

January 2, 2022 by Steve Brandon



Aiming Your Mind

Various

1. Bible Intake

2. Bible Meditation

There are many passages in the Scriptures that teach us to direct our minds toward the things of God. Here are a few:

"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2).

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

"Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered" (Psalm 105:5).

"Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me" (Isaiah 46:9).

Now, apart from the explicit commands to set your minds upon the things of the Lord, there are plenty of other similar passages that set forth the example of the writers of Scripture thinking upon God and his ways:

"We take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

"I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night" (Psalm 63:6).

"I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds" (Psalm 77:12).

"On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate" (Psalm 145:).

The above verses illustrate the following reality:

"Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:5).

The converse is true as well:

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh" (Romans 8:5).

The question before us this morning is simply this: Where is your mind? Are you setting your mind on the things of the Spirit? Or, are you setting your mind on the things of the flesh?

The title of my message this morning is, "Aiming the Mind." I want to encourage you this morning to think. I want to exhort you this morning to think about God and his ways. That is, to aim your mind upon God. I say this because there are so many passages in the Bible that command us to focus our minds upon the things of God. God calls us to think about him, and the things that he has done! That is really the premise of the entire Bible. It is written for us to know God and his ways, that we might think upon them, that we might believe them, and be saved from our sins.

That's why I constantly encourage you to read the Bible for yourself. God has given us his word to reveal himself to us. The Biblical writers not only command us to meditate on him, but they also model doing so. This has been the thrust of my messages in December before Christmas. I have been encouraging you to work toward mastering the Bible. knowing what it says, where it says it, and how it says it.

I haven't encouraged you to work toward mastering the Bible so that you all would become Bible scholars. I have encouraged you because it is for your good. It is for your sanctification. Shortly before Jesus was betrayed, he prayed to his heavenly Father for his followers. He prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). In other words, if you are a follower of Jesus, your sanctification, the process of being made holy, comes through truth. And truth comes through the Word of God. Thus, my encouragement to you to soak your mind in the Scripture, and master the Bible. think on the truth!

Thus the title of my message this morning: "Aiming the Mind." That is, aiming your mind toward the things of God.

My favorite professor in Seminary, Dr. George Zemek, once wrote a scholarly article entitled, "Aiming the Mind: A Key to Godly Living."^[1] In the article, he talked about how our mind is fallen. and how we don't think as we ought. He points out how our sinful actions come from our sinful thoughts. He quotes Jesus in the following text:

Mark 7:20-23

"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Dr. Zemek then says this, "According to Jesus and scriptural precedent the fountainhead of all perverted behavior is the fallen human heart." Biblically speaking, it's from our heart, our inner being, from which our thoughts come. And so, it logically follows, that our hearts must be transformed. Our minds must be transformed. This is what repentance is. Literally, repentance is "a change of mind." And this change of mind will result in change in behavior. Salvation begins with the mind, as you hear the word of the gospel, as you understand the work of Christ on the cross for your sins, as you believe in Jesus. and that works itself out in action.

And that which begins with salvation continues on with sanctification. And the key to sanctification is "aiming the mind" as Dr. Zemek writes. In the article, Zemek quotes Donald Guthrie, who maintains that "right action will follow from right thought." And I would contend that right thought comes as you aim the mind on things of God. So, this morning, I would simply encourage all of you with ...

1. Bible Intake

That is, take the Bible into your mind. This can come a lot of different ways. It can come through reading the Bible. It can come through listening to the Bible. It can come through reading Christian books. It can come through hearing sermons about the Bible at church. It can come through videos of Bible preachers and teachers. It can come through godly conversation. It can come through Christian music.

We can take the Bible in through various means. I read an article this week by Tim Challies entitled, "Intimacy or Familiarity." In this article, Challies recognizes the various ways in which we take the Bible in. He writes, "When I consider Bible reading, I see two broad approaches: one that aims for familiarity and one that aims for intimacy. Both are good, both are beautiful, and both have their place."^[2]

In my messages before Christmas, I have urged you all to read through the Bible and become familiar with the Bible. With my message this morning, I'm encouraging you to focus in on smaller passages, so that you can meditate upon them. Certainly, familiarity with the entire Bible helps with this. But you cannot focus on the entire Bible to develop an intimacy with God that comes through meditation.

