

Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: Various passages	Title: Think About How You Think	Date: 04.29.18
Website Writeup:			
Think about how you think! In reference to the ideas & images which govern our thinking, we must think about the information and our ability to process these things well. Feeding ourselves Truth, and avoiding garbage are healthy spiritually formative practices we look at in this sermon.			

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Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

We began last week looking at how thinking plays out in spiritual formation, exploring ideas & images as they relate to our thoughts. My wife showed me this small article in *May's National Geographic* concerning the power of imagery in our thinking. Basically it says, put your spouse's face there in the middle among all the puppies & keep looking at all the pictures together, and suddenly you'll feel better about your spouse. Thought that was a good little illustration of the power of imagery.

We said spiritual battle is mostly waged in our minds & thought is the primary way in which the Evil One seeks to undermine God's kingdom plan in our lives. The most important things in life are the ideas & images we hold of God & whether they're accurate or not. A healthy image of God defines a healthy image of self.

I'd also remind us of something we discussed a few sermons back, Vision, Intention & Means, since they will come up again today as we look at two more aspects of thought which reinforce good ideas & images of God: information & our ability to think.

You may've seen the movie *Catch Me If You Can*. The real life story of Frank Abagnale Jr., a con artist, who passed himself off as an airline pilot, a doctor & attorney, and who passed over 2.5 million dollars in phony checks. You wouldn't want Frank as your doctor, pilot, or lawyer! He hadn't been trained in any of these things, and that information is fairly important when it comes to doctoring, flying planes, or lawyering.

We'd usually regard Romans 10:14 as a verse concerning only nonbelievers, which in referring to Jesus, says, "...how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" That was most certainly written with the idea of salvation of the nonbeliever in mind since Paul begins that passage saying, *Brothers & sisters, my heart's desire & prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge* (Rm 10:1-2).

Realize, he's speaking of the people of God, who apparently needed salvation. People who'd only perpetuated a culture of religiosity, disregarding the heart of the Word as they relied only on humanistic tradition. They'd built a protective hedge around the law, heaping rules on top of God's Word to insulate it & protect themselves from its violation. All which buried God's true heart & Word under layers of ideas constructed by humans.

Anyone who wanted to know God, now had to run a gauntlet of cultural hurdles in order to just get to the heart of what God wanted to communicate to them.

So...their pursuit of God wasn't based on right knowledge. And in reference to that, Jesus said to the teachers of the Law in Luke 11:46, "*And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry...*"

Spiritual formation's the consistent growth of Believers in the knowledge of God by the Power of the Spirit transforming us into Christ-likeness. To accomplish this, a steady flow of unadulterated information is needed through the direct ingestion of God's Word. We have to think about how we think - without right information, our ability to think well is impeded. Failure to comprehend who God is, as we spoke of last week, is destructive to ourselves, others & the world.

Hosea 4, vv6 & 14 say, *6 my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. And, a people without understanding will come to ruin!* We're now living in a post-Christian society, where if people even have a copy of the Bible, it's on the top shelf untouched. The knowledge of God goes unengaged; the Word of Life disregarded. And I believe we're witnessing what Hosea was speaking about in society now.

There are a few people in my life to whom I go for various things since they have knowledge I don't. Computer issues, Rob Granholm. Physical health, Rachel Brobst, Joe Gargano or Natalie Shaeffer. Taxes - my sister-in-law. Electrical issues - Moses McMenamin. Plumbing - Bob Gaffney. Legal issues - Ivory Bishop. Real estate - my friend, Paul Clough.

If you want to know about God the Father you go to God the Son, Jesus, since in Matthew 11:27 he said, *27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."*

Jesus affirms & fulfills the totality of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Law), and proclaimed to the Jewish leadership, *39 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life (Jn 5:39-40).*

He's the Living Word. Colossians 1:15 says this about Jesus...*15 The Son is the image of the invisible God,* and in v19, *19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...* To know Jesus, is to know God. To know Jesus is to be directed & devoted to the Scriptures which he claimed to fulfill, and to his words which guide.

Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom reign of God - his central purpose (Lk 4:43 - *43 But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."*)

And just before his arrest, Jesus prayed in John 17, *6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes*

from you. ⁸For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me..."

