

# MIND MONSTERS

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## INTRODUCTION

**Y**OU'VE PROBABLY NEVER heard of Roger Babson, even though he is a picture of success in the modern era. This brilliant mathematician and businessman became a millionaire when he formed a financial analysis company just a few years after graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He became a sought-after columnist for popular magazines and newspapers, and he even foresaw the stock market crash of 1929 using an economic assessment technique he developed.

But Babson's main obsession was gravity. When Babson was a child, his sister drowned in a swimming accident, and he believed gravity was to blame. He called it "a dragon" that "came up and seized her."<sup>1</sup>

Decades later Babson's grandson also died tragically by drowning, and this incident seemingly led Babson to found the Gravity Research Foundation as a means of discovering scientific advancements to help mankind conquer the deadly force of gravity. The man went all out in trying to defeat a force he called "Our Enemy Number One."<sup>2</sup>

Now it would seem to me that you don't graduate from a high-profile university like MIT and then enjoy a successful career as a businessman by disconnecting yourself from reason. And yet here was a man, Roger Babson, who was just like the

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rest of us in many ways—except in his obsession to defeat one of the fundamental forces in our universe. What drove him to have such a disregard for reality, at least in this area?

Hurt. Pain. Heartache from the past. Instead of accepting that life brings both good and bad, Roger Babson allowed thoughts into his mind that drove him to some outlandish pursuits.<sup>3</sup>

So what about you? Do you have some Roger Babson–like thoughts occasionally? Did a painful divorce cause you to say, “I’ll never open my heart like that again”? Or did a business failure make you think, “I don’t have what it takes to be a success”? Or maybe you feel satisfied in life yet face challenges in your thoughts, moods, and emotions sometimes. Take a minute to think about these questions:

- Do you find yourself focusing on the troubles around you?
- Do you lack peace? Are you conflicted?
- Do you have trouble seeing the good things in your life?
- Do you feel despair or depression, despite the apparent blessings around you?
- Do you go so far as to blame gravity—or some other force—for the hurt and pain in your life?

If you answered yes to one or most of those questions, you may be experiencing mind monsters. Mind monsters are those negative thoughts we all battle, the creeping shadows

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in the corners of our minds that feed our insecurities, worries, and fears; the thoughts that lead us to irrational anger or undefined depression.

But I have good news for you: with God's help, mind monsters can be defeated! It's not just up to you or me to get rid of mind monsters. God wants us to partner with Him to overcome the negative invaders of our minds. That means He is asking you to take an active role in recognizing, rejecting, and replacing mind monsters you may be facing, as well as in retraining your mind to keep them from returning. We'll spend some time on these four Rs in upcoming chapters. They have helped me tremendously in my own life to partner with God and overcome negative thinking.

We are encouraged, as Christ-followers, to recognize and destroy thoughts that are inconsistent with God's thoughts: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."<sup>4</sup> One of the most potent ways we can take every thought captive and get rid of mind monsters is to build up our faith and fill our mind with the right things.

My goal in writing this book is to equip you to do just that—to learn how to take your thoughts captive and focus only on the ones you *want* to focus on. Let's recognize mind monsters for what they are and learn biblical truths to overcome them. You do not have to spend the rest of your life attached to the mind monsters that may be plaguing you right now. You can discover them, destroy them, and live the best possible life God has for you!

## CHAPTER 1

# NEGATIVE INVADERS OF THE MIND

**H**AVE YOU EVER had the wrong thing in mind? Have you ever had one of those moments when it dawned on you, “I haven’t been thinking right”? It’s as if a light suddenly comes on, and you realize you’ve been giving a voice to mind monsters, those negative invaders that come and:

- Steal your joy and peace
- Disrupt your relationships
- Take away your contentment in life

They steal your life, one day at a time. As you read this book, you may be thinking, “I attend church. I’ve given my life to Christ. I shouldn’t have to deal with mind monsters, right?” The truth is, a person can be saved and on his way to heaven and *still* have to battle mind monsters.

So if you want your life experience to be positive, abundant, joyful, and overflowing with peace; if you want to live a successful Christian life with a great marriage and a fantastic

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relationship with your kids, you have to take a stand against negative invaders of the mind. It's impossible to live a positive life with a negative mind.

Mind monsters are nothing new. In fact they are at least as old as the Bible, all the way back to the Book of Judges, where we can read about a man named Gideon who had to conquer some mind monsters on his way to defeating the Midianites.