There is great blessing in meditation. Many passages in the Bible talk about this blessing:

Joshua 1:8

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.

This was spoken to Joshua, who was following in the paths of Moses, and was about to lead the people of Israel into the promised land. The LORD (who spoke these words) directed Joshua to think and meditate upon the law that Moses had just written. This was the path to Joshua's success: meditation upon God's word. Joshua's success wasn't dependent upon his military might or strategy. Rather, it was upon his constant focus upon God's word, never letting it depart from his mouth, thinking upon it day and night.

In a similar way, this is a path to our successful living before the Lord, meditating on God's word day and night. This is the message of Psalm 1.

Psalm 1:1-2

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

The path to spiritual blessing comes through a constant meditation upon God's word, day and night. One of the reasons why this blessing is so great is that such an action helps to keep us from sin, which is the point of verse 1 above. The man is blessed who avoids the sinful path, and who walks in the way of the Lord. This comes through meditation upon God's word. The blessing is described in verses 3 and 4 using a contrast.

Psalm 1:3-4

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Let me ask you, is this the sort of life that you want to live? Do you want to be like a tree, that is steady. the endures through the dry seasons. Or, do you want to be like the tumbleweed, that drifts across the road as the wind blows it along. That's the choice presented in verses 3 and 4. It all begins with your delight in God's word. There is a direct correlation between those who delight in God's word, and meditate upon it day and night, with those who don't have God's word upon their mind.

The blessing comes through a righteous life. When you aim your mind at God's word, it will work to keep you from the sinful way. We can see this direct connection in Psalm 119:11, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Some translations say, "I have treasured your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." The idea is the same, putting God's word in your heart as a deterrent to sin. The Psalmist says, "I have put your word in my heart. I have stored it up. I have treasured it in my soul. and that is the very thing that

has kept me from sin!"

This act, of storing up the Bible in the heart is called memorization. It is what I want to address in my second point this morning. We have talked about "Bible Intake." Now, I want to talk about ...

2. Bible Meditation

Bible meditation is the thinking upon God's word, over and over pondering it in your mind. The best picture is that of a cow, who eats the grass from the field, then finds a shady spot to chew his cud. He chews his cud over and over and over again. That's what meditation is. It's reviewing God's word over and over again. It is constantly thinking upon it again and again. We see this often in Psalm 119.

"I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways" (Psalm 119:15).

"Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes" (Psalm 119:23).

"Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works" (Psalm 119:27).

"I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes" (Psalm 119:48).

"Let the insolent be put to shame, because they have wronged me with falsehood; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts" (Psalm 119:78).

:Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Psalm 119:98 Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. Psalm 119:99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation: (Psalm 119:97-99).

"My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise" (Psalm 119:148).

The only way that you can meditate upon God's word in this way is to memorize it. And I want to encourage you all to work toward memorizing God's word, as a way to "aim your mind."

Now, at this point, I know that there are many of you who are resisting this thought, because over the years, as I have spoken to people and encouraged them to memorize portions of the Bible, the first thing that comes out of their mouth is this, "I'm not good at memorization." If I had a nickel for every time that I have heard this, I would be a rich man!

People often say this, "I know that you can memorize the Bible. But I'm not good at memorizing the Bible." Now, if you have been at Rock Valley Bible Church for any length of time, you have seen me quote Scripture from memory, and you think that it comes easy for me. It doesn't come easy for me. I work very hard at memorizing Scripture.

Right here, I believe, is the crux of the issue. Memorization is hard. It takes effort. It takes mental effort, and many, quite frankly, are not willing to put in the work. Many people think that if they simply say, "I'm not good at memorization" it puts them off the hook. It's as if people think that just because they aren't good at something, they don't have to do it.

