in your past where your “filter” was a negative interpretation? What was the result? How would you change the interpretation? How would that have changed the result?
- What are some ways you could challenge negative interpretations (or filters)?
- What about asking the question, “Are you sure? How do you know?”
- How could being a believer affect the way we interpret events in our lives? What are some interpretations or assumptions we get from Scripture? (Romans 8:28)
- Members of the group can share other verses that could help us in our daily interpretations.
- How did you react to the list of “shoulds”? (Day 8) Do you have any “shoulds”? (If not, you’ll probably identify a few as you go through the questions in the coming week!)
- As Christians, what is an alternate way we could look at a negative interpretation or a “should”?
- Think of a negative situation in your life (for example, a job situation, loneliness). Explain how you have been interpreting it. Now find another interpretation you can give to the same situation. How have you grown, or how could you grow spiritually and/or emotionally from this situation?
- Do you ever make negative comparisons of yourself? Why do you do that? How can you change that interpretation? The group members can make suggestions and help each other.

#### MIND FRAMES

- What was your response to the section on mind frames? Can you identify with the process described? Have you ever tried anything like this? Did it work? Why or why not?
- How would you summarize “changing your frame?”

- Do you have any situations in your life that arise occasionally for which you could benefit from changing your frame? What are they? How does this affect you emotionally? How can you change your frame?
- As a group, help the person who shared find another frame or interpretations for the situation. Anyone who wants to takes a turn. Use principles of positive thinking if that helps.
- As a group, brainstorm some ways to “change the frame.”
- Do the exercises this week. Come back with observations about

What interpretations you have in certain situations.

How they made you feel.

Any efforts you made to change them.

Results of these efforts.

What you felt God taught you through the exercise.

## *The Self-Esteem Habit*

- What are your initial thoughts about the area of self-esteem? Is it important? Why or why not?
- Did any of your impressions change after reading this chapter? Do you agree or disagree with the summary from Nathaniel Branden? (Day 10)
- How do you think becoming a believer in Christ can affect a person's self-esteem? Is this enough by itself to change our view of ourselves? Why or why not?
- Is high self-esteem the same thing as pride or arrogance? If not, what are the differences?
- What are some signs of low self-esteem? Average self-esteem? High/healthy self-esteem?
- Do you identify yourself in one of these 3 categories? Do you have thoughts or ideas about why that is the case?
- What kinds of factors make the difference?
- Do you agree with the idea that we all have value and talents before we come to Christ (and after) because God created us? How does that make you feel?
- Do you feel like it is selfish to focus on your self-esteem in order to improve it? If so, would it also be selfish to improve other areas of your life, such as your health or education? Does this seem inconsistent to you?
- How could having a higher self-esteem make you happier and more effective in your life?
- What would be some advantages for you? How do you think God would feel about those changes?
- Would you like to share any reasons your self-esteem might be lower than it should be?



- What role do your thoughts play in your self-esteem?
- Do you think your self-esteem can be changed? According to the chapter, what are some tools that might help?
- Did you receive any negative messages (verbal or nonverbal) when you were young from parents or friends? How can you rewrite those messages?
- What are some negative things you say about yourself? As a group, help each other to rewrite the negative statements into positive, affirming ones.
- What are some areas where you have the hardest time in your self-esteem? Or are there certain moments, or certain situations that make you feel worse about yourself?
- What can you learn about those areas mentioned above? What does it tell you about your feelings about yourself?
- What do you think of affirmations? Have you ever tried affirmations? Are you willing to try some?

Each member can create and say aloud an affirmation to try it. Then they will use that affirmation during the week.

- Do you feel you understand the importance of personal as opposed to Biblical affirmations? How can these personal affirmations affect you in a different way than Biblical affirmations?
- Why might you want to start with personal affirmations before using spiritual or Biblical affirmations? How can you see the two working together?
- What are some ways you can see yourself the way God sees you?
- What do you think of the concept that *you can begin to think of yourself as you want to be rather than as you are* (and with time this will boost your real feelings about who you are)?

## *The Habit of Living in the Present*

- How would you define living in the present?
- What are some ways we DON'T live in the present? Where would you say you live the most often? Future? Present? Past?
- What do you think it means to live consciously?
- Read Colossians 4:5. How does this passage fit into the idea of living in the present?
- How did you respond to the idea that only in the present do we have the power to act? How can this thought impact the future?
- If you struggle with regrets or bitterness over events in the past, what are some ways you can let it go? (In the group, feel free to discuss this with each one who responds, if he or she desires.)
- How inclined are you to worry about the future? Does your faith in God help you with this (really)? If not, why do you think it doesn't? What are some things that may help?
- Are you a planner? Why or why not? Does planning sometimes get out of hand? How could you keep it in perspective?
- What do you think of this statement by Thomas Carlyle, "Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand."? (Day 16)
- Read and consider the following verses:

"Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you." 1 Peter 5:7.

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done." Philippians 4:6.

- Discuss the impact of these scriptures. Do you believe them, or have trouble believing? Why?

