

## Lesson 7 **Stewarding the Mind**

### Overview

To steward the mind entrusted to us is to intentionally sift incoming messages, reflect on Jesus, and welcome the Holy Spirit to align our thoughts and moral reasoning with the will of God.

### Objectives

To be a steward of the mind, learners will

- Love God, acting to develop the mind of Christ.
- Love people, cultivating spirit-filled, heart-soul-and-mind-level love.
- Spread the gospel

## **Open Heart, Soul, and Mind**

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Jesus said, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart (KARDIA) and with all your soul (PSUCHE) and with all your mind (DIANOIA).’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38). How are heart, soul, and mind differentiated?

According to *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, the Greek words heart, soul, and mind as used in Matthew 22:37-38 mean the following.

Heart—KARDIA, καρδία (kardia) represents the hidden and real person, which is the person's character. As one's vital center, the heart steers decisions. “From the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23). A hard heart is an inner character that is set against God, while a pleasing heart is an inner character that orients toward God.

Soul—PSUCHE, ψυχή (psychē), from psucho, in this context, denotes the seat of will and purpose. The PSUCHE/soul carries out decisions. The early Christians were of “one soul;” they shared a will and purpose. “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32 ESV). The soul aligned with God's will and purpose acts in unity with other Christians who are so aligned.

Mind—DIANOIA, διανοία (dianoia, dee-an'-oy-ah) literally means thinking through or over, such as in deep thinking known as meditation, reflecting, knowing, understanding, moral reflection, and consciousness.

Minds closed to God are in darkness; these people cannot see the way so they lack understanding of a right life. “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him" (Ephesians 4:18).

A mind open to God is like a room illumined by the Lord's light as one reflects on his teachings. "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Hebrews 8:10). "Whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8b). "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). Wisdom and thus love develops in a mind open to and illumined by the light of God.

Apply

- Across your life, what has helped in developing a mind more fully open to God—his light and love?
- In personal growth or evangelism, how have you seen the mind, that is, deep thinking on the law of love, lead to change in the heart/one's inner character, and the soul/one's will and purpose?

## **Be Transformed by the Holy Spirit**

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The active, indwelling Holy Spirit continually transforms the heart, soul, and mind. Being softened clay in the hands of the Holy Spirit, the inner character/heart orients toward God, as the open mind meditates on the ways of Jesus, as the will and purpose/soul aligns with the Spirit's instruction.

Jesus told his disciples, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:16). "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).

Apply

- In which decade of life was it hardest for you to welcome the Holy Spirit's work in aligning you with God? In which was it easiest? Why?
- In what ways have you been aware of the Holy Spirit transforming your heart, soul, and mind, even now, that is, your character, purpose, and deep thinking?

## **Come Curious**

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"Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty'" (John 6:35). Jesus is reminding his

hearers of when God provided manna in the desert (Exodus 16:8). As we meditate on Jesus, we consume the manna, being transformed. Without him, we miss what matters. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9 ). Paul said, "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Can a mind observe itself? To some degree metacognition is happening: we are thinking about our thinking. Unfortunately, our thoughts that are biased remain unchecked since we assume they are right. We are blinded to our wrong thinking. In fact, we usually see what we expect to see rather than what is there. It is hard to find our own mistakes as we edit our writing because our eyes see what we meant to type. Likewise, our minds accept our own misunderstandings.

Jesus came to make the blind see. We invite the Lord to search us and show us through the Spirit what of our minds is out of line with God's ways. Those who are sincerely open to seeing blindspots are courageous enough to bring questions to God rather than to come to verify expected answers. Only the curious can hear the answers God brings.

Apply

- What have you noticed lately that is of the mind of Christ that is a new way of thinking for you?
- How have you feasted on the manna, taking in daily feeding on the Bread of Life, today's bread today?

## **One Thing is Needed**

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Please note: We are going to talk about the type of anxiety that arises as temporary worry. Anxiety disorders, on the other hand, are more than temporary worries and fears and can last months or a lifetime. When anxiety is persistent and impairs daily functioning, getting help from an expert is the right step. Psychological disorders may result from genetic precursors, internal physical chemistry, adverse experiences, and/or personal choices made. Christians face the same disorders as others do. With authenticity, we can be open and supportive of each other through the challenges that come with all types of illness, including mental illness. The church needs to be a community in which, when someone is suffering with a psychological disorder, all draw near to help—stigma-free and judgment-free. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) website is a helpful resource for families and friends.