The information provided to us in the Scriptures, and in the life of Jesus, is all sufficient for salvation & a life of godliness; *we remember 2 Peter 1:3, ³His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

In meeting Jesus, we meet God the Father. In engaging the Scriptures daily we're drawn more deeply into God's character as we're transformed into the likeness of Christ by them. But we must think about how we think. Thinking is the activity of sifting out truth from falsehood based on the information we have. Spiritual formation is like an old prospector panning for gold. Sifting through all the lies of culture, letting them fall away as scriptural Truth settles within us. Thinking takes information enabling us to see it in it's full orb; reshaping false ideas & images of God along the way.

To think well is to be responsible with life. Martin Luther did so when he presented his thoughts at the Diet of Worms in 1521. *He said there, "Unless I am convicted by Scripture & plain reason - I do not accept the authority of popes & councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot & will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."* Some also attribute him as saying famously at the end of this, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise."

Martin Luther was saying the same which Jesus had said to the teachers of the Law, "... *you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry...*" And also what Paul said in Romans about the Israelites, "*their zeal is not based on knowledge.*" People had added hurdles to knowing God, burying information under rules & regulations, traditions, pageantry, power & control. Martin Luther was getting back to the simple message of the unadulterated Word, basing all his life upon it. Reaffirming the simplicity of Gospel information - reestablishing Christ's role as Lord.

Martin Luther thought well, paying close attention to Truth. As followers of Jesus as well, "*We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.*" (Heb 2:1) Taking our thoughts captive to Christ, subjecting them to the scrutiny of the Word. Replacing wrong ideas & images with Truth of Scripture beginning with our view of God, which leads to our view of self, others, and all of creation. God has hitched his wagon to our response in this. Not that he's castrated himself in his ability to intervene, but has, to some level, limited himself in working through the Church. So, the furtherance of the Kingdom of God is somewhat contingent on our willingness to think well. Crooked thinking, unintentional or not, is always bent towards evil - it must be. And crooked thinking leads to crooked actions - healthy thinking leads to healthy actions. Changed hearts lead to changed behaviors which lead to changed societies.

God's Word is good for the soul, as Psalm 19 says...⁷The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

To be immersed in Truth leads to extravagant worship. God's Truth ingested with an open heart, captivates & fills the hearer with joy unimaginable. However, we're often too busy & distracted to pay attention, led away even by the simplest of things - slowly taken in by evil constructs of ungodly thought. Dallas Willard tells an all too familiar story of a child with her grandmother in the back yard making mud in a puddle. She's been told **not to do this by granny**, but wants to anyway so she keeps saying, "Don't look at me Nana." When we deny God's word to us we're in essence saying don't look at me - what Adam said in the garden - 'I was naked & afraid, so I hid'. We're looking away from God onto something else. When we allow indifference leading to sin, or evil, to flower & grow in life, we block the flow of divine joy & satisfaction.

Truth telling & confession are good for the person. When a battered woman finally opens up about her torment, she finds freedom from the abusive husband. When an alcoholic quits hiding & follows God's prescriptions to life, they find freedom. When we submit our patterns of thinking to conform to the truths of Scripture applying them into every detail of living through the power of the Spirit, we find our hearts restored.

The bottom line is, the Word of God, when explored openly, changes a person in only the positive as we're drawn into the glory of God's presence. C.S. Lewis once said that a young atheist can't be too careful about what he reads & must steadfastly protect is ignorance. True. The danger in reading & contemplating the Word of God is, your heart will be captured by God; true for the atheist & for us continually growing in him!

We live in a culture which arrogantly boasts of complete freedom with what we feed our minds. There's no limitation as to what information or imagery we open ourselves up to, be it sexual, violent, horrific, or what have you. We're made to feel unintelligent if we're closed to exploring, hearing, or seeing all things. We're made to feel prudish, or abnormal if we're at all restrained in what we allow access to our thoughts. **But we must remember nothing enters which does not have its intended effect; we need to ask the Lord for conviction in this area. Not just to arrogantly & piously stand the higher ground over others, but to do so out of humility of need, conviction for the glory of Christ, the betterment of self & the elevation of our fellow humans. We can't choose conditions & deny their consequences. You can't play with a tiger & not expect to get clawed. The power to choose our thoughts is a basic freedom & one which we must use well.**

Let's remember Paul's words in Philippians 4:8, ***8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*** Since the images & information we feed our minds with works at a subconscious level to undermine the very fabric of self - imagery doesn't operate under rational control - negative imagery undoes us slowly & deliberately. Like gaining weight a little over time, not noticing the ounces coming onto our bodies over weeks & months.

