

## Loving God with all your mind

The last few weeks we've been exploring how the Greatest Commandments still are! We've looked at how the heart is the center of our being and the place where Jesus makes his home. Our spirit or soul (thanks, Susan) is the immortal breath of God giving us life. Today, we'll explore how our minds are connected to both. I like how Susan put it last week: when we meet Jesus, he replaces our heart, regenerates our soul and renews our minds; each leads us to love Him more because each reflects God's great love for us!

Before we dive into today's talk, though, I want you to know I'm going to get a little personal, okay? It feels a little ironic, sharing my heart about using your mind. Maybe because I grew up believing I was dumb, an average student, with the 'brain of a canary' as my mother used to say. I didn't know any women who used their brains for much besides being a secretary or a teacher, and so I never *thought* I could do much. I didn't grow up in a Christian home and it wasn't until I was about 22 that I began to take a little more seriously this guy Jesus my brother believed in. When I took a semester off of uni and backpacked throughout Europe, the friends I was with wanted to visit a place called L'Abri, a Christian community in the Swiss Alps started by an evangelical 'thinker'/writer named Francis Schaeffer. I didn't think I was smart enough to figure out what he was talking about so instead, I read the bible. I made my own little topical notebook of verses so I could see what it said about various issues in life. Then when I came across John 10:10, where Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full," my heart was melted and I made a *decision* to try to follow him.

For the next five years, I taught English at a public high school, and knew only a few Christians. Though my heart was zealous to 'save the public school system', I burned out, because I neglected my mind. I left the school to work on a master's degree. Only then, when I was 28 and sitting in classes at a Christian university, did I dare to believe I might be able to study well. God gave me the chance to change my perception of myself by giving me the discipline and the delight of hanging out in the library. To read and discover. To connect dots. To write research papers, and write more. It was like I was waking up from being dead.

One thing led to another and soon I began to understand God gave me a mind that was to be renewed and enriched and expanded because of the grace of our Lord. Unlike some of you who had breathing humans as your first Christian mentors, my teachers were writers and books.

Yet I've recently realized that He has always been 'mentoring' me— through the curiosity he planted in me, through conversations and novels and lectures, through my bible reading at L'Abri. Each of these were God's tools to shape my thinking which changed my heart (and still does). I began to learn that each part of this planet reveals

God's purposes and character. The more I read the Bible and other books, the more questions I had about what it means to be a Christian, to be the church, to be his hands. The Jesus of the Gospels too often looked different from the churches I visited. As Richard Foster says in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*:

"Many Christians remain in bondage to fears and anxieties simply because they do not avail themselves of the Discipline of study. They may be faithful in church attendance and earnest in fulfilling their religious duties and still they are not changed . . . they may sing with gusto; pray in the Spirit, live as obediently as they know, even receive divine visions and revelations; and yet the tenor of their lives remains unchanged. Why? Because they have never taken up one of the central ways *God uses to change us: study*. Jesus made it unmistakably clear that it is the knowledge of the truth that will set us free." – Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

And that brings me to today. I can't tell you how grateful I am that God has changed my whole life through study. Just as I've been encouraged by many of you who, though it's been a little lonely, have made the connection about loving God with your mind. You're here and you want to learn! I've also met – as I'm sure you have – a lot of nice people in Noosa who have switched off their brains; as if they came here *not* to think any more or to study or grow. It's like they've done their wrestling in life and this is where they can finally shut down. But I think God gave us the Greatest Commandment for every season of our lives, whether we're 28 or 78. So I pray today challenges each of us to *wake up* a little more, that you'll go home excited to study the scriptures and other books for yourselves.

**So point #1: loving God with all our minds starts with using them!**

Did you know we have a history of Christians using their minds to love God? In the year 1643, for instance, a group of Christians settled into their new home called Massachusetts, and wrote a mission statement for their brand new school. Because they were disciples of Jesus, they wanted a school where: "every student (was) plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well that the main end of his life and studies *is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life*, Jn. 17:3, and therefore to lay Christ as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning." Harvard College began in union with Jesus Christ, because the founders believed that learning at *all stages of life* attaches us to God.

They weren't the only ones. Catholic monks throughout Europe are credited with saving much of Western civilization because they preserved and protected manuscripts during wars, and then established Christian schools to equip others in the light of God's truth.