The Israelites were in trouble. Their land had been taken over by the Midianites, and they were feeling the weight of oppression. In the middle of this was a lowly farmhand named Gideon. In Judges 6:14, God appears to Gideon and tells him, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

Pretty strong words to hear directly from God Himself. And yet Gideon immediately let a mind monster jump between him and God. In the very next verse, he replies, "Pardon me, my Lord, but how can I save Israel? My clan is weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (v. 15). Can you believe it? *God* just gave Gideon a job, and Gideon refuses, saying he isn't strong enough.

Fortunately when God chooses you, you stay chosen. Gideon essentially spends the rest of the chapter disbelieving God, and God spends the rest of the chapter convincing Gideon that he is, in fact, the one chosen to rescue Israel from their captivity. And from then on, Gideon finally accepts his role and kicks the invaders out. (It's a great story—read Judges 6–8 for all of it.)

There's also the New Testament story of Joseph, where a



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mind monster almost kept him from marrying the mother of Jesus. When we read the story of Jesus's birth, it's easy to see how close Joseph came to messing up God's plan. The Bible records in the first chapter of Matthew that Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married. Back in those days if you were engaged, you were committed; it took a divorce to become unengaged.

But then the unthinkable happened, which we read about in Matthew 1:18: "Before [Joseph and Mary] came together, she was found to be pregnant [through the power] of the Holy Spirit" (AMP). When Joseph found out Mary was pregnant, he knew it wasn't *his* child. He also knew Mary's penalty could be death—it was a horrible disgrace for a woman to be pregnant out of wedlock. His decision? "*He had in mind to divorce her quietly.*"<sup>1</sup>

He had in mind! Notice how his thinking had gone off course. His mind was on a completely different track than the plan of God. An angel came along and pointed this out to Joseph. I imagine the conversation went something like this: "Joseph, you've got the wrong thing in mind. God's got a plan going on here, and you're not thinking right. You've got to get the right thing in your mind."<sup>2</sup>

If you want to live a successful Christian life, you have to take a stand against the negative invaders of your mind.

## WAYWARD THINKING

Have you ever felt sad the moment you woke up? Your mind is whining, "Oh boy, another day! Oh my, a blue Monday! A

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terrible Tuesday! A weird Wednesday! A tough Thursday! A frightening Friday! A stinking Saturday!”

These wayward thoughts cause you to turn on your country western music and sing, “It’s raining outside, and it’s raining inside too. I’ve got trouble on my mind, and I don’t know what to do.”

What happened to “This is the day the LORD has made; [I will] rejoice and be glad in it”?<sup>3</sup> It went out when sadness came in. The sadness created wayward thoughts, and the mind monster of sadness started jumping around inside your mind wreaking havoc! It said, “Let’s go claim Monday as a day of sadness. Let’s go ahead and move into Tuesday and call it terrible.”

When the mind monster is at work, everything is sad, everything’s gloomy—but there’s really no reason for it to be that way. The negative invader of your mind came in and created wayward thoughts—thoughts that would get you off course. God had an assignment for you that day. You were supposed to go to work happy. You were supposed to walk in and smile at the folks in the office, greeting them with good cheer.

You were supposed to let your light shine before men so they could see your good works and then honor and glorify God.<sup>4</sup> That was God’s plan before sadness—the monster—invaded your mind. Now you’re on a completely different track, feeling bad and walking into the office with your head hanging low. When your coworker asks, “Did you have a good weekend?” you can barely respond. You’re moping around and sacrificing influence with your poor attitude.

You've just been taken over by a mind monster. Get back on assignment and live out the purpose God has for you by understanding that these wayward thoughts are really mind monsters trying to hijack your day and your destiny.

## THE TRAINS OF THOUGHTS

A few years ago my wife and I celebrated our wedding anniversary with a trip to Europe. Most of the time we were away we were transported between cities and countries by train. It was an experience that turned out to be much more difficult than we imagined. The signage was insufficient, and finding someone to help us with directions seemed impossible. We ended up being confused for a good portion of the trip. It wasn't until the end of our time in Europe that we began to understand the routing system and train-car assignments.

Have you ever taken a train? If so you know you don't get on one without knowing where it's going. After all that's the whole point; you're on board to get somewhere. In my book *Forces That Form Your Future*, I wrote about the way thoughts are like trains—they take you somewhere. But so often we jump on these trains of thought without knowing our destination!

So many people end up in places they don't want to be and then wonder how they got there. But it only makes sense that they boarded a train of thought to Self-Pity City, Anger Town, or Lonesomeville without even realizing it.

