

Week Four: Love God with All Your Mind

Sunday, April 22, 2018

by: Rev. Roger Lenander

Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – alive, holy, and pleasing to God– which is your reasonable service. 12:2 Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God – what is good and well-pleasing and perfect. - Romans 12:2

“The mind is a terrible thing to waste,” was coined by Art Fletcher, the former head of the United Negro Fund. After his death his granddaughter recalled her grandfather and some of his life experiences.

“There was the time when Grandpa was in eighth grade the great civil rights leader, Mary McLeod Bethune, visited his class at school. She told them one day someone who was in that very room would have the ear of the president. Or there was the time in high school when he found out his picture would be in the back of the yearbook with all the black kids. That was the day he organized his first civil rights protest.

Grandpa was a big shot in the Ford administration. One day a white guy stopped him the hallway, ‘Boy,’ the guy said, ‘can you tell me where Art Fletcher’s office is?’ Grandpa did his best shuck and jive and told the guy to (imitates her grandfather) ‘Take the elevator to the sixth floor, suh.’ Then Grandpa ran up six flights of stairs. He wiped the sweat off his brow and slid behind his desk just in time to see panic on the guy’s face when he read ‘Arthur Fletcher’ on the nameplate and saw Grandpa smiling behind it. The guy was there for a job interview.

Grandpa hit the lecture circuit near the end of his life. He reminded people it was he who had coined the term ‘A mind is a terrible thing to waste’ for the United Negro College Fund.

Our mind is the source of our wisdom, discernment, decision making, and problem solving. We take cues from our environment, training, relationships, and experiences in engaging our mind. Some minds are kept neat and orderly. Other minds are chaotic. Into the mind God infuses love. Our mind is designed to live in harmony with God’s intention and desire. Sin seeks to destroy that. God counters with wisdom to discern how that love is directed in and through us. So, while I might never have the ear of the president, my mind is equipped to speak in the power of God’s love where I am today.

God, happy are those who walk in the wisdom of the Lord. Fill us, equip us, sanctify and send us with renewed minds to make visible your love for the world. Amen.

Monday, April 23, 2018

by: Misty Coyle

Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God – what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.

Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

12 ¹⁻² So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.

Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Romans 12:2 (MSG)

I like Bible study. I like to read all sorts of books from different theologians and different translations of the Bible. This quest for knowledge and understanding only happened a couple of years ago. I felt the need to "keep up" with some acquaintances and fellow followers of Christ. I guess they had this expectation of me being Bible smart after learning about my childhood and I did not want to disappoint; so, I delved into every book, joined every Bible/sermon app, and watched any video I could get my hands on. I am loving God with all my mind.

I like these two translations of the Romans 12:2 verse. The "renewed" mind plays a vital role in loving Jesus as also stated in Ephesians 4:22-24 (NRSV). But I had a hard time understanding what a renewed mind was and how to go about achieving it. Then as I read The Message translation of the Romans verse, "You'll be changed from the inside out." stuck with me and gave me the 'a-ha' moment only the Holy Spirit could give me.

The language of the mind is images. Maybe when you do math in your head, you see the numbers working on the blackest of chalkboards with a brilliant white piece of smooth chalk, clicking as it is lifted and placed back on the board. Our mind is like a never-ending movie theatre of revolving pictures and words. Even when we sleep, we dream. The Lord created us this way. Complexity and all. So, to love God with all our mind, is to love him with reason, knowledge, memory, and imagination. You need to use all four processes to love God with ALL our mind.

- Reason is to understand and form judgement by a process of logic; or, what we like to call discernment. If I do this, will the love of God be seen by others?
- Knowledge involves taking time to fill our mind with God's Word. When we grow in truth, God's Word, we gain knowledge.
- There are many commands in the Bible for which God requires us to remember - memory. When we remember God's kindness, faithfulness, patience, and peace, we build a foundation of faith, hope, and love.
- Imagination - "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine." Isaiah 55:8 (NLT) In our imaginations, we can capture the divine thoughts that come to us. When we learn something in our quest of knowledge, we can imagine God in all areas of our lives. This is love anchored by faith.

What we take in; is what we put out. If we are taking in fair reasoning, knowledge of truth, remembering rightfully what God has given us, and imagining God in our lives; we will produce justice, truth, faith, hope, and love for others. Just as Jesus commanded us to do.

Dear heavenly Father, let my words, actions, and love be yours to everyone around me. Give me strength so people around me will know your truth. Amen!

