

TITLE: "More Than You Think"

TEXT: Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Introduction – "We are what we think"

Rene Descartes was a French philosopher who lived in the 1600s. He is famous for his statement, "I think, therefore I am," which is the basis for much of Western philosophy. ...But what does the statement actually mean? I was NOT a philosophy major because a lot of this stuff makes my brain hurt, but bear with me. How DO you know you exist? Well, Descartes argued that we know we exist because there has to a being who wonders whether we DO exist. So, he wrote "I think, therefore I am."

I do not wonder whether or not I exist. While Descartes pondered whether he might be a butterfly who was DREAMING that he was a human being, I wonder what I am going to preach next Sunday and how in the heck I going to fix the problem with my gutter drainage at my house.

There was a philosopher, much more recent than Descartes, who said, "I STINK therefore I am." I couldn't find out who he was, and when I Googled "I stink, therefore I am," I found a LOT of junk that was CERTAINLY not suitable for a Sunday morning sermon, so I will just leave it at that.

But what I DO want to give you, is another statement about thinking. You have all heard the statement "You are what you eat." What I propose this morning are three statements that I would like you to consider.

The first is: "You ARE what you think."

The second is: "You can CHANGE what you think."

And the third is: "The Lord IS ABLE to help you to change what you think."

1. You ARE what you think

Let me tell you a story. It's true, and it is by NASCAR driver Michael Waltrip. I found it in last month's *Guideposts* magazine. The title is "The Last Lap."

I knew it was there. And for nine long years, I tried not to think about it. It was a DVD of my first NASCAR victory. After 16 winless seasons and 462 car races, I had won the Daytona 500—the biggest and most important of them all. My sister Connie had recorded the race for me and slipped the DVD inside a case she'd decorated with stars and smiley faces.

The DVD was tucked in the top drawer of the entertainment center in my living room. I walked past that drawer every day. But I never opened it. That would have meant opening up the feelings I'd kept a lid on over those nine years. Yes, I'd finally gotten the win I'd prayed for, ending years of public and personal doubts about my abilities. Yes, I'd driven into Victory Lane at Daytona, the dream of every driver. But watching the horrible ending was more than I could bear.

I'll never forget the moment I climbed out of my car after winning that race. Everyone important to me was there, showering me with wild whoops, confetti and champagne. My wife Buffy. My two beautiful daughters, Caitlin and Macy. The rest of my family. My race team. ...All but one. The one I wanted to see most. My buddy and mentor, who had hired me to drive for his team, who had coached me to win that day. "Where's Dale?" I asked.

To NASCAR fans, Dale Earnhardt was The Intimidator, the fearless, mustachioed man in the black No. 3 car. The most swashbuckling driver since Richard Petty. Dale owned the car I raced. The last I'd seen him, in my rearview mirror on the final lap, he was running third, behind me and his son, Dale Junior. *Just like he drew it up for us a few days ago*, I thought. *Whoever gets to the front, stay there and the others on the team will work to protect his lead.*

I kept waiting for Dale to come up to me and hug me, flash that big old smile of his. I didn't know that seconds before I crossed the finish line, there's been a bad crash behind me. On the final lap, two cars had hit between turns three and four. They bounced off the wall and spun around, smoking, then slid across the track and came to rest, mangled, in the infield. One driver climbed out of his car, unhurt. The other driver had to be cut from his car. It was Dale, killed when he hit the wall.

How did this happen? I asked myself. People said Dale never raced like he did that day. Instead of trying to win, he'd kept his competitive fire in check, playing defense, maneuvering to keep other cars from taking a run at Dale Junior and me.

Was I to blame? I sensed it everywhere. At the supermarket. At the track. The worst was at the race-team headquarters. There were a couple hundred people working there, and every morning I wondered if they were thinking, *If it weren't for him, Dale would still be here.*

...We are what we think. Michael THOUGHT he was guilty of his friend's death. He FELT guilty. It affected his racing. It affected his relationship with his family and especially wife, Buffy. She kept telling him, "It wasn't your fault," but when she asked him to talk about it, he said, "I don't want you to counsel me. I'm sick of this. I'm just going to deal with it on my own." After that, he said, "it was like something froze up between Buffy and me."

What do YOU think? Are some of your thoughts about yourself negative or destructive?

I know a woman whose parents divorced when she was a child. She blamed herself for their divorce, even though it was NOT her fault. Later, when she and her husband divorced, because he was unfaithful, she blamed herself for that, too.

Many people get the impression when they are children that they are not pretty, not good looking, not coordinated, not capable and that sits in the back of their minds throughout their lives.