What we're talking about is having a **Vision** for feeding ourselves - thinking well. We may equate it with David's call in Psalm 51:10-12, ¹⁰ *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.* ¹¹ *Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.* ¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

The **Intention** is 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, ³ *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.* ⁴ *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.* ⁵ *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.*

Vision must fuel **Intention**. God has empowered us by the Spirit & will provide the grace for us to walk this out, but he will NOT do it for us. We must walk with him in this. Which brings us to the **Means** - the Disciplines within our control to put us in position to receive what's beyond our control. God can do a spiritual house cleaning, we can't. And in order for that to happen, we have to always put ourselves into the receiving position (Rm 12:1-2, Hebrews 2:1, Psalm 19:7-8, Jn 5:39-40, Ps 119:11, and others).

Our first Tool, Discipline, or Means is Scripture memorization. As Psalm 1:1-3 states, ¹ *Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,* ² *but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.* ³ *That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers.*

Or Psalm 119:11, ¹¹ *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*

Or Joshua 1:8, ⁸ *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful 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.*

We can memorize single verses, or tackle whole passages. If you say you can't, I'd ask if you know the lyrics to your favorite song? You probably do, and if you can memorize those, you can memorize Scripture. Some good passages to tackle are Romans 5:1-8/8:1-15, 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 2:1-10, Philippians 2:1-11 or Colossians 3:1-17 (and plenty of others). Doing this allows the light of God to shine in your thinking, and as a result darkness is naturally dispelled - displacing garbage with the light of Truth.

Secondly, get in the habit of having a basic quiet time. Take at least 15 minutes each morning to be with the Lord. (1) Open your Bible. (2) Pray the Holy Spirit would guide your time. (3) Using the principle of Observation, Interpretation & Application begin by reading a short passage slowly allowing the Spirit to pinpoint words or phrases & highlight those. (4) Read it again slowly observing what's going on in & around the passage, asking yourself - why was it written, to whom, under what circumstances, etc. (5) Read it a third time slowly asking the Spirit to interpret its meaning for you. (6)

Finally ask the Holy Spirit to apply the passage to your life; how does it make a difference for you now, or inform your life, etc. (7) Journal your thoughts.

Thirdly, at the end of your day, reread your passage from the morning & review your day prayerfully with the Holy Spirit. Ask him to interpret the experiences, conversations & events of your day. Write these out in your journal & close with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Fourthly, find others who are walking this out. Pursue Discipleship relationships. Observe them, share with them, and imitate them. What are their practices? How do they live? Seek their counsel. I watch Kathleen as she wanders around talking to people & praying for them! What a great witness! Ladies, pick her brain!

And by the way, some of those people you may not even know, or can even be dead! We can learn a lot from life stories & writings of certain people who've walked in faith well.

For instance, my wife's reading the *Diaries of Jim Rayburn, Founder of Young Life*, and is vastly encouraged by his life & thoughts. She comments on his passion & devotion, and is thinking a lot about how that informs her faith. Some of us have been reading through Dallas Willards book, *Renovation of the Heart*, which many of you say has been helpful. Some are using the study companion to that book with it's daily devotions. Someone just told me they've picked up *Sacred Romance* by John Edlridge again, enjoying his thoughts on the Christian life. What do these people think on? How do they spend their time? How have they lived? Etc...

The danger is, some writers sound wonderful, but aren't writing out of the accepted Christian tradition which adheres to the Word of God. You don't want to replace lies with lies. It's good to ask, who are good writers to spend your valuable time reading. People like Timothy Keller, CS Lewis, Francis Shaeffer, Nancy Pearcey, AW Tozer, Francis Chan, GK Chesterton, Henri Nouwen, Watchman Nee, John Piper, and Philip Yancey, to name a few, although there are plenty of others.

Let's remember though, their words are an interpretation of Scripture, not Scripture themselves, we should never give up reading the Bible first & foremost. And if you need some direction on doing that, maybe grab this book, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, by Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart.

So, there are some practical tools in our pursuit to think well about how we think, pursuing good ideas, images & information which lead us deeper into Christ-likeness.