

CHANGING YOUR MIND

Years ago the great Polish pianist Jan Paderewski was playing for a number of weeks at Carnegie Hall in New York city. He was living nearby in a posh New York hotel. It was the master's custom to practice for a couple of hours every morning on a piano that had been brought in for him. On the third morning of his stay an angry lady stormed into the manager's office and said, "Someone is hammering away on an old piano every morning across the corridor from me. This is the third day. It is driving me mad, and unless you stop it I shall leave this hotel immediately."

The astonished manager responded, "But madam, that is Paderewski himself!" The lady nearly fainted with surprise and said, "Paderewski! Oh, that's different. Of course I had not the slightest idea. I adore good music. I am an excellent musician myself. Please say nothing at all about it." The hotel man was much amused to note that thereafter, for the remainder of Paderewski's stay, the woman kept the door of her apartment wide open and entertained a party of friends there every morning while he practiced.

What was the difference? The room? The hotel? The music? No! The only thing that changed was the woman's attitude. The only change that was made was a change in her thinking.

We are continuing our series today called Transformed. It is based on the following verse;

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Two weeks ago we talked about Spiritual Transformation. Last week we talked about Relational Transformation. Today I want to speak about Mental Transformation. Changing your mind.

Romans 7:22-25 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Let me sum up what I want to say this morning in one sentence: God is far more interested in changing your mind than He is in changing your circumstances. So often we want God to change our circumstances. We want him to take away all of the problems, all of the pain, all the sorrow, all the suffering, all the sickness, all the sadness. God says, yeah, I know that's important but really more important than that is what's happening in you. Nothing will change in our lives until you get to the renewing of your mind.

Why is the renewing of your mind so important? Because my thoughts control my life. Action always begins as a thought. Your thoughts shape your life for good or for bad. If you accepted the thought when you were growing up when somebody said to you "You're worthless. You're no good. You don't matter. You're ugly. You're uncoordinated." If you accepted that thought, whether it was right or wrong, it shaped your life.

Also, the mind is the battleground for sin. Temptation always starts in the mind. Paul says here he delights in God's law, but there is something else at work attacking his mind. That is where sin starts.

Paul says two things about temptation. First he says it is a battle. There is a war raging. It is there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Sometimes you're conscious of that battle and sometimes you're unconscious of that battle. But it's going on in your life.

Second, he says sin makes you a prisoner. That is ultimately what it does. It puts us into bondage. It means that our life is controlled. Your life will either be guided by God or directed by the devil. Satan knows that the battle is won or lost in the mind which is why that is his battleground.

Romans 8:6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace

An unmanaged mind leads to tension. A managed mind leads to tranquility. The unmanaged mind leads to pressure. A managed mind leads to peace. An unmanaged mind leads to conflict and chaos. A managed mind leads to confidence. An unmanaged mind leads to stress. A managed mind leads to strength, security and serenity.

To win the war of the mind you need to learn to control your thoughts. Some people think that the mind just wanders, that it is uncontrollable. No, you can control your thoughts. Like the remote on a TV, you can change the channels. To do that you have to make three choices. If you want a healthy mind you have to learn to do these three things;

1. Feed your Mind with God's Truth

We all know the importance of nutrition. Good food and good calories cause you to be better, to be stronger, to be healthier, to have more energy. Bad calories, bad junk food, things that don't do good, harm your body. The same is true in your thought life. I must feed my mind not with junk, not with poison, but with truth.

Matthew 4:1-4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

The Bible is our soul food. It's our owner's manual for life. Nutritionists tell us that the best way to eat is to eat just a little every couple hours rather than to eat big meals then go long hours without eating. You just kind of nibble your way through the day eating the right foods. The same is true with truth. If you're constantly thinking about truth, it's going to renew your mind. It's going to change your mind.

Psalms 119:97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

There are over seven thousand promises in the bible. Seven thousand! If you want to have your mind renewed become a promise person. Begin to learn, memorize and think on these. If you feel pretty hopeless about your situation, you're not spending enough time in the promises of God. Because they're there.

David is called a man after God's own heart. There was a time when Saul wanted him dead. He had to run and be a fugitive for many years living in caves and moving from place to place and never knowing if this would be the day he would be found and killed. How did he survive?

Psalms 119:95 The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder your statutes.

