

Transcript 139

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the God Questions podcast. Today's episode I have with me, Steve Arterburn. He's the author of many books, but one that is coming out very soon titled Every Believer's Thought Life, defeating destructive mental patterns to gain victory over temptation. Now for me Steve is I guess I'll most famous for the Every Man's Battle book. I remember reading, I can't remember exactly when it came out. But as someone who adds some pretty significant exposure to porn when I was younger, it was key in me achieving in large part victory over that temptation. But this book that we're going to be discussing today, which deals more about the thought life, is still a big challenge we struggle for me as it is for many men and women out there. So Steve welcome to the show.

Steve Arterburn

Thank you and I'm so glad that you found Every Man's Battle. We we do a workshop to help people go even further into that recovery from it, and I'm just delighted you found it. I want to mention one thing that you know, I'm actually more famous for some people because of the Women Of Faith movement. I created this conference for women in 1996 and before it was over you know, we were filling arenas everywhere. We had 5,000,000 women come and over half million came to Christ. So I just want to mention that because this book really is for both men and women and it covers all subjects.

Shea Houdmann

That was clearly both men and women have struggles in their thought life. So absolutely, and we'll include some links to where you can learn more about Steve and New Life ministries and the whole every every man, everyone's battle series of books in the show notes at podcast.gotquestions.org and also the description on YouTube when this episode goes live. So Steve did we start out with what led you to write Every Believer's Thought Life?

Steve Arterburn

Well, we've done all of the books that you possibly could do, you know? Fred Stoker had a vision for Every Man's Battle that when I talked with him, he said I have a vision from God of six books. They will sell all over the world and they will sell millions. Well, you know that's kind of the same vision I've heard from a lot of unpublished authors, but in this case Fred was such a deep and wonderful spiritual man. And then his vision has come true. So as we, as I sat there and with Marcus, now Marcus Brotherton is my co-author. He and I wrote Kirby McCook and The Jesus Chronicles a couple of years ago together and it won book of the Year for Adolescent Christian literature. So he's a powerful writer. I love working with him. And so if you look at all the things that have been done about Every Man's Battle and Every Woman's Battle, all of this, you come to OK, what's the next level and what are people struggling with the most? Well over and over it's the thought life. You're going along and you're doing fine. And then boom, something triggers you or something reminds you or something is such a a horrible temptation that it takes everything in you to run from it and run to something good. So I thought this is the area that we need to address and we need to provide some hope and healing in the area of thought life because once you know you deal with the thought life, I mean it impacts the way you feel. It impacts what you do. Who it really is you could say, it's everything. So that's how I got to the point that this is

where we ought to focus. Do the research and find what would be most helpful in a person who's got thought life problems which to 1 degree or another, I think is everyone.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely, let me go through a few questions that we received at Got Questions that are that definitely you discuss in this book. Well, the first one is something along the lines of do our thoughts really matter in the sense of does it really matter if I'm thinking it as long as I don't do it? So how do you respond to that?

Steve Arterburn

Well, I think Jesus is the one that responded first when he said, you know, even when you're lusting after another woman, you're committing adultery. So yes, your thoughts matter. Then we are directed of course in Scripture to take every thought captive. So you don't just let something exist. This let me tell you this. If you have a thought that you are too bad for God to use, that you've gone too far, and you've sinned too much, that thought needs to be dealt with. I had that thought at one time after I had pressured a young woman to have an abortion when I was in college. And I just said man, I've killed my own child, God, can't use me. And it. I'm fortunate that I found people that were giving me a different message because I believe that message was what Satan wanted me to believe. And a lot of people think that they've gone too far or done too much.

