

MILE

6

TRANSFORMED – Our Lives Renewed to be Like Christ (a DISCIPLESHIP Journey)

Mile Marker 6 ... “A Transformed Mind – Learning to Think Like Christ”

Various texts including 2 Timothy 3:14 - 4:5

We’re in the midst of this discipleship journey of transformation. In this section of mile markers, we are reflecting on what it means for us to be renewed. To follow Jesus means we embrace His leading and, even more, we become more Christ-like. As we saw in Mile Marker 5, it’s not just about our faith as a single compartment, but our commitment to Jesus infiltrating every part of who we are and influencing every area of our lives. As Dallas Willard has put the goal of spiritual formation *“is to bring every element in our being, working from the inside-out, into harmony with the will of God and the Kingdom of God.”* In this mile marker, we turn our attention to a **transformed MIND**. “Every element” includes our thinking; indeed, following Jesus means we learn to think like Christ.

Years ago, a poll on religion led to the following conclusion being drawn: *“We are having a revival of feelings but not of the knowledge of God. The church today is more guided by feelings than by convictions. We value enthusiasm more than informed commitment.”* Surely this is not the best way for us to approach our minds as we follow Jesus and are transformed into His likeness!

Our Minds – Yes, They Matter!

We need to make sure we establish this up front: **our minds matter to God!** There *seem* to be ways where some in Christian circles diminish the importance of the mind in a life of faith. It’s a bit of an odd reality. Few (if any) would come along and minimize the importance of our hearts (remember this from MM5, the Biblical “heart” includes the entirety of our inner lives). Likewise, not many would dare to suggest that our external actions are irrelevant. Yet, when it comes to our minds, that’s somehow seen differently. To use the language of a book on Christian apologetics (written by Josh McDowell), many want to “check their brains at the door” when it comes to faith. Author Os Guinness has written it this way in his book *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to Do About It ...* **“it’s anti-intellectualism – a disposition to discount the importance of truth and the life of the mind.”** Contrary to this perspective, God’s Word values our minds (including our beliefs, our thinking, truth, etc.) – it’s a fundamental part of how we are made in His image and part of what needs to be transformed into the likeness of Christ!

Now, there are many reasons that we become cautious when it comes to faith in Christ and our minds. Some are valid. Maybe we’re aware of what God’s Word says about right beliefs being inadequate if they’re not paired with right actions (see James 2:19-20). Maybe we’re reminded of warnings like 1 Corinthians 8:1 where Paul writes that *“knowledge puffs up (with pride), but love builds up”* (ESV). It’s not hard to see how that can happen. Maybe we’ve seen the way that someone “became too smart to believe in Jesus” (it *can* become a threat in higher levels of Christian academia). It is certainly true that there are legitimate reasons for us to be on guard when it comes

to our minds. Yet, sometimes, it seems we take these and go way too far. For example, some mistakenly view faith as being in opposition to reason or thinking – “after all,” so the thinking seems to go, “faith is believing in what cannot be seen or proven.” As if that provides permission for omitting this part of who we are from our following of Jesus.

We do not want to ignore the legitimate cautions, but let’s consider some of these ways that God’s Word elevates the role of the mind in our lives of faith:

- **READ Matthew 22:37 and Mark 12:30** ... as Matthew and Mark relate the story of Jesus highlighting the greatest commandment, they use the “mind” word. Even if it’s not used explicitly in Deuteronomy 6:5, it’s part of loving God with all we are.
- **READ Romans 8:5-8** ... part of being guided and directed by the Spirit (as opposed to by the flesh) involves giving Him control of our minds.
- **READ 1 Corinthians 2:10-16** ... we do not embrace the wisdom of this world (see also James 3:13-18). However, part of our lives of faith is allowing God’s Spirit to make Him known to us so that we can understand spiritual things. In fact, through the Spirit, Paul writes that “we have the mind of Christ” – that’s a fascinating thought!
- **READ 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and Ephesians 6:11** ... part of our spiritual battle involves the battlefield of the mind – both human reasoning in general and withstanding the “strategies” and “schemes” of the evil one (see also 2 Corinthians 2:11).
- **READ Ephesians 1:16-19 (3:18-19 too); Philippians 1:9-10 and Colossians 1:9-10** ... in these prayers for believers, part of Paul’s prayer aims directly at their minds/thoughts. It seems to communicate this progression of right thinking – while not sufficient by itself – helps lead to the right results in a life of faith!
- We also see in the NT commands to “think about” or “set our minds on” certain things (see Philippians 4:8 or Colossians 3:1-4) as well as a command to “grow in the grace *and knowledge* of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18; see also 2 Peter 1:5-8).
- That’s not to mention the frequency of big concepts like “**TRUTH**,” even “**the FAITH**” (not a confidence, but a set of beliefs we hold to be true in Christ), “**WISDOM** and “**UNDERSTANDING**,” (even if these refer to “applied knowledge” in Proverbs, it still involves our intellect), “**TEACHING**” (as in one of Jesus’ roles and what we see as a pillar of the early church in Acts 2:42).