No matter what is happening in your life, you need to be a student of God's word. You need to be feeding your mind with God's truth.

Our minds are wonderful creations of God. But did you know they need to be guarded? How many here used to play with Silly Putty when you were a kid? You could do a lot of neat things with it. You could make shapes, and you could even bounce it like a ball. But the best thing to do was to flatten it out, press it on the Sunday comics, and pull up a copy of the comic on the Silly Putty. Our minds are like that too! They are made by God to pick up everything. If we constantly expose our minds to bad things, they will get filled with bad thoughts and desires.

2. Free your Mind from Godless Thoughts

The second thing you need to do is to free my mind from destructive thoughts. Remember, the devil want to make you a prisoner. To be free, your mind needs to be liberated. It needs to be delivered and released. Maybe you are here today but you are still being held captive to something that someone told you years ago that simply was not true.

When I was a kid I went to camp. One night we were singing by the campfire and someone behind me tapped me on the shoulder and said "you are a really BAD singer." So I stopped singing. For years I stopped singing. I was so afraid of offending people. I really wanted to sing, I missed it so much because I enjoyed it. When I was in seminary I was interning at a church and one of my friends was the worship pastor. One day I asked him if I could get his honest feed back about my singing. I told him the story I just told you and then I sang for him. He laughed and said that my voice was fine. I would probably not get a job singing for Phantom of the Opera, but my voice was fine. So I started singing again. For years I had missed out on the joy of singing just because some kid had said something nasty to me.

There are three enemies to the mind. Three things that feed the sinful nature;

The first enemy is our own fallen humanity. Sometimes we are our own worst enemy. We tell ourselves things that are not true. We allow our own fallen nature to speak lies into our lives.

The second enemy is the devil. Satan wants to control your mind. He cannot force you to do anything because, as a Christian, "Greater is he that is in me than he who is in the world." But he can make suggestions, and they can be persuasive.

The third is the world's value system. That means the culture around us. Everything around us tells us to be a less disciplined person. Advertisement say, "You deserve a break today. Have it your way. We do it all for you." Mountain Dew says "Obey your thirst." In other words be an animal and do whatever you feel like doing.

The world has their value system. It's promoted by advertisers and it's promoted by movies and it's promoted by television, it's promoted in songs and it's certainly promoted by celebrities. So nobody around you is actually encouraging you to live a responsible mentally healthy life.

1 John 2:16-17 For everything in the world -- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does -- comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

The world is encouraging you to place yourself into a position of bondage. So how do we fight this war against these three enemies?

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 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.

Notice this is warfare language. He's talking about this battle going on in your mind, this mental battle. He says we demolish strongholds. A stronghold is any lie that I believe. A spiritual stronghold in my life is a lie that I believe.

God really doesn't love me. That's a lie. I know better than God what will make me happy. That's a lie. That's a stronghold. Anything that I believe that's a lie is called a spiritual stronghold in my life. Secularism, hedonism, materialism – all lies. It could be a personal belief. I can never be forgiven. That's a stronghold. I will never amount to anything. That's a stronghold.

Behind every sin is some lie that you're believing. These strongholds need to be destroyed. How do we fight this mental battle? We take thought captive. The word used here in 2 Corinthians in Greek is AKMALO TIDZO and it literally means to conquer. It means to bring under control. It is a compound word combining ACME (a spear) and HALOSIS (a prisoner of war). Do you get the picture? Leading a prisoner away at spear point.

We make every thought obedient. That means we bring it under submission. We force it to act in a certain way. My thoughts often disobey me. They often rebel. My mind often has a mind of its own. It wants to go in another direction. Like a disobedient child I have to force it to obey.

So many people are allowing their minds to call the shots. Like a bad parent, they let their kids do anything they want. The reason why most people are ineffective in life and actually fail at life and actually don't enjoy life is because they've never learned how to fight the battle of the mind.

Roger Bannister was an Olympic runner. Every four years the Olympics was held. Ever since they started keeping records, no person had ever been able to run a mile in less than 4 minutes. It was the established belief that no one could ever break that barrier. But Roger Bannister didn't listen to them and in 1954 went out and broke it and made sports history. For hundreds of years it was thought to be impossible, but then he did it. But here is the most interesting part. After Roger broke the record, within ten years 336 runners had also broken that record. Why? Simple. The barrier was in the athlete's minds. They had believed what the experts said. They were convinced no one could ever break the record. The point: You will never go beyond the barriers in your own mind. If you think you can't, you won't and never will try. If you are defeated in your mind, you've already lost the battle.

