

Unleavened Minds:

Training Our Thoughts to Walk in God's Way

First day of The Feast of Unleavened Bread — April 2, 2026 in Helena, MT

By Daniel Deininger

Core Theme: Just as we put physical leaven out of our homes, God calls us to put sin out of our minds — and that begins with understanding and training the thought life.

PART 1 — THE FOUNDATION: “What These Days Picture”

🕒 *Approx. 10 minutes*

Opening — Establish the Physical Observance

The Days of Unleavened Bread are not merely a ritual — they are a living, annual reminder of a deeper spiritual reality. Leaven throughout scripture pictures sin — its corrupting, pervasive, spreading nature.

Exodus 12:15-17 NKJV —

15 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

16 On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat — that only may be prepared by you.

17 So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.

> God commanded seven full days — not one, not three — seven. We will come back to the significance of that number at the close of this message.

Leaven as a Picture of Sin

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 NKJV —

6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

> Paul makes the connection unmistakably clear — leaven is malice, wickedness, corruption. Unleavened bread is sincerity and truth. This feast is not just history — it is a present-tense call to put sin out of our lives.

Define Sin Clearly

1 John 3:4 NKJV —

4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

> This is the biblical definition — sin is not merely a feeling, a cultural standard, or a matter of opinion. It is a measurable departure from God's law. That gives us something concrete and clear to work with.

We must also control our mind. That is where sin begins.

Matthew 5:27-28, 43-44 KJV - v27 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: v28 - But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

v43 - *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. v44 - But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*

The Picture of Unleavened Bread

For seven days, eating matzo — plain, flat, unleavened bread — is a daily physical reminder. Every meal, every bite, points to a spiritual reality: *we are in a season of intentional focus on removing sin from our lives*. The physical act anchors the spiritual intention in daily life. God designed it that way deliberately. He knows how we are made.

PART 2 — THE PROBLEM: “Why Sin Comes Naturally Without God”

⌚ Approx. 10 minutes

Transition: *“But if we are going to put sin out — we need to understand why it comes so naturally to us in the first place.”*

Without God's Spirit, Our Natural Thinking Is Contrary to His Way

Romans 8:6-7 NKJV —

6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

> This is not pessimism — it is honest diagnosis. The natural human mind, left to itself, trends away from God's way.

We Are Not Born with God's Law Written in Us

None of us came into this world with a Bible downloaded into our minds. Whatever we know of God's way — we had to learn it.

Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV —

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

> This is the honest starting condition — not a condemnation, but a diagnosis. And a diagnosis points toward a cure.

The Contrast — God's Way Leads to Good Outcomes

Isaiah 48:17-18 NKJV —

17 I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go.

18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river.

> We can all look at our own lives and see this pattern — decisions made contrary to God's way rarely end well. Broken relationships, financial hardship, guilt, regret — the fruits of carnal thinking are visible and real. Conversely, when we walk in alignment with God's principles — honesty, love, self-control, patience — the results speak for themselves.

PART 3 — THE PROCESS: “How Sin Actually Begins — The Mental Model from James”

⌚ Approx. 15 minutes

Transition: “So if sin is the problem, and God's way is the solution — we need to understand exactly HOW sin gets into our lives. And James gives us the most detailed and precise answer in all of scripture.”

James 1:12 NKJV —

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

> James opens with encouragement, not condemnation. The person who understands this process — and actively engages it — is being approved and strengthened. Endurance is possible. And it is rewarded. Hold that thought as we walk through what follows.

James 1:13 NKJV —

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

> Before explaining the process, James clears away a common excuse. God is not the source of your temptation. The responsibility lies closer to home — which leads to the most important verse in the passage.

James 1:14 NKJV —

14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

> Here is the real source: your own desires — internal, not external. The word “desires” in Greek is *epithumia* — deep inner cravings and appetites that already exist within us. And notice the word “enticed” — in the original Greek, *deleazō* — a fishing and hunting term meaning to lure with bait. Something external presents itself as the perfect answer to an internal desire. This is the moment of maximum opportunity for intervention. The thought has arrived — but nothing has been conceived yet. This is where the battle is most winnable.

James 1:15 NKJV —

15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

> James uses a pregnancy metaphor — deliberate and precise. Conception happens when the internal desire unites with the external enticement — when we stop merely noticing the bait and begin dwelling on it, embracing it, entertaining it fully. The will begins to agree. The

imagination plays out the scenario. A thought becomes an intention. An intention becomes an action. An action, repeated, becomes a habit. And a full-grown habit of sin — James says plainly — brings forth death.

