

“With all your mind”
Focus on Worship
Mark 12:28-33, Psalm 1, Romans 12:2, Phil. 4:8

Since the beginning of the year, we have been focusing on those words of Jesus we heard today from the gospel of Mark 12:30: Listen to it one more time, say it with me: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” Loving God is worship, the fundamental and first purpose of your life.

Let me just say this: You can do all kinds of good things, give lots of money to help people, raise nice kids, have a good marriage—you can do all that, be a nice person, have a nice life. *But if you do not love God*—worship God—you will have missed the primary purpose of your life on earth. “What is the meaning of life?” “Why am I here?” Here’s why: to love God and love people. That’s it. Worship is not part of your life: it is your life. That’s why we’re spending six weeks focusing on worship. [And next, during Lent in our *40 Days of Love* series, we’re going to focus on the other part of the Great Commandment: Loving people. Which is usually harder than loving God, amen?] So I’ll say it again: Worship is not part of your life: it is your life.

We’ve been using this definition of worship: Worship is responding to all that God is with all that you are. In order to ‘respond to all that God is’ we need to *know* all that God is. How do we do that? In fact, we might ask, “How can we even know enough about God that we *want* to believe in Him, *want* to love Him, *want* to worship Him?” Fortunately, God has not left us to figure that out on our own, He has told us—in His Word, the Scripture. No less a theologian than John Calvin has said that the Bible is like spectacles that help us to see clearly who God is.

In the Scripture, God shows us Himself. Through the lens of the Word of God, we clearly and accurately see God and come to know Him. Through the lens of the Word of God, we also clearly and accurately see and come to know ourselves. In fact, Calvin says that without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of yourself.¹ (I.1.2) Man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinize himself.

So you can’t even really know yourself, know who you are and what your life is about, until you first know God. All true and accurate self-knowledge begins with knowing God. Until we recognize that we owe everything to God—that we are nourished by His fatherly care, that He is the Author and Source of everything good that we have and experience—we will never love Him with all we are. We will never truly worship Him. Unless we come to understand and believe that our only joy and complete happiness is found in God, we will never truly and completely give ourselves to Him. We will never respond to Him with all we are. Love Him with all.

But how do we come to see God in this way? How do we come to know God as Author and Source of all good and all happiness? God gives us the actual knowledge of Himself *only* in the

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. I.1.2.

Scriptures. Just as spectacles are needed to read clearly as we get older, “so Scripture clearly shows us the true God.”²

I’m very, very nearsighted. But my 10/800 vision has always been correctable to 20/20 with glasses or contacts. Without my contacts, I can still see, a bit. But everything is out of focus—*really* out of focus. Without my contacts, I cannot walk around an unfamiliar room without bumping into stuff. I could not drive safely or read road signs without my contacts. Over the last 10 years or so, it’s gotten harder and harder every year for my eye doctor to get the right prescription for me so that I can see both up close to read and also at a distance for driving with my contacts. Hence, reading glasses. Gettin’ old ain’t for sissies! With my contacts, my distance vision is good, but I still need reading glasses to see things that are closer. Without my reading glasses, I could not read a love letter from my husband, or the news of the day, or my email. I might be able to pick out some words. But I would not have full understanding of what Paul was saying. I wouldn’t really know what was happening in the world.

The Bible is like the contact lenses that help me to see the world around me in focus—as it *really* is, according to God, and the reading glasses that help me to read the fine print, the instructions for living a life that pleases God. The spectacles of the Scripture bring the world into focus. The lens of the Word of God takes what looks to my natural eyes like only like a fuzzy mess and brings it into focus. Makes it understandable and meaningful.

I grew up knowing *about* God. I grew up believing in God. But until I started to read the Bible, I didn’t really *know* God. I didn’t understand that Jesus had died for me, personally, not just for that faceless mass of humanity out there somewhere. I didn’t understand much about God at all, or about who I was in relation to God. Who God said I was. I knew who the world said I was. I knew who my friends thought I was.

