

[Opinion](#)

[Soul Seeing](#)



(Unsplash/David Matos)



by Michael Leach

[View Author Profile](#)

## [\*\*Join the Conversation\*\*](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

September 10, 2022

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

You have heard it said, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." It's been [the slogan](#) for the United Negro College Fund scholarship program since 1972. You may also be familiar with Vice President Dan Quayle's [rendering of it in 1989](#): "What a waste it is to lose one's mind. Or not to have a mind is being very wasteful. How true that is." I think the mind is a terrible thing, period.

A friend of mine who has suffered three nervous breakdowns described them like this: "My brain was trying to kill me." I have visited that neighborhood: obsessive thinking, chronic anxiety, paranoia, sleeplessness. The mind is a terrible thing.

My wife Vickie is in year 20 of Alzheimer's disease. You know what that's like. I have friends with Parkinson's disease. You do, too. You know what a terrible thing it is to have lost one's mind. Or not to have a mind at all.

The only response we can make to a loved one with a neurological disease like Alzheimer's is to meet their needs, one by one, as they come. The only response we can offer friends whose brains are trying to kill them is loving kindness. But what about those times when we all have unwanted thoughts beat against our brains like steel balls in a pinball machine game that won't stop? What can we do for ourselves?

It takes a lifetime of suffering from our thoughts and surrendering them to God to get to a place of peace and love and gratitude that is no longer easily disturbed.

[Tweet this](#)

I'm not talking about the kind of mental agony so intense it puts us in a hospital or makes our blood seep through our skin like Jesus' did in the Garden of Gethsemane. I'm talking about the garden variety of unbearable thoughts that come to all of us from time to time like slivers that throb just under the skin and won't be removed. Thoughts about what we want or don't want to happen to us, thoughts about what should be or shouldn't be, thoughts that make us feel guilty or afraid. Thoughts that don't drive us mad but make us miserable.

"Peace of mind for five minutes, that's what I crave," the singer Alanis Morissette [once said](#) in response to a question about being famous. "The mind is the source of all suffering," [observed Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron](#), "and it is also the source of

all happiness." Do we have the power to choose a happy thought over a hurtful one?

It's easy to quip, "You can't stop the birds of worry from flying over your head but you don't have to let them build a nest inside your head." Trying to stop our thoughts is like trying to stop the wind. We can't just toss out our negative thoughts about a situation or condition or problem and replace them with positive thoughts as if they were bubble wrap. We can only stop reacting to those thoughts, identifying with them, and beg God to take them away. It is never the problem that is the problem, it is our nagging thoughts about the problem that bring us suffering. The solution? "Let God transform you into a new person by letting God change the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect" ([Romans 12:2](#)).

I'm 82 years old now and can't tell you how many times I have cried out to God, like Job: "Please, God, these thoughts are killing me! Take them away. I give them to you. I place them on the altar of your love. Only you can make me realize that I am whole, that all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well" " ([Julian of Norwich](#)).

Soon enough the problem was resolved or it just dissolved. And it was God who did the work (Phil 2:13), not me.

Much of my life has been spent in surrendering to God and letting God be God.

## Advertisement

I think it takes a lifetime of suffering from our thoughts and surrendering them to God to get to a place of peace and love and gratitude that is no longer easily disturbed.

When troublesome thoughts come to you, please, just observe them without judgment. They're not your fault. Look at them but don't make a federal case out of them. They are not you. They are thoughts that come and go, pretty much without bidding.

Only then can you "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" ( [Philippians 2:5](#)). Surrender and let God be God in you. Be more interested in the things of the soul than the things of the earth and your mind will soon be hidden

with Christ in the mind of God ([Colossians 3:1-2](#)). You will dwell in the secret place of most high and abide under the shadow of the Almighty who will be your refuge and fortress ([Psalm 91:1-2](#)).

The mind is a terrible and awe-inspiring thing. The poet Rumi sums it up: "No one can understand this until he has lost his mind."

A version of this story appeared in the **Oct 28-Nov 10, 2022** print issue under the headline: The mind is a terrible thing.