Steve Arterburn

My most recent Bible project is the one year Bible for men. And my wife did the one year Bible for women. And I'm you have to I we provided 100 word commentary for every day. So in February I open up. And on the new the Old Testament passage, Aaron, God's first chief priest, is worshipping a golden calf. So you know if you ever made a bad hire, you could relate to that. And then and then here's Peter in the New Testament. On the same day, coincidentally or not same day, the New Testament passage, Peter denying he ever met Christ. Well, what happened? Did he remove the calling from them? No. He restored Aaron and Jesus restored Peter to the calling that they had. And I just say that because if you're thinking that God's punishing you for the rest of your life, all those kinds of things or he's not wanting to use you or you've lost your calling. That is not coming from God. In fact, when I paid this abortion, I was we were an infertile couple for seven years, and so people would say, well, I guess God's punishing because that's what people think about God. Well, just the opposite happened. 1990 Christmas Eve Madeleine was born of a couple who decided not to have an abortion. More courageous than me and when the nurse presented her, she put her in my arms. Not my wife. Was God giving back to me the very thing I destroyed. Now that's hard for some people to hear because their thoughts are not according to Scripture. Their thoughts is that your sins aren't really washed away, they aren't really the the slate isn't completely white. There's always these scars that you have. I'm telling you something that is a horrible way to live and hopefully through Every Believer's Thought Life you can clear up some of that faulty, that thinking that can really prevent you from experiencing all the good things that God has for you.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely, and your book covers the thought life in many, many different areas. I mean, the sort of the overarching theme is since controlling our thoughts related to sexual things, but that is the area where I

think most people struggle the most. But clearly it's not the only area where we have struggles. And that's demonstrated by the type of questions we received is people having all sorts of unbiblical thinking on multiple different arenas, not just about sexual things. But this next question, kind of along those lines. It can deal with a lot more than just sexual stuff, but primarily focused on that is what about is temptation a sin and when does in the sense, when does, when do our thoughts become a temptation? When is it different? There was a thought in my mind when does that thought actually become something that is sinful? If we can't ultimately control stuff that pops into our brain? So how do we navigate that?

Steve Arterburn

Yeah OK, so first question. Is temptation sin? Well? Well, Jesus was sinless and yet tempted in many ways, so obviously temptation is not a sin. Here is a a sin. When a couple that aren't married and they're committed to stay pure until married, when they decide that winters here and they're going to rent a little cottage up in the mountains and the snows falling and the music's on and there's a fire in the in fire place and they just can't believe that they were so committed to purity and they had sex that night. I mean what, what do you expect is going to happen? So what the sin of that was not only just having sex before marriage, but you set yourself up to be tempted to have sex before marriage. And the only way that you wouldn't is one of you would have to run out of that cabin. And so the sin is when we don't protect ourselves from temptation. And when we not only don't protect ourselves, but we invite it. An alcoholic who's been recovering for two days who takes a job as a bartender is not protecting himself from that temptation. And so a big part of recovery from anything is, well you know, Romans 2 Romans 12:2 says be transformed by allowing God to change the way you think. And so it's not like you just all of a sudden memorize a bunch of stuff and change the way you think. Or just say. God has to do God's part of that process. He wants to work with us in that transformation and so then you go from what can I do and get away with? You go from that to, what do I need to avoid so that I can still feel good to myself? Good about myself at the end of the day.

Steve Arterburn

I love the story about the guy. He he had a weight problem with cholesterol problem and every day on the way to work he passed the doughnut shop and there he was eating a half dozen donuts. And so he decided, made a commitment to find a different path, one year later somehow he's going from the donut shop and he prays to God, God, if this is a reward for me going one year without coming to the donut shop provide me with a parking place right out front. And then story goes, he only had to drive around the block 8 times until that parking space became available. So he he he caused that relapse and this thing about keeping your or staying in perfect peace with your mind stayed on God is something that if your mind has stayed on God then your mind is going to go to godly things, not the ungodly things. And just as the temptations and the problems we've been in have formed some grooves quote on quote grooves in our brain pathways, it takes time for us to kind of reprogram, and we can recalibrate the brain from this old way of thinking to the new way.

Shea Houdmann

It's a, it's a powerful story, just like the donut shop guy and I I love me some doughnuts but sometimes doing what he did and literally keeping yourself as far away from the temptation as possible is ideal. For someone like me who my job is in Internet ministry. I'm on the computer all the time, so just in a sense,

avoiding the temptation of looking things online by not being on a computer. It's not an option, so I've had to feel more creative in how I fight those temptations and how I establish accountability and so forth.