Consider temporary anxiety and worries; notice Jesus' focus as you listen to the reading of Luke 10:38-42. "Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary,

who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Imagine being in the room. Martha is upset to the point of exasperation in serving Jesus and his entourage, so she lets the Lord know it. Jesus never rebukes her for her candidness. She is free to authentically speak her mind. Jesus responds by saying her name twice, "Martha, Martha." We wonder if the tone is gently soothing in his redundancy, as in "Darling, Darling." Or perhaps he says Martha's name a second time because it takes twice to get her attention out of her head and on his voice. "Martha, Martha," meaning "Friend, Right here, Listen, Friend."

Jesus is masterful at supporting Martha through her worry. He names Martha's feelings, validating that he gets her experience, saying, "You are anxious and troubled about many things." Next, Jesus shows her that she has what it takes to move forward, saying, "One thing is necessary." Martha will have to push through her anxious troubled feelings. Jesus is not going to rescue her with a miracle, water-to-wine-at-a-banquet style, just to make sure she feels happy. Instead, he lovingly holds Martha accountable. He is not confronting her for speaking candidly; rather, he is correcting the thinking that fed her anxiety. Jesus' message is: You and Mary each have a choice. Mary chose the good portion, implying, you can too. You feel worried because you are making many things out of one thing—I am here. My visit can be complicated or simple. You are anxious, and, he implies, I believe you can handle this, Martha. Jesus seems to be communicating, "Martha, Martha, I really get it: you are anxious and troubled; you can handle that feeling. Mary is choosing well and we are sticking with that. You can sit right here beside Mary. You have what you need. About supper—figs and olives will be fine."

Our Lord is the master teacher. He named Martha's feeling of anxiety and showed confidence in her ability to move forward by avoiding rescuing her with a please-be-happy quick fix. He showed her her choices. We don't hear what Martha did next. I like to think she sat down. Listening to Jesus aligns our minds to God's will and purpose.

Our society is seeing an increase in anxiety among youth. Driven by tech addiction, people fixate on screens in the quest for bigger-weirder-better, seeking likes and distractions that might produce each next rewarding dopamine hit. Not only are fast-moving screen images training the mind to have shortened attention spans, but with screens at the ready as pacifiers, a main parenting goal has become, "I just want my kids to be happy." Parents of children who are anxious, as you steward the training of another's mind, take note of Jesus' response to Martha. When the youth is anxious, compassionately name the feeling, create a visual of the behavioral goal. Communicate

your confidence in the person's ability, and then don't rescue. Sincere compassion with accountability works. A mind can be trained to move through worry to peace. (Partnering with a therapist, such as one using Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions (SPACE), can be a good strategy to help where there is chronic anxiety with impairment of functioning.)

Apply

- Think of a time when someone was Martha-minded—distracted from the best by what seemed good and missing peace by dwelling on resentment. What deception was filling the mind? What peace-giving choice was available?
- Think of a time when you have been Mary-minded. Though others chose anxious busy-ness and perhaps even tried to shame you into the same, you chose to be still, peacefully focusing your mind on Jesus' teaching. How were you able to be still at his feet? What kept your mind focused on Jesus?
- Can you help someone who is distracted by many things? What steps will help you to be Christ-minded in compassionately naming another's feelings, expressing confidence in them, and being present without rescuing while they make a choice?

## **Savor One Verse**

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Colossians 3:16 says we're to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. One way to do this is to meditate on scripture, writing one verse from our Bible reading on an index card and carrying it with us through the day. We can prop the card on the window sill while doing dishes or pull it out in the car line.

We've been amazed that, sitting with a passage, while continuing to ask God for more, he gives deeper layers of insight with connections and elements we didn't see on the first or second read through.