3. Focus your Mind on Good Things

For good mental health I must focus my mind on the right things. What do you focus on?

First, you focus on Jesus. You've heard about the old cliché you become what you think about most. If you think about Jesus guess what you're going to become like? Jesus.

Hebrews 12:2-3 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Second, you think about others.

Philippians 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Everything from the world teaches you to think about yourself and nobody else. When Rick Warren wrote his book the Purpose Driven Life he began with the most counter cultural statement he could think of. He wrote "It's not about you". It is only in giving your life away, that you'll understand what it means to live. So think about others. Think about Jesus ...

Lastly, think about eternity. Focus on the prize. Remember that there is more to life than just here and now. The problem we have today is that we have short term thinking. We only think about what's happening right now.

Colossians 3:2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Have you heard the old saying "He's so heavenly minded he's no earthly good." That is not true. I have found that the people who are not heavenly minded do little good. Those who are most heavenly minded throughout history are those who have done the most good on earth. The problem is the opposite: We're so earthly minded we're no heavenly good. All we think about is budgets and baseball and bills and stuff like that.

I need to feed my mind on truth every day. I need to free my mind from those destructive thoughts. I can choose not to think of them by changing the way I think. Then I can focus my mind on the right thing. When I'm focused on the right thing I don't have time to pay attention to the wrong thing. When I'm watching TV and I don't like what I see I just flip the channel. Change your attention. I'm no longer tempted. It's real simple. Just change your thinking. That takes an act of the will.

I remember when the seatbelt laws came into effect in 1976. People had all kinds of excuses for why they weren't going to wear one. Some said they felt constrained, and some were afraid they if they had an accident they would be trapped. Some thought the strap would somehow stop them from driving safely. Others just said, "Nobody's going to tell me what to do." I heard about one guy who had a friend that said, "I'm not wearing one, and that's that." Then a few weeks later the friend drove up, and he had his seatbelt on. The guy asked why and he said, "A really nice police officer gave me a ticket for not wearing one and I found out real quick that it was quite comfortable and easy to use."

How do you change your thinking? You make the decision to do it. Is there anything in your own life that is holding you back right now? Is there faulty thinking that is holding you back? Don't allow yourself to be held captive. Change your thinking.

Harry Houdini had a problem. The famed escaped artist found himself in a jail cell that he couldn't get out of. His mind began to wander back to the challenge he made...any jail cell, he claimed, couldn't hold him, that is until now. Thirty minutes had gone by since the heavy, metal doors swung shut behind him. After an hour, he was still working with the concealed piece of metal that he had hidden in his belt. Bathed in sweat and panting in exasperation, he could not get the tumblers to move. There was something different about this lock. Something he had never experienced before. Finally, after laboring for two hours, Houdini collapsed to the floor in frustration and failure. He couldn't figure it out! He had never been beaten before! All he could do is wait for his ultimate embarrassment. He hung his head in shame. But as he did something miraculous happened. When he hung his head, he instinctively leaned against the heavy, metal door...and it swung open. The door was never locked, just closed. The door had been open the whole time. For Houdini, his mind overruled the physical. His mind was locked, and that was all it took to keep him from opening the door and walking out of that jail cell. From that point on, Houdini always checked the door first.

Do you need help in doing this?

Stephen ministry is our congregation's one-to-one caregiving ministry. They deal with emotional and mental healing of an individual with Christ's help. God works through Stephen Minister's to plant a seed of hope and healing in a person whose life seems barren and forlorn because of some crisis or tragedy and loss. Stephen Ministry training will equip you, and our congregation will support you, so that you can show God's mercy, care and compassion to another who is hurting. They will walk beside an individual, pray for him or her, and help him or her work through life's difficulties. Through this ministry God will bring forth new life and renewed faith in both your care receiver and in themselves as a Stephen Minister. If you are interested to hear more or you feel God is calling you to serve in this way, please contact Pastor Shirley Thomas.

Over 100 years ago a woman named Kate Wilkinson wrote a hymn called May The Mind of Christ My Saviour. It says;

May the mind of Christ my Saviour, Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling All I do and say