

Our thinking v. God's thinking! - a one-off study for small groups

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Q1 Let's indulge our imagination for a moment of science fiction (or so it is for the moment). How would you feel if citizens were forced to take a medicine which policed the bloodstream for illegal drug molecules? (This is one stage on from a spy in the cab to monitor our speed and observance of traffic signals and report any indiscretions, isn't it?)

Q2 How about a rule that people standing trial should be required to take psychoactive drugs so that their thought processes could be subtly examined?



Freedom of thought is one of the most fundamental human rights. Psychologists talk of 'silent speech' in which we talk to ourselves some time before we talk to others on important issues. Totalitarian political regimes have dreamed of not only denying freedom of association and freedom of speech, but even freedom of thought, if only they could. Democratic politicians should be engaging in a battle, not to deny freedom but to allow freedom while trying to win a battle for hearts and minds. That is what God seeks to do as well in us. Jesus came to bring freedom (Jn 8:36). Important as freedom is however, to use that freedom to good effect is crucial. When God brings us to faith in his Son, he has in mind bringing us into a continuous process of change for good, from the inside out, as he wins a battle for our hearts and minds.

Read Isaiah 55

It is a profound truth that there are those with a great spiritual hunger and thirst which has yet to be satisfied, because the forgiveness of God cannot be bought and cannot be earned by effort, much as many have tried those routes. It comes to the one who seeks God (v6), calls on him when he recognises the presence of God (v6), repents by renouncing both sinful ways and thoughts (v7) and turns to God (v7). Notice that the first part of our response is repentance in which we rethink our values and the actions which spring from them. Turning our back on previous thought processes starts then and lasts a lifetime! Let's look at how Isaiah contrasts our reasoning with God's. Let's see how far we have come along the road. *Read again vv8-9.*

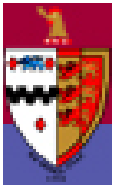
Isaiah brings us the words of God that our thoughts (and ways) are not his thoughts (and ways) (v8). Not only are God's thoughts and ways different, they are also on an entirely higher plane (v9). We're going to look at some implications of this:

- We think that the way to leadership is getting others to serve us ...
but God says otherwise (Mt 23:11)
- We think that the way to independence is by getting our from under authority ...
but God says otherwise (Prov 15:33)
- We think that the way to succeed is by covering up our mistakes ...
but God says otherwise (Prov 28:13)
- We think that by surrendering our lives to God we will lose them ...
but God says otherwise (Mt 16:25)

Not all in the group may be aspiring leaders (of anything even!) but we will surely have had wrong thinking in one or more of these life areas.

Q3 Which of these four lessons have members of the group already learned? Are there things which can usefully be shared in the group?

God's work never fails to bear fruit (v11). He chooses to work through us with all of our shortcomings, and he seeks those who, far from bringing his Name into disrepute by their actions or by their words, will actually



Robert and Nicholas Thorne founded Bristol's first school in 1532 after the dissolution by Henry VIII of the monasteries where most education had previously taken place. They chose the Latin motto, or mission statement as we might call it today, *EX SPINIS UVAS*, a play on their own surname, meaning '*from the thorns come grapes*'. Nonsense of course in terms of Botany, it was a visionary statement of the life-changing possibilities of education perhaps best fulfilled by *Bristol Grammar School* in the last 100 years. One wonders whether the two men had Isaiah 55:13 in mind. A greater work by far has been carried out by our Lord through every generation of his church as he has set about radically changing those who come to faith in his Son, Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:17)

Q4 Are we like thorn bushes which have been transformed to bear grapes as fruit in the service of our Lord?