I remember reading about a popular actress. When she was a child, her dad told her she would never amount to much. Well, she did, but she never thought that she had lived up to her dad's expectations and even though her dad died, she still strove to prove him wrong time and again. She became a star, but was a very unhappy person who sought relief from her thoughts of inferiority through drugs.

What do YOU think? Are some of your thoughts about yourself negative or destructive?

2. You can CHANGE what you think

You CAN CHANGE what you think. You can change your conscious thoughts much more than you may realize. ...But first you have to WANT to change. Sometimes this is more involved than you may think. I read about a professional hockey goalie. I forget his name, but his team did win the Stanley Cup one year. As a kid, he could never please his dad. He would complete a chore, like sweeping out the garage, and his dad would come home, snatch up the broom, do a better job, stare at him and then walk off.

As an professional hockey player, every puck that came at him became one more opportunity for utter failure, so catching or deflecting those pucks became, almost a matter of life and death. He was successful, amazingly so, but was he a content, well-adjusted person? ...No, he was a mess of anger and resentment inside.

But was inner peace worth the possibility that he might lose his competitive edge and cease to be a star? ...That's the question we have to ask ourselves. We ARE what we think. Even if our thoughts of ourselves, others or the world are dysfunctional, they STILL are who we are. Our thoughts tend to become part and parcel of how we look at the world, and deal with the world, and they are not easily changed.

But, eventually, you may get sick of negative thoughts; or at least sick of the negative affects of negative thoughts. I know I have. It's only when we get REALLY sick of something that we ARE willing to change. Put another way, "Until the pain of NOT changing gets worse than the pain of changing, we won't change."

3. The Lord IS ABLE to help you to change what you think

God WANTS to help you to change what you think. God WANTS you to see yourself as God sees you. And if you have faith in Jesus Christ, God sees you as the radiantly wonderful person you were created to be. And if you are WILLING to change, God WILL, if you ask, renew your mind and get you thinking positively about yourself.

It took Mike Waltrip nine years to do this, but he did it. During those years, he won many races and started his own successful business, but he was not a happy man. Every success felt empty and his relationship with his wife was a struggle. Then, he finally prayed: *Lord, I know I need to sort out my feelings. Give me the courage to watch the video of that race. Help me to forgive myself, to let go of this awful guilt.*

After that prayer, he found the courage to watch the DVD of the race in which his buddy Dale Earnhardt had died. He writes:

I watched the pre-race interviews. I heard Dale tell reporters in his confident drawl, "You better keep your eyes on Michael." He was talking to them, but I knew his message was for me. *The losing is over, Michael. You'll win for me.*

As I watched, the race began. Dale Junior and I got to the front of the pack early. Dale was behind us. He was battling back there, blocking. I never knew what he was dealing with. Drivers making charges, Dale fending them off.

I know I couldn't have done what he did. Junior couldn't have done it, either. I thought, *Maybe the way Dale raced that day did play a role in his death.*

The final lap. I fixed my eyes on the TV screen. When we went into the third turn, I saw something that made me sit up straight. By that point we were home free. There was no catching Dale Junior or me. Dale knew that. He was not blocking or playing defense anymore. He was racing for himself, trying to finish third behind his buddy and his son—or maybe even win it all, if we slipped up. Dale wanted me to win, but he wasn't going to *let* me win. I bet Dale said, *I got a chance to make a run on you two. Here I come.*

He cut low on the turn to make his move and made contact with another car, sending him into the wall. Dale had died doing what he loved—racing, not blocking. It didn't ease the pain of losing him. But my relief was so tremendous I broke down sobbing. I prayed, *God, I'm sorry I didn't come to you with this nine years ago. If only I had trusted in your forgiveness and forgiven myself.*

Conclusion – More than you think

You ARE what you think, but you can be MORE than you think. Think about each of your negative, dysfunctional, shameful, unpleasant, demeaning, belittling thoughts.

Get sick of them and, finally, be willing to CHANGE what you think.

Then ask the Lord to renew your mind. If you do, Jesus will help you change what you think, so that you can see yourself as God sees you. And if you have faith in Jesus, God sees you as the radiantly wonderful person that you were created to be.

Amen.

In her book *Jesus Calling* Sarah Young writes (July 7th): “Trust Jesus in all your thoughts. The Lord knows that some thoughts are unconscious or semiconscious and He does not hold you responsible for those. But you can direct your conscious thoughts much more than you may realize. Practice thinking in certain ways—trusting Jesus, thanking Jesus—and those thoughts will become more natural. Reject negative or sinful thoughts as soon as you become aware of them. Don't try to hide those thoughts from the Lord; confess them and leave them with Jesus. Then go on your way lightheartedly. This method of controlling your thoughts will keep your mind in the presence of Jesus and your feet on the *path of peace.*”