Many times they assume God put them there. I've heard people say, "You know, God put me in this wilderness. I'm hungry, and I can't feed my kids, but God put me here." That

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usually is not the case. More often than not, God is saying, “I didn’t put you there. You boarded the wrong train of thought.” The wrong train carries:

- Thoughts of worry
- Thoughts that create guilt
- Thoughts that cause you to feel insecure and question yourself
- Thoughts that bring sadness
- Thoughts that cause suspicion of others’ motives
- Thoughts that bring doubt of God and His Word
- Thoughts of inaccurate assumptions

For example, have you ever met a person who assumed something about you that wasn’t true? I remember a day when I left church quickly to catch a plane for a speaking engagement. My assistant had picked up a sandwich from Subway for me because I didn’t have time to eat lunch. I raced to the airport with no time to spare.

When I arrived, I jumped out of the car, hurried to the check-in counter, and said, “Is there any way you can get me on the plane? Can you get my baggage checked through? I have a speaking engagement tonight, and I’ve got to get on this plane.”

I remember watching the attendant work slowly. I was

wondering, “What’s bothering him? Why is he treating me this way?”

Finally he blurted out, “The next time you’re running late to the airport, don’t take the time to stop at Subway and pick up a sandwich.”

Now in that moment I didn’t have to be a great man of God to recognize the mind monster of anger that jumped into my thoughts. Longing to leap over the counter and grab the attendant by the neck, I saw a flash, a picture of that negative imagination.

I rebuked that thought. I cast it down. I brought my thoughts into captivity and kindly responded with something like, “I really didn’t get the sandwich myself, but that’s OK. Would you just please let me on the airplane?”

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*Thoughts are like trains—  
they take you somewhere.*

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Everyone makes inaccurate assumptions from time to time. The man at the ticket counter put two and two together and assumed I stopped and hung out at Subway and as a result was late for my flight.

He concluded that he shouldn’t have had to rush. He probably told himself, “This tardy customer isn’t going to create an emergency for me! I’ve been here all day waiting for him to get here. He obviously stopped at Subway, and now he wants to fire me up and get me going. I’m not hurrying for him, because I know what happened. I see the bag in his hand!”

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I have to admit, I'm not immune to making inaccurate assumptions myself. As a Pentecostal preacher's kid, I grew up assuming certain things about people who weren't part of our specific brand of Christianity. It seemed to me that those in other denominations were less informed, less sincere, and just all-around less spiritual than those of us in my dad's church. I stereotyped them as not being on "our side."

But then along came Reggie. We met during football camp while we were in high school and hit it off right away. We saw eye-to-eye on a lot of things and had many of the same interests, including several classes together. He was a fun, good-natured guy and a terrific athlete, so we became friends.

Then I discovered the worst: he was not only one of "them"—his dad was the pastor of one of those "other" churches! Yet here we were: two preachers' kids in a large, secular high school. I began to realize that our commonalities were so great they rendered our differences irrelevant, and I stopped making all those negative, incorrect assumptions.

Looking back I can see that God had a bigger plan for me and that even then He was beginning to free me from false assumptions. He was preparing me for what I enjoy now: friendships and camaraderie with pastors and leaders of various doctrinal and denominational backgrounds. My world is so much bigger today than it ever could have been had I held on to my "us and them" mentality. I had to change my mind to change my world.

Every day you're going to be bombarded with mind monsters coming to steal your joy, take away your confidence, mess up your relationships, tempt you to doubt God's Word, keep

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you focused on your flaws and shortcomings, and create chaos and havoc. There's no condemnation in the fact that mind monsters are lurking in your life—everyone has them. But you have a choice: Will you allow them to stay, affecting who you are and God's plan for your life, or will you conquer them?

### **KEYS TO REMEMBER**

- Mind monsters are the negative invaders of your mind that come to steal your joy and peace, disrupt your relationships, and take away your contentment in life.
- It's impossible to live a positive life with a negative mind.
- If you want to live a successful Christian life, you have to take a stand against the negative invaders of your mind.
- You can overcome the invasion of mind monsters and live according to the assignment God has for you each day.
- Thoughts are like trains; they take you somewhere.
- You have a choice of whether or not you will allow mind monsters to stay, affecting who you are and God's plan for your life, or if you will conquer them.

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### THINK ABOUT IT

- What do you think about the statement made in this chapter, “I’ve given my life to Christ. I shouldn’t have to deal with mind monsters, right?” Why do you agree or disagree with that statement?
- What are some ways you have learned to conquer mind monsters by reading this book so far? What kinds of things do you already put into practice that help you overcome mind monsters?
- What are some examples of different trains of thought? What do those trains look like when they “arrive” in your mind? (For example, the “Lonesomeville Train” begins with thoughts such as, “No one cares about me.”)
- Can you think of a time when you realized, “I haven’t been thinking right”? What did you do when you came to that conclusion? Did you take any steps in that moment to begin thinking better? Will you approach that situation differently in the future?