Personally, I think that Proverbs 22:13 applies. "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!'" Somehow, this excuse of some lion being on the prowl, excuses them from the work! What's really going on is that the sluggard doesn't want to work, therefore, he makes up some excuse that he thinks will get him out of any work that he is called to do. In a similar way, there are many that say, "I'm not good at memorization!" and think that this excuses them from even trying.

But listen church family, I would encourage you to see the blessings that come through memorizing Scripture. The blessings will urge you to press through the difficulties in memorizing. The blessings of work urge the worker to work hard! "A worker's appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on" (Proverbs 16:26). The worker knows that the path to food and provision comes through his hard work. In a similar way, the godly one knows that memorization and meditation is the path to a godward life.

This is my testimony. I know that memorization takes a bit of work. But do you know why I work at it so hard? I have seen the great blessing that memorization is in my life. Here is a quick list of blessings that I have found in memorization:

- Memorization protects me from sin. I have experienced the reality of Psalm 119:11 in my life. God's word comes screaming at me in my mind when I am tempted to sin.
- Memorization draws my heart to the Lord. As I rehearse the truth of God over and over and over in my mind, I cannot help but be drawn to the one upon whom I am meditating.
- Memorization allows me to meditate. It is impossible to meditate upon any portion of Scripture without having first memorized it.
- Memorization helps me sleep at night. As I lay my head on my pillow at night, my pattern is to review a long passage of Scripture that I am working to memorize. I often fall asleep in the middle of a verse as I try to rehearse the Bible in my mind.
- Memorization gives me joy in the Lord, as I can constantly rehearse the gospel in my mind. I can simply pull up any gospel-centered verse to recite to myself, which causes me to rejoice in God's grace to me.
- Memorization helps me with confidence in evangelism. I have memorized enough Scripture, that I am always ready to

give an answer for my hope in Christ to those with whom I am sharing the gospel.

- Memorization secures me in my faith. Any doubts that come to my mind about the reality of God and the gospel are quickly dispelled by a verse or two or three or four that come to mind.
- Memorization give me peace. In Isaiah 26:3, we read of the promise of peace to those who aim their mind upon the Lord, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."
- Memorization helps me pray. It is always best to pray with Scriptural words. I have memorized enough of the Bible, that words to pray come quickly into my mind.
- Memorization guides my paths. When it comes to making decisions with my life, I have experienced the reality of Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
- Memorization enables me resist the spiritual warfare that's all around us. Consider the following text:

Ephesians 6:10-18

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

I don't know how it is that you can take up the armor of God to fight the fight of faith without memorizing portions of Scripture. I don't know how you can fight the devil and his minions without the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God) ready at hand.

One of the things that we have pushed here at Rock Valley Bible Church are the Fighter Verses.^[3] Fighter Verses are a collection of verses from the Bible designed to help you fight the fight of faith. Paul told Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:11-12

But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.

You can find out about these verses at fighterverses.com. The website has a wonderful app that is very helpful in memorizing Scripture. There are five sets of verses to memorize throughout the year, which are on a five-year rotation. Each year, they have 52 verses for you to memorize. This past year, I stuck with the plan of memorizing the verses for 2021, simply by using the app on a daily basis.

(I finished my sermon by presenting the congregation with a list of the verses from 2021 and asking them to pick a verse from the list. I then quoted the verse from memory and provided an example or two of how I have been encouraged, challenged, or helped by the verse this past year as I have memorized and reviewed the verse over this past year. I was asked about the following verses:

Psalm 56:3-4
Philippians 2:5-7
Romans 12:1-2
Ephesians 6:10-11
John 15:5
James 1:2-5
2 Corinthians 12:9-10
John 1:12-13
1 John 2:15-17

If you want to hear my responses, you can listen to my sermon at rockvalleybiblechurch.org.)

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 2, 2022 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] George Zemek, "Aiming the Mind: A Key to Godly Living," Grace Theological Journal 5.2 (1984) 205-227. You can read this article online here: https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/gtj/05-2_205.pdf.

[2] Tim Challies, "Intimacy or Familiarity," <https://www.challies.com/articles/intimacy-or-familiarity/>.

[3] See <https://www.fighterverses.com>.