The Full Progression James Describes:

Internal Desire → Enticement → Mental Dwelling → Intention → Action → Habit → Death

Nothing jumps straight to action. There is always a mental process in between — and that process has identifiable stages where God-given intervention is possible.

Bringing in Science to Reinforce

What James wrote by inspiration nearly 2,000 years ago has now been confirmed by modern neuroscience. In 1949, Canadian neuropsychologist Donald Hebb published his landmark work *The Organization of Behavior*, introducing what became known as Hebb's Law:

"Neurons that fire together, wire together." — Donald Hebb, The Organization of Behavior, 1949

> What this means in plain terms: the brain forms and strengthens pathways based on what we repeatedly think. A thought that is noticed and dismissed leaves little trace. A thought that is dwelt upon, rehearsed, and entertained carves a deeper groove — and the next time a similar enticement comes, that groove is easier to fall into. The brain has literally been rewired by the habit of dwelling. This is not coincidence. This is how God designed the brain to function. And it is precisely why James describes sin as a conception — something that grows from what we allow to take root and be nurtured in the mind.

The Point of Earliest Intervention

2 Corinthians 10:5 KJV —

5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

> Paul's language here is military — casting down, bringing into captivity. This is not passive. It is active, early, decisive intervention. The earlier in James's progression you act, the easier the battle. Catch the thought at the enticement stage — before conception — and you have the advantage. Wait until desire has conceived and an intention has formed, and the battle is far harder. Taking every thought captive is not poetic language. It is a precise, early-intervention strategy that modern neuroscience fully validates.

PART 4 — THE SOLUTION: "Writing God's Law on the Mind"

⌚ Approx. 12 minutes

Transition: *"Now we understand the problem and the process. The question becomes — what builds the foundation that makes thought management possible in the first place?"*

We Need God's Law Written Internally, Not Just Known Externally

Hebrews 8:10 NKJV —

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Jeremiah 31:33 NKJV —

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

> This is the new covenant promise — transformation from the inside out. Not just external rule-following, but God's law becoming part of how we actually think. Notice — it must be written there. Writing takes time, repetition, and intentional effort. It does not happen automatically.

The Holy Spirit Is the Agent of This Transformation

Romans 8:5-6 NKJV —

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

> The Spirit does not merely forgive — it actively redirects the mind. It resets what we are drawn toward.

Galatians 5:22-23 NKJV —

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

> Every quality in this list is essentially a quality of a transformed thought life. Love begins in how we think about others. Joy is a condition of the mind. Peace is the absence of anxious, destructive thought patterns. And self-control — the last fruit listed — is the very capacity James is calling us to develop.

2 Timothy 1:6-7 NKJV —

6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

> “A sound mind.” The Greek word here is *sōphronismos* — discipline, self-control, sound judgment, a well-ordered mind. God's Spirit is literally described as the Spirit of a sound mind. The very thing we are working to cultivate — God has made it available through His Spirit. We are not doing this alone.

Daily Study Is How We Write the Law on Our Minds

Psalms 119:11 NKJV —

11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

> Notice the connection the Psalmist makes directly — hiding God's word in the heart is the strategy against sin. Not willpower alone. Not good intentions. The word, stored inside.

Joshua 1:8 NKJV —

8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV —

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

> Joshua calls us to meditate — but Paul calls us to go further: to study. The word “diligent” here carries the sense of urgent, focused effort — like a skilled craftsman who takes pride in doing the work well. “Rightly dividing the word of truth” implies the word must not just be read casually — it must be handled accurately, understood deeply, and applied correctly. Meditation without study can lead to misapplication. Study without meditation can remain purely intellectual. Together — daily study and daily meditation — they write God’s law on the mind in a way that becomes instinctive, ready, and powerful in the moment of temptation.

The Perfect Example: Jesus in the Wilderness

What does it look like when God’s word is truly stored in the mind? We have the perfect example.

Matthew 4:1-11 NKJV —

*1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.
3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”
4 But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”
5 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,
6 and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”
7 Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”
8 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.
9 And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”
10 Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”
11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.*

> Notice what Jesus did not do. He did not debate. He did not reason through the options. He did not rely on willpower or emotional strength. Three times Satan came. Three times Jesus reached immediately for scripture — “It is written... It is written again... It is written.” The word was already there, stored, ready, precise, and powerful.

> Notice also the conditions. Jesus was physically depleted — forty days without food. He was isolated. He was at a point of genuine human vulnerability. If there was ever a moment when temptation had maximum advantage, this was it. And yet the stored word of God proved sufficient. Every single time.

> This is the living proof of what Joshua 1:8 prescribes and what Psalm 119:11 promises. The word hidden in the heart becomes the weapon in the moment of battle. And note: Satan himself quoted scripture in verse 6. Knowing scripture is not enough. Jesus did not just know the words — He knew the truth behind the words, and He knew how to apply them accurately and immediately. That kind of deep familiarity only comes through the daily meditation and diligent study Paul described.