Christians established universities in France, Germany, at Oxford, Cambridge, all over, even some of Australia's first ministers were highly educated men (and a few women). Most Ivy League universities in the US, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, like Harvard, all have Christian roots and if you visit their campuses you'll see scripture chiseled into the side of the buildings. These early Christians believed learning was a calling, that an active mind was – and is – as necessary to life with Jesus as prayer and church.

So Christians have a history of thinking well and of wrestling with ideas. It's no accident that Johannes Gutenberg in the 15<sup>th</sup> century invented this thing called 'moveable type', or the printing press, so he could make copies of the bible available to anyone who wanted to read it. Christians are people of the book, of words, and some of the best thinkers, writers, scientists, statesmen and artists throughout history have been smitten with the Person of Jesus Christ, who they believed called them to use their minds in ways that benefitted everyone.

But sometime in the last century, a switch got flipped for evangelical Christians, and they began to turn off their brains. Faith and believing, many said to me, were all that mattered. If your soul was regenerated (born again) and your heart was home to Jesus, that was enough. Why bother with that heady academic or intellectual stuff?

It became a little like one of my favorite novels, *F451*, a classic by Ray Bradbury. It's the story of a society in the future where firemen don't put out fires; they start them. And they start them by burning books. Any time they discover someone with a stash of books, firemen are called to that house, set a bonfire and throw the rebels in jail. People are medicated throughout the day to keep from thinking, and they sit in their parlors interacting with 'reality' stories on large screens that fill the walls. It's a society where intellectual pursuits, like reading books, are illegal. Bradbury wrote *F451* long before interactive television, in the early 1950s just as WWII ended and was fresh in his mind. See, a mindless people fall for anything. You know who said, "people are most easily persuaded through their listening"? Hitler. He believed if his speech stirred people's emotion and sounded good, it was enough to drown out the truth.

*F451* reminds me of another book, but one written in the 1990s by an American historian named Mark Noll, himself an evangelical. The book was called, "The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind" and his point was simple: The scandal is that *there is no* evangelical mind. Meaning, Evangelical Christians, in the US at least, too often don't believe they need to do the hard work of thinking things through, of wrestling with Scripture or bible study guides, because that's what their pastor is for, right? What he (or she) says in the pulpit is good enough. One of the saddest things in the world for me has been meeting Christians who love God with their hearts and souls, but have turned off their brains. It literally doesn't make sense to me.

Don't get me wrong: I understand those days when we want to lie on the couch, turn on the TV and turn off our brains. We're tired and we just want to "veg out." It's called amusement. Think about that word: Muse means inspired or full of thought. And when you put an A in front of a word in English, it negates the meaning. So *a-muse* literally means, *without thought, mindless, un-inspired*. And there's an entire industry banking on the fact that we will want to veg out a lot, to be amused regularly (rather than once in a while), rather than creating our own 'forms' of entertainment. We're so engrained, maybe even addicted, with the culture's amusement, that many Christians today even think church is supposed to entertain us. Yes, we Christians can be lazy thinkers. Dorothy L Sayers says that if we don't learn how to learn and think, we "become victims of the shoddy, lazy, or worse, nefarious thinking of the age."

And isn't it funny that we now have access to more information than any other time in history, more gadgets and entertainment than ever, yet more social problems than we want to admit? *More* information is not the answer. Learning to love God with our minds is. So **How do we cultivate a life of the mind that's enthralled with God's character?**

**Point #2: we turn to *the book on which our faith is based.*** The Bible is full of words like listen, meditate, remember, consider, wonder, think, recall, contemplate. The connection our hearts and souls have to the mind is always active, never passive. We watch God creating the earth, the skies, waters, and creatures and then hear him say, "Let us make mankind in our image." The greatest Creative Being in eternity made us to be creative!

We watch Joshua lead the Israelites across a dry Jordan River and send troops back to gather 12 memorial stones. Why? To *remember* God's provision. The psalmist meditates on God's promises and calls God's thoughts precious. Proverbs *personifies* wisdom and says life will be better with *her*. Isaiah promises that if our mind is stayed on God, we'll be kept in perfect peace.