Steve Arterburn

I mean, in one second you go from a man of integrity, enjoying life, to something pops up. You just instinctively go to it. And now you're full of shame and remorse. I'm I'm a fraud. I'm a fake. Just like that and that's why we need this book so that our brain our our thoughts aren't so subject to just anything that comes along.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, so that's a good segue into what I wanted to ask you next. We get a lot of questions from people who are really struggling with like intrusive thoughts. And I know some are struggle with OCD type of mindset where I mean they they have to stop and they become so focused on it, so obsessed over it that they can't like, not think about it. I know a lot of this stuff in the book talks about how to how to deal with that in many different areas, but maybe just briefly for someone who struggles with intrusive thoughts, not necessarily narrow down to one type, what's the what are some principles that they can take away with how do I overcome these intrusive thoughts and not have them impact me so much?

Steve Arterburn

Yeah, well, you know it depends on what we're really talking about. There is a a classic obsessive compulsive diagnosis where you know when I worked in Psych hospitals you would have a person that would shower 12-18 times a day. Their skin was scaling or red and and they get got infected from just all of trying to scratch all of the germs off. Now of course they were obsessed with cleanliness and germs and all of that, and then the of the compulsion happened as a result. And trying to get them to not be compulsive would be kind of foolish. So in those cases it's usually a combination of two things, one, there are some intrusive thoughts that are there because the brain is malfunctioning. And so if I was that person I would try a medication from a physician and I might be one of those people which I've known them all through my life that that medication fixes it because my brain was imbalanced, wiring problem whatever, but it fixes it. Now the other thing is, for every compulsion there is this obsession, like cleanliness, but the obsession has to come from somewhere. And the obsession comes from the unresolved issue from whatever it is. And so in the area of in, let's just say not OCD, but just an intrusive thought that keeps coming back. Well, the first thing if I was working with that person I would say all right? So let's think about this. Where in the world could that be coming from? What could the source of that be, and what is that intrusive thought doing for you? Now I know what what it's doing to hurt you, but what is it doing for you? Why you know maybe this intrusive thought prevents you from feeling this deep shame over here. But you've got to have some good help to figure that out. In the meantime, in the book, you can be guided to do some exercises like that. OK, if I'm if I'm feeling this, where could that be coming from? And if I'm repeatedly thinking this, what could the source of that be? And then what am I going to do to replace those intrusive thoughts with something that's going to be good for me, not harmful?

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, it's very true and with Got Questions. I mean, we are very clear that we are not a counseling ministry that we always encourage people to seek counsel through the pastor, local Christian counselor, medical professional, whatever. But some of these ones that I we don't think are actually medically diagnosable issue would just the thought of trying to get them to go back to what's actually causing you this compulsion and you to react accordingly. And to me it's the, it's the guilt that people experience with that that's the worst aspect of it and that they have the thought, it keeps coming back and they feel so guilty about it, it causes them to obsess about it. It just brings the thought back and it's a vicious cycle that that never ends. It's it's painful to watch and we only watching through like Internet communications not actually helping the people in in person, but it's it's painful to watch for sure.

Steve Arterburn

Well, Lamentations tells us, examine your ways. And a lot of times we don't think that's a good thing to do, and it is a good thing to do, and that we, the past, can give us insight into the present. Now, do you want to go live in the past? No, but when your past is seeping into the present, it's no longer the past, it's the present that you need to deal with. But some people, and oh, this is just tragic. Folks will tell them we'll just get over it. Thank you. Appreciate that. But for some folks, you just can't get over it, and that's very unkind and uncaring for someone who's struggling to hear that, that kind of notion.

Shea Houdmann

So Steve, I need to thank you because you've been providing me with excellent segues into the next questions, and we didn't even go over these ahead of time, so thank you again for this. My next question would ask you is why is 'don't to do this' or 'just like stop thinking about this' not as helpful as replacing and filling our mind with truth. And more compelling joys.

Steve Arterburn

So if I were to criticize you rather than you saying yeah, hey, thanks for the criticism, we'd appreciate it most likely, especially if it was your wife rather than me. You would kind of dig in your heels and defend yourself then rather than immediately be ready to change. That's human nature, and so it's also human nature as we're growing up, whatever you can't do, you want to do that. Whatever the rule is, human nature is we're not born good as a lot of people think, we want to rebel. And so when you're told, do not do this or you cannot do this, well, it's important to abide by that. Now if that becomes such an obsession that this thing you can't do is controlling your life. Once again, why? Why is that so important to you to still be able to do that? When we surrender that right or that entitlement, now we can move on to what would be something better to dwell on every time this thought comes up?