Tuesday, April 24, 2018

by: Juel Pierce

What is love? I remember a time when I thought love was mostly an emotion, perhaps an emotion based on hormones and being in close proximity to someone. Or perhaps love is an accident: we speak of “falling in love” with someone, as though it is something that we can’t help—something that just happens to us. And if we can fall *in* love, we can probably fall *out of* love. And if that’s what love is, what does our mind have to do with it?

As I think of this “love,” I’m reminded of King David, who “fell in love” with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his army commanders, and decided he had to have her. So, because he was king, he took her, and all sorts of difficulty happened as a result. (See 2 Samuel 11-12) David’s “love” was not love, but lust. Perhaps if he had thought through what he was planning to do, he might have made a different decision.

In Philippians 2, Paul considers what love is—the love of Christ Jesus for us. We do not believe that Jesus “fell in love” with the idea of becoming human. Instead, he made a decision to put aside his equality with God and become a servant. Paul urges us to have “the same mind” as Jesus, who chose obedience rather than the glory of being one with God. Jesus’ mind was made up to love God and obey God’s will, and for our sake he humbled himself.

Each day, we are faced with decisions about how we will live. Will we choose to be selfish, or choose to regard the interests of others? I confess to you that there are more times than I wish happened that I choose to be selfish, choose not to act in love toward God and toward others. But I also have God’s love with me and surrounding me, and if we believe Paul, God’s choice for me/ for us is always love. God’s mind is made up toward us. If we follow Jesus, love for God and God’s people is not an emotion (at least not much of the time), but it is a choice, a decision to live, pray, think, act in love toward God. We use our minds to love God.

Loving and gracious God, you decided, you chose to send your Son Jesus Christ to live out your love for us and all people. May we use our minds, as well as our hearts and souls, to choose to act in love always for you and for your people. Amen.

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

by: Jim Pierce

*One of the scribes came near . . . and asked [Jesus], ‘Which commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, The first is, ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; **you shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.**’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12: 28—30, NRSV, emphasis added)*

“Woke Up this Morning” is an African-American Spiritual we sang often at Fountain of Hope Lutheran Fellowship, a church our family was part of for many years. Its first verse proclaims, “O I woke up this morning with my mind, and it was stayed, stayed on Jesus.”

Other verses instruct:

“Can’t hate your neighbor in your mind, if you keep it stayed on Jesus”

“Makes you love everybody with your mind, when you keep it stayed on Jesus”

“The devil can’t catch you in your mind, if you keep it stayed on Jesus”

“Jesus is the captain in your mind, when you keep it stayed on Jesus”

Each verse ends with the refrain, “Hal-le-lu, Hal-le-lu, Hal-le-lu, Hal-le-lu, Hallelujah.”

That spiritual has been on my mind these past few weeks as I’ve carried these verses from Mark around with me. Its words are advice I need every day, sometimes several times a day.

I don’t know about your mind, but mine gets stuck, stays, on lots of unhealthy things: things that raise my anxiety, things that weigh me down, things that make me fearful, things that seek to control me. I’ll be rolling along, doing just fine when Bam! In pops that thought, whatever it is, that takes over my mind, spinning out scenarios that just aren’t good. They are not healthy for me, they are not healthy for my relationships with others, they push me away from God.

Whoever first sang this spiritual knew that reality as well and knew from experience that the only antidote is to keep your mind stayed on Jesus. Only there is escape from hate, escape from the devil, freedom to love everybody. Only there, when Jesus is the captain in your mind: in charge, directing your thoughts, words and actions, filling you with God’s grace.

Woke Up This Morning is a song I need to sing every day, a song I need to pray every day. “God, help me keep my mind stayed on Jesus.” Perhaps you need to pray it, too. Join me now.

God help me this day, this moment, to keep my mind stayed on Jesus. Amen.

Thursday, April 26, 2018

by: Phil Hornbostel

How special the one who devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High! He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients and is concerned with prophecies; he preserves the sayings of the famous and penetrates the subtleties of parables; he seeks out the hidden meanings of proverbs and is at home with the obscurities of parables. He serves among the great and appears before rulers; he travels in foreign lands and learns what is good and evil in the human lot. He sets his heart to rise early to seek the Lord who made him, and to pray to the Most High; he opens his mouth in prayer and asks pardon for his sins.--Sirach 38: 34b-39: 5

We are called to love God with all our mind, and this is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of our relationship with God. As Paul continually berates us, “who has known the mind of the Lord?” (Romans 11: 34 *and* I Cor. 2: 16), we can be certain that we can never study hard enough, read extensively enough, or meditate on the Bible enough, to truly know the mind of God. But that is not what God desires; what he asks is that we love him with all our mind. We are asked to continue to study, to question, to pursue, and to review, all of Scripture through all our life. And in using our mental faculties, in using all the ability God has given us, to learn about God and his relationship with us, we are loving God with all our mind.