And that's not the half of it. In fact, why not do your own study of how scripture addresses the mind? (Handout) Look at how Daniel used his intellectual gifts to study the literature of the time in and gained favor in the King's palace; how Mary sat at Jesus's feet listening and learning from the rabbi, when women never did (and while Martha was going nuts); or how, when Paul went to Athens in Acts 17, he studied local poets so he could reason with the intellects about the Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus! As we learned both in last year's retreat theme and in this current series in Ephesians, Paul writes that we're to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. It's our true worship!

**Point #3: The more we study, the more we'll understand and the more we'll want to love God with all our minds!** And what active steps can we take to renew our minds? We have a room full of wise and smart women so I hope you'll trade ideas. Here are some of mine: read! Every day. Reflect. Journal. Join or start a book club or sign up for a class, like our new Learning Exchange classes coming up or the Moore College courses. Come to Meredith's lecture July 28! Let's be intentional, schedule time to consider how we feel about something or why we might have made that comment we later regretted. We meditate on God's goodness to us no matter what our day was like. We think through the implications of a passage or sermon or Connect group discussion and imagine how to respond with our lives. Imagine what we could do for Noosa if we put our heads together?!

We also ask the Maker of our Brains to get rid of faulty thinking and transform our minds with his truth. We exchange the lies in our heads for the truth of the Living Word, who says we are fearfully and wonderfully made! We take our brand new worship centers (that Susan talked about last week) on adventures . . . with books and conversations, art exhibits and walks so that we're attentive to the glimpses of God's Glory every where we go. As we do, we build up the mind's muscle to be like the One who made it. Through our minds we get to know Jesus, like we would get to know a friend; and our mind then helps keep our hearts from going astray.

Paul put it like this in Philippians 4: *Finally, 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. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.* Paul's not giving us a lesson in positive thinking, but a strategy for living in this world, and loving God!

**Point #4: What happens when we start to love God with all our minds?** I can tell you from my own experience that our view of the world – and of ourselves – begins to change. The filter or lens through which we see everything gets clearer, and our renewed perspective helps us see signs of His redemptive hand everywhere. We learn to love God's thoughts more than our own. We long for his insights; we yearn for his story. Our trust increases because we *remember* that God provides. Our faith is deepened because we *recall* his promises. We see challenges or suffering or transitions – like moving to a new country – as opportunities to grow because we *know* that God is with us. We don't shut off our brains from the world but we find it pales in the light of sitting at the feet of Jesus. Listening to him and learning from him is far more interesting and exciting than anything else! **And we become better human beings in the process**, the kind of people God wants us to be because we view all the world as His. As Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch theologian, and newspaper editor who also became prime minister said, "There is not a square inch on the whole plain of

human existence over which Christ, who is Lord over all, does not proclaim: This is Mine!”

The more we train our minds, focus our attention, think on the things of God, the more we long for him and see him in every square inch of the culture! We renew our minds so that we can discern truth, create art, write stories, read aloud to others, concoct new recipes and think creatively about how we can better care for others. How else can we know what God wants us to do with our lives right now, if we don't think about it? But when we do, we see more clearly that our eternal home called Paradise will reveal far more glorious things to consider and contemplate than anything we can imagine!

See, at every stage of our lives, God gives us *more* opportunities to make an impact on the world *when* we use our minds, when we do the hard work of thinking and wrestling and searching – that's when we grow. I don't know about you, but I never want to stop growing. I've watched people getting older, but not necessarily *growing* older. And growing can only happen when we remember every minute of every day:

how *single-minded* Jesus was when he gave up his Godness on the cross; his mind had been completely connected to his Father's (I only do that which I see the father doing). He displayed his intellectual brilliance in taking on the Scribes and Pharisees, while beautifully engaging with the marginalized, knowing how to cast out demons or exactly what someone needed – his mind connected with his eternal spirit and his broken heart. Christ's conversation with Pilate before his death was a philosophical debate that he'd long ago won as God, but which he willingly engaged in for our sake. Through every part of his life on earth, throughout his ministry and his excruciating suffering, what was Jesus *thinking* of? Every time he challenged authorities, or healed someone or told a parable that *made you think*, when he endured flogging, was spit on, and speared in his side, what was *he* thinking of? You. Me. He was *imagining* us in his presence. He was enduring a temporary time of suffering *so that* we might know his Amazing love and love him in return with all our minds, hearts and souls for eternity!

“I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full!” Think on *these* things – because how we use our minds radically affects our hearts and souls, and especially, how we love our neighbors as ourselves. Which are next week's talks. Let's pray.