To truly understand life in general and your life in particular, *this* is required. The Word of God. The Bible. We’re speaking today about what it means to ‘love God with all your mind.’ To love God with all your mind requires that you know God. And to know God, *this* is required. To love God with all your mind means to think about God; learn about God; study God: who God is, what God has said and done. To love God with your mind is to devote your intellectual faculties to those things that please and honor God. As usual, the Bible has some guidance for us. Look back at Psalm 1:1-3. V. 2, The Msg: “Instead you thrill to God’s Word; you chew on Scripture day and night.”

Joshua 1:8: “Do not let this Book of the Law [the Scriptures] depart from your mouth [speak it]; meditate on it day and night [think about it, reflect on it], so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

“Meditate on it day and night.” This is one way to love God with your mind. Think about God’s Word continually, all the time. Fill your mind with God’s instructions: focus your thoughts on who God is, what He has said and done. This is why I ask you, encourage you to memorize the Scripture. So that you can “meditate on it,” reflect on it, any time: when you’re in line at the grocery store, waiting for your kids after soccer practice, when you can’t sleep...

² Ibid, I.6.1.

What are people like who meditate on the Word of God, focus their minds on God in the Scripture? Psalm 1:3. Fruitful, healthy, rooted, growing, prosperous, successful.

Romans 12:2: Don't be conformed: Don't let this world squeeze you into its mold. Msg: Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Listen: If we do not counter the messages of the culture all around us—it's all about me; I'm worth it; pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment is king; more/better/bigger/richer is better—if we don't counter those messages with the truth of the Word of God, we are destined to become conformed to them. To be squeezed into their mold. To become so well-adjusted to those messages that we go along with them without even realizing it.

These messages bombard us 24/7/365. That's why we need to meditate on the Word of God day and night—24/7/365. “Don't be conformed to the pattern of this world, but *be transformed*—metamorphed—this means a fundamental transformation of character and conduct. How?? “By the renewing of your mind.” Renewal: renovation, complete change for the better. Your character and conduct will be fundamentally transformed by a complete renovation of your mind, changing the way you think, *what* you think and think about. You see, how you think, what you think and think about, will eventually, if not immediately, influence what you *do*. If you think about something long enough, you will eventually do it. If you fill your mind with thoughts of something, you will eventually act on those thoughts.

To love God with all your mind, you must put God's words into your mind. There is one particular verse that will help us understand how to do this: Phil. 4:8. The verb *think about* means to ponder, to give proper weight and value to, and to allow what you learn from these ponderings to influence the way you live your life. Paul says that we should fix our thoughts on certain things:

Things that are true: This means to think about, focus your mind on, things that are real, dependable, things you would bet the house on. As opposed to what is false, not real, not dependable. The Scripture gives us this focus for our minds, because it tells us what is real and dependable: God is good. God is faithful. God will never leave you. God will always forgive you. Romans 8:28. [Back to Phil. 4:8.]

Things that are noble: Focus your mind on things that are honorable, majestic, and awe-inspiring. As opposed to things that are petty, undignified, dishonorable.

Things that are right: Meaning what is right in God's sight; that which is approved of by God, according to the will of God. “Before you can do the right thing, you have to think the right thing.”³

Things that are pure: meaning clean, innocent. Now, when we think about ourselves, our lives, our world, there is not much purity. Not much that is truly clean or holy. The images that bombard us and our children on TV and the internet. Not much purity and innocence there. Those images and thoughts get in your head. And they will affect what you do, how you live. So

³ Tom Holladay, *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*, p. 59.

instead fix your mind on God's purity and the cleansing God promises to provide: 1 John 1:9. Pray Psalm 51:10: Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Things that are lovely: Let God entertain you in the sense of deeply enjoying the blessings of the world He has created. Loving God with your mind does not have to be just a dry, seriously intellectual experience. Take joy in who God is. Celebrate what He has done for you. Recognize His greatness and goodness.

You get the idea. Fill your mind with things that are admirable—in people, in God, in God's world. Focus on what's best in others, rather than what bugs you. Think about how excellent God is, how great He is. Focus on the things around you that reflect or demonstrate God's excellence and greatness, creativity and love. If you do this—if you love God by learning about Him, thinking about Him, focusing your thoughts on Him—you will not be able to keep yourself from praising Him.

You will not be able to stop yourself from thanking Him. From loving Him with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.