How many of us read the Bible regularly? How many of us seek the more obscure portions of the Bible, and seek the “law and gospel” in these passages? How many of us turn to the word of God in the saddest moments of our lives, to find comfort in sorrow? How many of us close our laptops, tablets, and iPads, and open our Bibles in leisure time? These are the moments when God calls us, to open our hearts as we read the “Good News”, the stories of God’s interaction with his people in every time and every place.

Heavenly Father, call me closer to you through your Word. Remind me that knowledge of your love for me is never farther than the Bible in my home, and that it simply awaits my reading. Help me to remember to seek your will for my life through study and meditation both at church and at home. And

be with me as I read and study about you, to open my heart to receive wisdom and understanding about what it means to be your child. Amen

Friday, April 27, 2018

by: Jeff Langdon

In the days before his crucifixion, Jesus was asked by the teachers of the law, what is the greatest commandment. Jesus answered that you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, He was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. But in that Old Testament passage, the word "mind" does not show up... Jesus added the word "mind" ...perhaps to put emphasis on what God wants from us.

God wants our love. God wants our love in a number of ways... but in summary, we are to love God with all that we are, including our thinking. Loving God is not simply obedience in body, commitment in will, passion in feeling, but also thinking in a manner that honors God.

How can we love God with our minds? Perhaps it is as simple as choosing to think about God...making thinking about God a thing we do. As we think about God, focusing our thoughts on God, considering God's character and remembering God's awesome works, we start to love God with our minds. It is a love that is rooted in prayer, in worship and the reading and studying of God's Word.

Years ago, I had a daily drive down the parkway to work at the old St. Joseph Hospital. This was a nice drive, down the beautiful winding Northeast Parkway. Over the years I watched the leaves turn, the colors of the forest floor change, and I even enjoyed the occasional light snow as I often created the first tire tracks of the day. After a particular meaningful Sunday School class discussion, I decided to make use of that drive thru nature to think about God. Usually my mind just pondered on God.... thinking about God, asking questions, listening for answers... not an overt planned out prayer but more like just thinking about God. As I look back, I guess I could describe that time as Loving God with my Mind.

Thinking about God is hard... unfortunately we can let life get in the way. We use our time and our thoughts to plan for the day... to plan how to get ahead... what do I need to fix for dinner... how am I going to approach this person... how can I get someone else to do this... do I have enough in savings... why did that person treat me the way they did... what am I going to do this weekend... etc. You get the drift.

The musician Keith Green composed a song the the following lyrics...

"My Word sits there upon your desk,
but you love your books and magazines the best.
You prefer the light of your TV.
You love the world and you're avoiding me."

What God wants is our thoughts. I don't think you have to get all crazy about it... but how about carving out some time each day to think about God... call it reflection time, call it prayer time. Call it what you will... but think about God. Read about God's awesome work in the Bible. Read about God's promises for God's people, Read about God's love for you.

And when you read about God and think about God, it becomes worship. And that is what God wants.

God, you have called me to love you with all that I am. Being reminded that you want my thinking, help me to take time to think about you. Use your Holy Spirit to help me in my thinking and being

*focused on you. May I worship you with my mind in all that I do, reflecting your love to others.
Amen*

Saturday, April 28, 2018

by: Rev. Roger Lenander

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." – Luke 10:25-28

Pastor and Author John Piper writes, "If a person doesn't move from intellectual awareness of God and right thinking about God to an emotional embrace of God, they haven't loved God with their mind. The mind has not yet loved until it hands off its thoughts to the emotions where they're embraced. And then the mind and the heart are working in what feels like such harmony, and you experience it as both intellectual and affectional love for God."

Heart, soul, and strength, are all included in the ingredients for a life submitting the mind to God's way of loving the world. The God discerning wisdom of the mind is both feeling (subjective) and intellect (objective). In our worship the Living Word, Jesus Christ, is heard through the written and spoken Word. The Holy Spirit breaths into us the breath of God to bring that Word to life within us. Then we are healed to be sent into the world with the compassion born of God. Go ahead...think on these things.

Holy God, we pray that our mind is be renewed daily in your Spirit. Teach us to listen for understanding, to learn for compassion, to act in justice. In the name of Jesus. Amen.