In the midst of legitimate cautions, here’s the best way for us to move forward: let us be cautious of the dangers that come with our minds, but let us not pretend that we are somehow better off on our faith journeys if we remain in ignorance; this is certainly not God’s will for us. True transformation involves our minds! Let us make sure our knowledge becomes a springboard that launches us either towards greater obedience in our actions or a deeper, more intimate relationship with God. Let us make sure we are feeding our minds with the priceless treasure of God’s Wisdom (see Proverbs 2:2-4). Let us embrace God’s revelation – He has made Himself *known* to us – and His truth, even the foundation of the Good News we believe (that certainly involves our mind!). Let us remember that the opposite of faith is **seeing/proving**, not **thinking**. Here’s how C. S. Lewis writes it in his book *Mere Christianity* ... when it comes to faith, Jesus wants “a child’s heart, but a grown-up’s head.” ***At this point, how does this overall emphasis in God’s Word challenge you about the way you’ve approached your life of faith as it relates to your mind?***

Our Minds – RUINED by Sin, RENEWED in Christ

There are two basic stages God’s Word teaches about our minds; let’s look briefly at both.

RUINED by sin. Sin’s entrance into the human experience due to “the fall” in Genesis 3 introduced wide-reaching effects. That involves our minds. Check out the following texts that speak to the condition of our minds outside of Christ – **READ Romans 1:28; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:17-18; Colossians 1:21; 1 Timothy 6:5 and 2 Timothy 3:8.**

*What stands out to you about the effects of sin on our minds (outside of/before Christ)?
How can you see this reality when it comes to the thinking of those in our world?*

RENEWED by the Spirit. Of course, Genesis 3 is not the end of the story. Jesus came to redeem and restore – to solve the problem(s) that sin had created. This extends far beyond *just* our minds, but certainly that’s a part of the equation. While this transformation will not be fully realized until He comes, even now it begins through His Spirit’s renovating work within us. Like a computer, our minds are in process of being rebooted to their proper original condition. Consider these texts that highlight what happens in Christ (these texts could also have been included in the earlier section emphasizing the foundational importance of our minds): **READ Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:17-24.**

What do these texts (and the ones we looked at earlier) emphasize about the importance of our minds to our overall transformation – especially in contrast to what’s true before Christ?

Our Minds – Embracing God’s Word

Within this process of our minds being renewed and transformed, there is one specific “tool” that the Spirit uses the most – God’s Word. It shapes and molds our thinking *according to His truth*. As followers of Jesus, we are not trying to discover truth or manufacture our own version of truth (as many in our world want to do). Instead, like Christ, we are simply embracing what God has made known about Himself and life. **It’s what we call REVELATION.** We can certainly know some things even about God through creation (called “*general* revelation” – see Psalm 19 and Romans 1:20). However, besides through Jesus (the WORD incarnate), it is through Scripture (a.k.a. God’s *Word*) that God has made Himself and TRUTH known to us. Ultimately, our knowledge comes not just from personal experience, another person, tradition or our own reason, but from what God reveals.

There are many texts in Scripture celebrating its value (*e.g.* Psalm 119; Matthew 13:1-23; James 1:23-24 or 2 Peter 1:20-21). As we think about our minds being transformed and the importance of embracing God’s Word/His revelation within this process, there is a text towards the end of 2 Timothy 3 wrapping into chapter 4 that is worthy of our attention.

Here's the setting for these words: Timothy is in Ephesus carrying-out the work of ministry. Paul is near the end of this life and is writing this 2nd letter to his protégé encouraging him in his work. Specifically, he is writing him about the importance of his work within the context of false teachers who are going to distort God's Truth about Jesus and more. In the midst of that, Paul is going to make sure Timothy grasps the value of Scripture in the midst of that context. As we consider what it means to have our minds transformed, we would do well to recognize that same value in our lives!

READ 2 Timothy 3:14 - 4:5 (does 2 Timothy 4:3-4 not sound familiar to what's around us today?!)

This text is primarily reflecting Timothy's responsibility in his context, but it also applies to us in our lives of faith. Paul highlights the reliability of what Timothy had been taught through the Scriptures (3:14-15). He begins 3:16 with the basis for that – it is "God-breathed" or "inspired" by Him.

What is the connection between God's Word being "God-breathed/inspired" and its being "useful?"

What does this text highlight about the role of God's Word in our lives (notice in 3:16 the specific ways it is "useful" and the end result of it all in 3:17)?

How have you experienced the transforming work of the Spirit in your mind and in your life through the pages of God's Word?

There are two specific categories in which we need to pay particular attention to God's Word (of course, even beyond these two categories, the Holy Spirit regularly shapes and molds our thinking, transforming our minds – these are just two key areas):

1. It's about our **DOCTRINE/THEOLOGY** = the practicalities of what we believe about God, Jesus, etc. Living with a transformed mind means allowing God's Word to determine what we believe in these areas.
2. It's also about our **WORLDVIEW** = how we view life, the important questions about our origins, human nature, truth, history, the future, etc. Living with transformed minds means we allow what God has revealed in His Word to control how we view life.

Within these two categories, what are some areas in which you struggle to allow God's Word to shape your thinking?

Overall, because our minds matter, how can you be more diligent in getting His Word into your head and embracing it as the foundation of your thinking?