Steve Arterburn

You know, in Every Man's Battle we talk about the corral, the mind being a corral, and every time something that is impure or improper ends up in the corral, you open that gate and you walk that thought. And that's that's the issue of taking every thought captive. That's what we want to be doing. And if you don't take it captive, it's going to captivate you and it's going to capture you and you're going to regret that I didn't do it a different way back when it was just a tiny seed, a morsel. Now I've got a Redwood tree I've got to deal with. Chop it down and dig up the roots and that's what I hate for anyone. My Southern Baptist parents who took us to church three times a week somehow didn't think it was harmful for me to go in my grandfather's office who had pornographic pictures all over the walls. And

I'm telling you that had an impact on me. It was a traumatic early sexualization of a four year old boy. And so I had to deal with pornography early on because I'd been introduced. I had had that little dopamine rush at age 4 from seeing something that was forbidden. And so if we don't make a commitment to deal with it, we just hope it goes away or wish it was better, then it's probably going to get worse for us.

Shea Houdmann

Probably one of the things I enjoyed most about the book, was back to what we were just talking about, it's not just don't think about this or stop doing this, it's more here's what you should be thinking about instead. Here's what you can replace those things with. And I know you talked a lot about Philippians 4:8 in the book where it reads, finally my brothers whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable. There's any excellence. If there's anything worthy of praise. Think about these things. And to me, that's that was one of the keys for me in and no means am I claiming my thought life is perfect. But in order to gaining a significant degree of victory in my thought life is not just, I'm not thinking about it, not thinking about, not think about it. It's no. I'm thinking about these things instead. I really enjoyed that emphasis in this book as well.

Steve Arterburn

Well, I think about 50% of people struggling with their thought life and this is going to sound so superficial. But I think if you took that verse alone, posted it on your mirror to see in the morning, had a card in your wallet to see it with or whatever. If you just have that around you, I think it's going to help about 50% of the people because it's just going to remind you what you need to be doing. And it is a powerful force for the future. But look if when you are lonely and you're sitting at home, that's when the intrusive thoughts happen. Fleeing temptation means go get out of the house rather than sitting there being alone, having this thought. Go exercise, go to the park, go somewhere, call a friend, but don't sit there lonely and just let this thing take over your brain. Those are really, you'd think people would just naturally do that. No, we don't. We need to be told get up and get out of there. That is just as tempting as being with you know somebody that you shouldn't be with. Save yourself from the temptation by fleeing the temptation and fleeing the circumstance in which it starts to take control.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent Steve. Appreciate your our conversation today. I could I could talk to you for so much longer but we're coming towards the end of our time. Maybe just briefly, obviously, I would agree with you. The book is for everyone or virtually everyone. But who do you think would be most benefited by reading Every Believer's Thought Life?

Steve Arterburn

OK, let me give you the author's answer and it's everyone because either you have a problem with this or you're going to be able to help people that friends are, maybe you know, you're even into a lay ministry or professional, but you're going to help them have some real tools to deal with thought life. Every Man's Battle was so popular and it still sells like crazy because it gives men something to do. Yeah, just like this didn't say oh pornography's horrible don't do it. It said rather than pornography, how about you bounce your eyes away. Rather than lusting after woman how about bounce your eyes away. And that bouncing has saved so many, it gave you something to do and it told you that don't feed that Sumo

wrestler sex drive that you have starved at. And that's why so many men have been impacted by it. And I hope the same thing will happen with this book.

Shea Houdmann

So Steve, thank you for your time again. I enjoyed our conversation and to our listeners if you struggle with your thought life and I think for 99.9% of you that's going to be the case. Highly recommend Every Believer's Thought Life, defeating destructive mental patterns to gain victory over temptation. This has been the Got Questions podcast with Steve Arterburn. Steve, thank you again for being on the show today.

Steve Arterburn

Thank you Shea. You did a great. I mean, you do a great job and I hope you'll continue to gain subscribers because you're doing an important thing.

Shea Houdmann

Thank you for the encouragement, Steve. So got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.