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# TRANSFORMED

Transformed In My Mental Health

Philippians 2:1-11

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This awesome Transformed series that we're in is all about experiencing God's power to change us, to grow us in health and wholeness and full aliveness in every key area of our lives. Truth is, it's easier to measure what health and wholeness and full aliveness looks like in some areas of our lives than in others. For instance, last week Pastor Paul talked about growing and being transformed in our physical health. That's relatively easy to measure.

In fact, as part of my health insurance I have to go to a lab each year and have all sorts of tests done. They check my blood pressure, weigh me, measure my waistline and take blood. And less than a week later I get a full report on key measures of my health. This year my report said that my blood pressure is great and my cholesterol is in the healthy range. Everything came back great...with one exception. They told me I'm overweight. Seriously. My Body Mass Index is too high. I told them I weigh this much because I've got so many muscles, but the nurse just gave me "the look" and shook her head. So, that's part of my physical health in need of transformation.

Today we're exploring our mental health, and that's a whole lot harder to measure. Now, from the start I want to be clear that we're not talking about mental health in the technical, medical sense – though that's a huge issue that deserves a sermon series one day, if for no other reason than to address the stigma we so often attach to mental illness. What I want us to think about today is perhaps better referred to as "healthy thinking." And no passage in the Bible speaks to the issue of healthy thinking better than today's Scripture Reading from Philippians 2:1-11. Let's read it together [New Living Translation].

I hear those words and I think to myself, I may need to lose just a few pounds, but I've got a lot of stinkin' thinkin' to shed! But before we get to that, let me share with you three reasons that healthy thinking matters.

First, **because our thoughts control our lives.** You've probably heard the old phrase "perception is reality," and that old phrase is true. How we think about things dictates how we respond to them in life. There's a deep and direct connection between our thoughts and actions. Proverbs 4:23 puts it this way, *"Be careful how you think; your life*

*is shaped by your thoughts."* [Good News Translation] Not long ago I had a conversation with someone who was wrestling through a string of failures at work and in relationships. He was just beginning to see that he actually caused those failures through some self-defeating behavior. And the more he dug into it the more he realized that it all stemmed from his relationship with his abusive father who told him over and over again, "You'll never amount to anything." He internalized that thought and it controlled his life. He did things that caused him to fail as if he needed to prove that he would, indeed, never amount to anything. That's what our thoughts do, and that's one reason why healthy thinking matters.

Here's another reason: **your mind is the battleground of temptation.** Almost all temptation starts between our ears. Let me give you an example. Did I mention that my doctor wants me to lose weight? Imagine it's 8:00 pm and I'm hungry. The moment it enters my mind that there's a slab of chocolate cake in the refrigerator, I'm in the battle zone. And here's what happens. As soon as the thought about the presence of that cake enters my mind, if I think to myself, "I know I'm hungry, but eating that slab of cake isn't going to get me to my goal of being healthy. It would be a better choice to eat some nonfat yogurt" – if that's my thinking, the battle is won. But if my thought is, "This morning I ate healthy cereal that tasted like cardboard and I took the stairs twice today. I deserve that slab of chocolate deliciousness" – if that's my thinking, then the battle is lost. By the way, the cake was delicious. Fortunately, giving in to temptation in that instance had minor consequences, but we can all think of circumstances in which giving into temptation can have devastating, life-changing consequences: drugs and alcohol, pornography and affairs, just to name a few. That's why healthy thinking matters, because your mind is the battleground of temptation.

Here's the third reason: **peace and happiness happen between your ears.** We tend to think that peace and happiness are circumstantial, that they happen outside of us. But that isn't true. So much of our internal discord and misery comes – not from our circumstances, but from how we think about our circumstances. Paul puts it this way in Romans 8:6, *"So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace."* I have found this to be true in my own experience. When I surrender my anxious thoughts to God in meditation I often find that my anxious thoughts are transformed into peace and even joy. I can't explain how that is. I can only report that it is. And as I reflect on my faith journey it seems to me that God is more often interested in changing my thinking than in changing my circumstances.

Healthy thinking matters. It's a life-changer! So, how do we develop healthy thinking? For some of us the answer

is “therapy.” And I mean that sincerely. Some of our patterns of thinking are deeply embedded in us from the wounds of our past, and to change our thinking we need compassionate, professional help. That’s why you’ll find a list of recommended counselors on the back of your bulletin this morning.