"The Lord says, 'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.'" Psalm 32:8. How will you apply this to your practice of living in the present?

- How will you strengthen your view of God's care over your life?
- Do you have anything you need to let go of? (Worries, regrets, bitterness, anxiety over unknowns, persistent questions.) Take time now to pray for each other, and/or commit to praying this week for one other person in the group.

## *The Habit of Specific Thinking*

- How would you describe “specific thinking” in your own words?
- What is one example of global thinking and one of specific thinking. Share these with the group.
- Can you identify any situations in your life where you have practiced global thinking? How could you take it apart to see the specific sections? How might that change your view?
- Recall a time when information was passed along among people you know. How did you react?
- What does it mean to “own your thoughts and opinions?”
- Would you say that you are a critical thinker? Or are you more likely to accept something without thinking, if it comes from a source you don’t question?
- How can you improve in critical, specific thinking?
- Do you have any knee-jerk reactions? If so, in what areas? How can you question your conviction and see it differently?
- Do you agree that some Christians fall into “group thinking” instead of examining an issue for themselves? What are some examples?
- How might specific thinking make us more patient and more loving to others?

## *The Habit of Self-Responsibility*

- What are some ways in which you think God calls on us to use our will?
- What are some disadvantages of being passive?
- Do you agree that you are responsible for your choices and much of what happens to you? How do your actions interweave with God's direction in your life?
- Recall the example of Joe from Day 19. Do you know anyone like him? What is the situation? What could that person do to be more proactive? (Don't mention real names.)
- Do you have any situations similar to Joe's, where you have been passive up to now? What are some steps to take? Group members can brainstorm for suggestions.
- What do you think of the phrase from Day 19, "*our desire or lack of desire is often an inner signal that the Holy Spirit uses to guide us.*" Do you agree or disagree? How has this worked in your life in the past?
- Is there anything in your life that you don't or didn't like that you later realized was your fault or your own doing? What is an example?
- Consider a situation you've had for at least six months. Imagine having this same problem five years from now. How does that make you feel? What can you do NOW to change that outcome?
- Is there any area where you've been taking responsibility where you should *not* be, for example, in someone else's life?
- Is there anything holding you back from taking responsibility for something in your life? (Fear of failure, self-doubt or inferiority feelings, fear of success?)

What is one step you can take this week and share with the group next time? Ask the group to pray for your efforts during this week.

## *The Habit of Openness*

- Do you personally know anyone who fits the description in Day 23? What is your impression of that person? What do you like about him or her?
- Do you consider yourself to be a person who is more open, or more closed?
- What would it take for you to become more open?
- How can being more open help us in relationships?
- Do you feel like being open would compromise your faith? Why? Are there ways you can protect your convictions and still enlarge your perspective? Brainstorm about this in the group.
- Do you know people (or are you one) who tends to accept nearly anything coming from a Christian friend or a source that claims to be Christian?
- What does critical thinking mean for you?
- How does being open reflect Christlikeness?
- Jesus spent time with people very different from Himself, with different lifestyles and values. How do you think those people felt with Him?
- Consider your life for a moment. Would you say you have stopped learning and growing?
- What was a difficult situation in your life that made you more open, more patient, or more understanding?
- If the whole world is a buffet table, what are some things you'd like to sample?
- Do you feel that you are willing to grow and change? What is the evidence for your answer?
- Did anything else in the chapter strike you as something you'd like to work on? (For example, having more relationships with people from different cultures or lifestyles, becoming a better listener, etc.)
- Do you identify with any of these as an area to improve?

## *The Habit of Knowing Yourself*

- Why is this perhaps the most important of all the mental habits?
- How could knowing yourself better make you more content?
- Do you agree that you are the point of reference for your life (among humans)? How does that fit with God's role in your life?
- How do you define the social self and the essential self? Have you seen the difference in the activity of your "social self" and your "essential self"?
- Are there any areas of your life where you feel you haven't lived according to your heart? Have you let others influence you, or always followed the "shoulds" of other people or society? What areas?
- What are some ways you can reclaim these areas mentioned above? Feel free to brainstorm together as a group.
- Do you feel guilty if you follow your heart, or take care of yourself? If you say, "no" for something that isn't right for you? Why? Will you take steps to change your decisions?
- List a few things that are shouting "yes" or "no" for you. Are these things you practice in your life? Share them with the group.
- What does God think about your "yeses" and "nos"?
- Discuss whether you might need to make any changes. (in reference to "yeses" and "nos").
- What does it mean to take back your "power" or to be empowered?
- Is there anything in your life that you aren't sure it's a fit? What could you do to begin to change this?
- How willing are you to tell people what you truly think and feel? Is this difficult? In what circumstances? Are you willing to try it?
- Is it scary to get to know the real you? Why or why not?
- Are there any other responses from your Journal that you'd like to discuss together?

## About the Author

Kyle Hunter has observed firsthand the benefits of developing positive mental habits in her work in counseling, social work, and ministry. She has a master's degree in counseling and lived in France for 13 years. She currently lives in North Carolina where she writes inspirational fiction and nonfiction and teaches French to adults.

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