Apply

- The Holy Spirit often nudges with a scripture stored in the mind during earlier meditations. What types of scripture might the Holy Spirit like to show you from your mind's library of verses right now in your current circumstances?
- What new scripture do you want to find again and again on your mind's shelf? Write it. Notice what happens when feasting on the scripture throughout the day.

## **Choose Eternal over Temporary, Peace over Worry, God over Possessions**

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Neuroscience reveals that the brain develops patterns of thought by replaying neural circuits. A neural circuit connects brain cells together in communication pathways that strengthen each time the circuit is used. Brain cells wire together as they fire together such that well used pathways become automatized, firing rapidly and easily. Physiologically, the mind develops practiced patterns.

Jesus is inviting us to practice particular thought patterns as expectancy mindsets until they become wired in as automatic ways of thinking. Hear Matthew 6:19-34.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (μαμωνᾶ, mamōna, meaning riches, money, possessions, property). Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life (Life, here is PSUCHE/soul/purpose), what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life (PSUCHE/soul/purpose) more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Character is both formed and revealed by what is loved. If all is entrusted to us to steward, then we have no actual possessions, only assignments. We can responsibly care for tangible things without owning them or treasuring them as of innate worth. Their value is only in their use for eternal good. “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1-2). God is the owner. The Godly heart steers toward what God loves, and the Godly mind thinks deeply, not about temporary tangible things, but about the eternal treasures of God. With repetition and practice, Godly thinking becomes more automatic.

Apply

- Steward the mind by meditating on truth. Jesus teaches that, truly, we will always have what we need. There is enough food on the earth for all if we share. How might we release our grip on what we hold too dear so that others may have?

- Center your mind on one priority—seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. What becomes front and center in this mindset?
- What are you investing in building a mind that is renewed, so fully focused on the will of God? What more would you be willing to invest?

## **How Christians at Hillcrest are Developing the Mind of Christ**

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We asked some friends who are committed to developing the mind of Christ to tell us how they have meditated on Jesus through various life experiences.

Kay Hayes said, "I make time to read a bit every day, maybe just studying one scripture. Also when life was really hard I asked a friend to pray regularly with me."

Elceone Roberts said, "I like to read the Bible in different translations which makes some of the verses easier to understand. I also like to write down names of people that I pray for. It is interesting to go back later and see the way God answered those prayers."

Hazeanne Luttrell said, "I have done many different things through the years. What I am doing now at my age is very different from what I did as a young mom when all of my children were home. We had a regular devotional with our kids at night before we put them to bed. Then I had my own time alone. In the last months, since Bill has been gone, I have spent time in the morning praying for all of our family and their special needs. My reading takes many forms. I just finished reading the commentary on Ephesians. One year, I studied the book of Romans and a commentary that was recommended to me—just the best ever. One year, I read only the words from the Bible (no commentaries) and tried to pretend that I had not known anything about the Bible—that was hard—and I decided that I had been very blessed to have been taught the truth all of my life by my parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Many times in December—a busy month to read daily—I read the 31 Proverbs because of the 31 days, and it is interesting how it talks about gluttony on the 24th and 25th of December. I have gone sometimes days without reading. I don't think I have ever missed a day of praying. But, if you get behind on your reading, don't fret - just start again where you left off."

Mary Barton said, "If I have committed my life to Jesus, that should show up in my conversations and actions, but it won't unless I have an active prayer life. Prayer and reading of God's Word daily become a necessary path to true devotion. In my morning prayers, I often ask God to guide me that day with His Holy Spirit and help me to follow as I should. The Spirit and the Word agree—so, daily, reading the Word and prayerfully following with the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit are required in order to remain faithful. When we are discouraged, our prayers may turn into laments. God hears and loves and answers. Setting a time helps create a habit that can help us remain in daily touch with our God."

John Barton said, "Times that keep us close to God include frequent and earnest meditating on scripture while opening our hearts and lives fully to God and praying with thanksgiving and supplication. Often people find set schedules, or places, or postures, or companions to help; but these things vary with individual experience. Added to these, other times must be open to the needs and service of others."

#### Apply

- How has your practice of sitting at the feet of Jesus changed across your lifespan?
- What might you like to improve in developing the mind of Christ? Take that step.