Aside from that, the very best thing we can do to grow in healthy thinking is to immerse ourselves in the truth, to immerse ourselves in God’s Word. What we fill our minds with matters because it shapes how we think and therefore how we live in the world. For instance, if you fill your mind with 24/7 cable television news you’ll think that the world is on fire, that the world is a dangerous place that’s getting worse and worse by the day, and so you’ll likely live in fear. But the truth is the world is safer and less violent than at any time in recorded history. Maybe we should turn off the TV and let the truth set us free from fear.

That’s what truth does. It sets us free by changing how we think. Jesus once said, *“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* This Word – rather than cable TV – has power to change our thinking by renewing our minds. Remember the central verse of this Transformed series from Romans 12:2, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* That renewing happens when we immerse ourselves in God’s Word. That’s how we live into Paul’s command in today’s Scripture reading from Philippians where Paul says, *“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”* That’s the goal, to have the mind of Christ, to think as Jesus thought. Through the power of the Holy Spirit this Word does the work of renewing our minds over time, aligning our minds with Jesus’ mind.

And I want to suggest to you that in the process of renewal we will experience two transformational, paradoxical things.

First, **the truth will comfort us.** We’ll be overwhelmed by the truth found in Scripture that we are loved and forgiven. Over time we’ll truly internalize the truth that Jesus came to proclaim – that we’re loved unconditionally, despite what we’ve done or have failed to do, despite our sin and brokenness, because we’re fully and freely forgiven. Over time that truth begins to quiet our inner critic, that voice that condemns us, tells us that we’re no good, tells us that our failures define us and that we’ll never be worth anything. That kind of stinkin’ thinkin’, which we all wrestle with, profoundly shapes how we live in this world, especially in our relationships.

But as the Spirit renews our minds, washes it with the truth found in Scripture that we are loved and forgiven, we begin to think about ourselves differently, and are therefore empowered to treat others differently – to treat them with greater compassion and less judgment. That’s the first transformational change that we experience over time when we immerse ourselves in the truth of Scripture and

the Spirit renews our minds – we’ll be overwhelmed by the truth that we are loved and forgiven. The truth will comfort us

But here’s the second experience: **the truth will make us uncomfortable.** The truth of Scripture will make us uncomfortable because it will call us outside of ourselves. It’ll convict us of the truth that life isn’t about us; it’s about giving ourselves away for the sake of others. Listen again to what Paul says about the mind of Christ, *“...though [Jesus] was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.”* Jesus knew that he was loved by God, and that freed him to think of himself as a servant, giving his life away for the needs of others.

As the Spirit renews our minds we will, like Jesus, be heartbroken by the brokenness of this world. And we will be called to do something about it. We’ll be increasingly uncomfortable with the world’s injustice, the ways in which the world’s systems often oppress the poor. We’ll be increasingly uncomfortable with racism, hatred, intolerance and violence. We’ll become increasingly uncomfortable with the ways in which we are poisoning this earth that we’ve been given to steward. We’ll become increasingly uncomfortable with generational poverty, world hunger, sex trafficking and the thousands of other ways in which millions of people around the world are crying out for hope and wholeness. The more our minds are renewed, the more difficult it becomes to bury our heads in the sand in response to these realities. We’ll be reminded that we’ve been blessed to be a blessing. And that will make us uncomfortable.

But I want to suggest to you that healthy thinking, and a healthy faith, live in that tension – the tension between the comfort of the truth of Scripture and the discomfort of the truth of Scripture. That was the mind of Christ. And as our minds are renewed, it becomes our mind too.

So, what goal will you set to grow a healthier mind? What will you commit to doing to open yourself to the renewing power of the Holy Spirit? Maybe your goal is to develop a personal, devotional life, to find a rhythm of daily immersing yourself in Scripture. You’ll find lots of great options on our website under “Spiritual Resources.” Maybe you need to connect with a therapist to heal some wounds from your past. Or maybe you’re feeling called to lean into the discomfort of our broken world. Maybe you’re ready to broaden and deepen your understanding of issues such as poverty, racism and global injustice. If so, you’ll find some reading suggestions on the back of your bulletin today.

Healthy thinking matters. It changes how we live in the world. And the truth of Scripture has power to transform our stinkin’ thinkin’ into the kind of thinking that sets us free to set others free. Let’s pray...