Romans 12:2 NKJV —

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

> Transformation is not a one-time event. It is a process — and it requires consistent input. Returning to Hebb's Law: the brain rewires itself based on what we repeatedly think and meditate on. If scripture is what we are storing — that is what the mind reaches for when enticement comes. We are quite literally programming our own minds through what we study, what we meditate on, and what we allow to occupy our attention.

PART 5 — THE CONCLUSION: “Seven Days to Build a Pattern”

🕒 *Approx. 8 minutes*

Transition: *“God in His wisdom didn’t give us a one-day feast. He gave us seven days. And I believe that is deeply intentional when it comes to what we are discussing today.”*

The Seven Days as a Training Opportunity

Research on habit formation confirms that repeated, intentional practice over consecutive days begins to build genuine neural pathways — new patterns of thinking. God gave us seven consecutive days of a physical reminder — daily unleavened bread — as an anchor for seven consecutive days of intentional mental and spiritual focus. This is not coincidence. It reflects God's understanding of how human beings actually change.

The Practical Challenge for These Seven Days

- Each morning: begin with scripture — intentionally put God's word in your mind before the world gets in.
- Each meal with unleavened bread: let it prompt a moment of self-examination — “What thoughts have I been dwelling on today? Are they leading toward life or toward death?”
- When a tempting thought arises: practice early intervention — notice it, name it, redirect it. Don't wait until conception. Take it captive early.
- Each evening: brief reflection — not condemnation, but honest assessment and prayer.

The Big Picture Encouragement

Philippians 4:6-8 NKJV —

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things.

> God is not asking us to do this alone. He promises to guard the very thing we are working to protect. And He gives us a checklist — a filter for every thought: Is it true? Is it noble? Is it pure? Is it lovely? Is it of good report? Apply this filter daily for seven days. It will begin to become instinctive.

The goal is not perfection in seven days — it is **direction**. Begin moving. Build the pattern. Trust the process.

Closing Image

Matzo is simple bread — plain, honest, nothing hidden in it. That is exactly what God is calling our minds to be during these days: simple, honest, nothing corrupt leavening the whole. As we eat it daily, let it be more than a tradition — let it be a daily recommitment to the most important work any of us will ever do: ***the renewing of our minds.***

Closing Scripture

Romans 12:1-2 NKJV —

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

The following articles and sermons are available at ucg.org for personal study and follow-up during the Days of Unleavened Bread:

Articles

“Guard the Door to Your Mind!”

ucg.org/united-news/guard-the-door-to-your-mind

A practical article using the analogy of a computer firewall to describe how we must guard our minds against corrupt input. Addresses the principle that how we think affects how we live, and what steps we can take to protect our thought life.

“The Battle for Your Mind”

ucg.org/peace/battle-your-mind

Addresses the very real spiritual battle for control of the mind, the dangers of ungodly media and input, and the importance of feeding the mind with what is good and true.

“We Must Change Our Way of Thinking”

ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-study-aids/transforming-your-life-process-conversion/we-must-change-our-way-thinking

Explores how repentance is not just about actions but about fundamentally changing the way we think, drawing on Isaiah and the teachings of Jesus. A strong complement to today's message.

“When Thoughts Run Amok”

ucg.org/learn/blogs/when-thoughts-run-amok

A personal, relatable account of how negative thoughts can spiral and what it looks like to practically bring them back under control through prayer and scripture — anchored in 2 Corinthians 10:5.

“5 Tips on How to Avoid Negative Thinking and Be More Positive”

ucg.org/learn/beyond-today-magazine/beyond-today-magazine-november-december-2019/problem-5-tips-how-avoid-negative-thinking-and-be-more-positive

A practical, accessible article offering concrete steps for replacing negative thought patterns with godly ones, grounded in Philippians 4:8.

Sermons

“Thoughts — Control and Rule Over Them”

ucg.org/sermons/thoughts-control-and-rule-over-them

A full sermon specifically addressing the Christian's responsibility to control their thoughts, drawing on 2 Timothy 1:7 and the example of Jesus Christ.

"Godly Mind Control — Part 1"

ucg.org/sermons/godly-mind-control-part-1

A sermon exploring what it means to have the mind of Christ, and how imitating Him begins not with actions but with thoughts.

"Guard the Door of Your Mind"

ucg.org/sermons/guard-the-door-of-your-mind

A sermon addressing how our thoughts can lead us to sin, and what practical steps we can take to ensure our thought life is pure and pleasing to God.

MY NOTES
