

THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT

RULING YOUR SPIRIT - The Call to Self-Awareness

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The ability to observe, understand, and regulate our own thoughts and emotions is not just a modern psychological concept but a foundational spiritual discipline in Scripture.

The Bible calls this "ruling your spirit" and being "slow to anger"—a practice requiring self-awareness, pause, and reliance on God's wisdom.

This study explores how this biblical form of metacognition—"thinking about our thinking"—equips us to manage emotions, respond righteously, and avoid sin, even when anger or distress is justified.

#1 THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR METACOGNITION

Scripture consistently directs us to govern our internal world. This self-governance is the spiritual root of metacognition.

Ephesians 4:26

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

This command makes a critical distinction. It acknowledges the emotion of anger while commanding us to control our response to it. The implied instruction is to pause, observe the anger, and choose a path that does not lead to sin.

Proverbs 16:32

Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Here, spiritual victory is redefined. True strength is not found in conquering external foes but in the internal, disciplined mastery of one's own spirit. This "ruling" requires the deep understanding linked to being "slow to anger."

James 1:19-20

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for then anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

The Apostle James provides a clear, sequential model for metacognition in moments of provocation:

- A. Quick to Hear: First, accurately perceive the situation.
- B. Slow to Speak: Pause your internal reaction and automatic responses.
- C. Slow to Anger: This created space allows for a chosen, righteous response rather than a reactive one.

Psalm 4:4

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.

This verse explicitly links emotional regulation with introspection. The command to "ponder in your own heart" is an act of holy metacognition—a silent, deliberate examination of our thoughts and feelings before God.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Crucially, the capacity for self-control is not mustered through sheer willpower but is supernaturally cultivated as we yield to the Holy Spirit. We "rule our spirit" by walking in His Spirit.

#2 THE FOUR-STEP PROCESS OF GODLY METACOGNITION

When a strong emotion arises, follow this "pause button" process modeled on

James 1:19.

A: What Am I Perceiving? (Quick to Hear)

Are there other reasons this could be happening other than my initial thought?

Separate the observable facts from your immediate interpretation. Before reacting, ask: What exactly was said or done? What are the bare facts before I add meaning to them?

B: Why Do I View It This Way? (Examining the Heart)

Interrogate your interpretation. Is my perspective driven by pride, a perceived threat to my rights, fear, or a genuine concern for God's glory and others' welfare? Scripture warns that "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Much of our reactive emotion is about protecting "self"

C: What Is It Making Me Feel? (Naming the Emotion)

Specifically label the emotion. Is it anger, or is it fear, shame, grief, or feeling devalued underneath?

Anger is often a secondary emotion masking something more vulnerable. Even Jesus experienced complex emotion: "And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5). His primary emotion was godly grief; the anger was secondary and directed.

D: How Should I Respond? (Slow to Speak, Slow to Anger)

With clarity from the previous steps, choose a Spirit-led response. Scripture offers several pathways:

Entrust judgment to God.

Romans 12:19

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

Speak truth governed by love, not retaliation.

Ephesians 4:15

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

Respond with Prayer, Not Vengeance.

Two profound examples from David's life illustrate this step.

David and his men returned to Ziklag to find it burned and their families taken. His men, in bitter grief, spoke of stoning him. In "great distress" David's first move was not to defend himself, retaliate, or despair.

1 Samuel 30:6

And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

He then turned to prayer, seeking God's specific guidance.

1 Samuel 30:8

And David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?" He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue."

The result of this metacognitive pause—choosing prayer over a reactive emotional response—was that David led those same men to a complete victory, recovering everyone and everything.

The other example David gives is in 2 Samuel 16:5-14

While fleeing his son Absalom's rebellion, King David was publicly cursed, stoned, and accused by a man named Shimei. Despite extreme provocation and his desire to kill Shimei, David paused and ruled his spirit.

2 Samuel 16:5-12

When King David came to Bahurim... Shimei... cursed continually. And he threw stones at David... and said... You man of blood, you worthless man!... Then Abishai... said to the king, ...Let me go over and take off his head. But the king said, ...If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, Curse David, who then shall say, Why have you done so?... Leave him alone... It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today

David considered a perspective beyond his immediate humiliation, chose not to retaliate, and actively trusted God's ultimate governance of the situation.

#3 CULTIVATING GODLY METACOGNITION

This skill is strengthened through daily spiritual disciplines that renew our minds and shape our automatic thoughts.

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Proverbs 14:29

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

True wisdom is demonstrated in patient, considered responses, not in the speed of our reactions. We cultivate this by regularly "pondering in our hearts" (Psalm 4:4)—reflecting on our emotional responses, our victories, and our failures before God, allowing His Spirit to transform our thought patterns.

Conclusion and Prayer Ruling our spirit through biblical metacognition is the journey of moving from being ruled by our emotions to being led by the Spirit. It is the practical outworking of having the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

A Prayer for the Journey:

Heavenly Father, my emotions are strong and often feel justified. Teach me to pause. Help me to be quick to hear Your truth, slow to speak my rash words, and slow to stir up my own anger. Grant me the Holy Spirit's self-control and the wisdom to rule my spirit as a steward of the heart You are redeeming. In moments of distress, help me to strengthen myself in You, as David did. When wronged, remind me that You are the just Judge. Transform me by the renewing of my mind,

that I may have the mind of Christ. In Jesus name, Amen."