

Worthy Music, Worthy Thoughts

by Elder Boyd K. Packer

Taken from General Conference Talk, October, 1976

“When I was a boy, we lived in a home surrounded by an orchard. There never seemed to be enough water to for the trees. The ditches, always fresh-plowed in the spring, would soon fill with weeds. One day, in charge of the irrigation turn, I found myself in trouble. As the water moved down the row choked with weeds, it would flood in every direction. I worked in the puddles trying to build up the bank. As soon as I had one break patched up there would be another. A neighbor came through the orchard. He watched for a moment, and with a few vigorous strokes of the shovel he cleared the ditch bottom and allowed the water to course through the channel he had made. He said, ‘If you want the water to stay in its course, you’ll have to make a place for it to go.’

“I have come to know that thoughts, like water, will stay on course if we make a place for them to go. Otherwise, our thoughts will follow the course of least resistance, always seeking the lower levels. *Probably the greatest challenge and the most difficult thing you will face in mortal life is to learn to control your thoughts.* In the Bible it says, as a man ‘*thinketh in his heart, so is he*’ (Proverbs 23:7). *One who can control his thought has conquered himself.*

“As you learn to control your thoughts, you can overcome habits, even degrading personal habits. You can gain courage, conquer fear, and have a happy life. I had been told a hundred times or more as I grew up that thoughts must be controlled, but no one had told me how. I’ve thought about this over the years and have decided that the mind is like a stage. During every waking moment the curtain is up. There is always some act being preformed on that stage. It may be a comedy, a tragedy, interesting or dull, good or bad; but always there is some act playing on the stage of your mind.

“Have you noticed that shady little thoughts may creep in from the wings and attract your attention in the middle of almost any performance on stage and without any real intent on your part? These delinquent thoughts will try to up stage everybody. If you permit them to go on, all thoughts of any virtue will leave the stage. You will be left, because you consented to it, to the influence of unrighteous thoughts. If you yield to them, they will enact for you on the stage of your mind anything to the limits of your toleration. They may enact themes of bitterness, jealousy, or hatred. They may be vulgar, immoral, even depraved. When they have the stage, if you let them, they will devise the most clever persuasions to hold your attention. They can make it interesting all right, even convince you that they are innocent, for they are but thought. What do you do at a time like that when the stage of your mind is commandeered by the imps of unclean thinking, whether they be the gray ones that seem almost clean, or the filthy ones which leave no room for doubt? If you can fill our mind with clean and constructive thoughts, then there will be no room for these persistent imps, and they will leave.

“I realize that in today’s world it’s often difficult to keep your mind filled with worthy thoughts. This takes careful control. However, it can be done when you make a safe place or your thoughts to go. I’ve found a way to make such a place, and I’d like to share it with you. It has to do with music – worthy music. A wise man once said, ‘Music is one of the most forceful instruments for governing the mind.’ Whether it governs in a positive way or a negative way is determined by what it brings on to the stage of your mind. If you can say that a song is spiritually inspiring or that it urges you to see yourself in a more noble perspective, the music is worthwhile. If it merely entertains or lifts your spirits, then it also has a useful place. But if it makes you want to respond in a carnal, sensual way or to consider unrighteous desires, then that music should be avoided. It is not worthy