

A Submissive Trust, A Fixed Imagination, and A Perfect Peace Part 2

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Isaiah 26:3

You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.

Passivity is a huge enemy for Christians. We are waiting for God to zap us, energize us, make us feel something that engages us to do something for the kingdom. The problem is—we think God needs to do something before we can; interestingly, God is thinking the same about us. We are not to wait on God to give grace, because grace is waiting on us. God will always give grace. There is plenty of grace for those who will consume it, use it, like a racecar driver at the Daytona 500. A racecar driver does not worry about gas mileage. He's not interested in fuel conservation. His only concern is to make sure his engine is performing to the maximum on the fuel that he is using. When it comes to using grace we need to be more like a racecar driver. Put the pedal to the medal. Consume grace. Use grace. Drink grace. Burn grace. Use it.

For the most part, we are more like Captain Kirk waiting for Scotty to beam him, we're waiting for God to show up and get us out of trouble. There was always something wrong with the transporter and Scotty had to, at the very last moment, fix it and—amazingly Kirk was out of trouble. That's how we view God and our relationship. It's like we believe if we did something for God that God would be frantic and beside Himself. "Oh no, there they go again, trying to do something for Me." But God doesn't think that. He's waiting for you to do something—to do what He said.

God has stated through His prophet Isaiah that He will keep us in perfect peace if we will do our part, which is to keep our minds fixed upon Him. That means there is something I must do. I have to focus and fix my mind on Him. That's my part. And if I do my part, He will then guard my mind. He will keep it as a sentry guarding my mind. That's what we discussed last week, how the mind works and what it means to keep our minds stayed on Him. Today I want us to go a little bit further because I really didn't get to discuss how to do that; I just introduced it at the very end of the message. But, for a few minutes, let's do a brief review.

I. BRIEF REVIEW

A. Our Minds Think Primarily Through the Power of Imagination.

Where does imagination come from? Ideas. Ideas fuel imagination. Information comes into the mind. The information forms ideas; ideas are nothing more than your perception of reality. That's all an idea is. It's something you perceive to be true. Some ideas we accept as truth and others we reject.

It is these ideas that form our images. For example, the idea of freedom will bring to the mind certain images. You may see an American flag. You may see one of the founding fathers. You may think of a president. You may think of those who have died for our freedom. But the concept, the idea of freedom, doesn't just stay some abstract concept, it becomes an image by which your mind can work and grasp that idea. That's the way God made you to think. It's the way you're supposed to think. Our problem is we don't know how to properly use the imagination. We don't know how to biblically use it.

Another example, when you hear the words, *eternal life*, images that revolve around that concept or idea come into your mind. You may think of Jesus immediately, or you may think of heaven or pearly gates or salvation. That's not to say you don't think in words. Last week, I didn't mean for you to walk away thinking that you never have a word pop into your brain. But the word is immediately followed up with images and concepts and word pictures that give you the ability to feel and to experience what you think. God never intended the mind and its thoughts to be purely cerebral, meaning in the brain alone, He meant for thoughts to permeate and transcend into experience.

B. From the Imagination Comes Scenarios By Which We Live.

We create scenarios. We think and imagine how things will play out according to the decisions we make and others make around us. So the imagination creates life scenarios, pictures, images of how things will work or not work. That's what we dealt with last week, to a large part. It's from these imaginations, these scenarios we play out that we either believe God or we do not believe God. These imaginations are based upon ideas and those ideas are either biblically informed or they're informed by some other party.

What we need to do is learn how to allow the Scriptures, God Himself, to create the proper mental images by which we live and work.

II. THE EMOTIONAL SIDE OF THOUGHTS

There is one thing I did not share last week and that is to how great a power these imaginations, arguments, or reasoning can be. In fact, they can be so powerful they can control. They don't control simply by concepts or ideas. Every idea or image produces a corresponding emotion. It's by the emotions that thoughts have power.

There are two different kinds of emotions.

A. Voluntary vs. Involuntary Emotions.

Involuntary simply means you're feeling something and you didn't choose to feel it. You had nothing to do with the mood or the feeling. Mood is a little different than emotions. Mood is actually a temperament that comes over the mind that can actually cloud or sway the mind. Involuntary emotions are the feelings and sensations you have that come from maybe hormones, chemicals, or other reactions. Even food or the atmospheric pressure can affect some people's emotions. Dreams also create involuntary emotions. You didn't choose that, your subconscious did. You didn't voluntarily choose to have the emotion that dream brought on. That is involuntary.

B. Most Emotions Are Voluntary.

Mainly and mostly our emotions come from our thought life. You think and therefore you feel, not vice versa. Your emotions are primarily a result of what you think.

For example, you just got news that your department is going to lay off 10 people and there are 25 people in your department. You do the math. There is a good chance you might not be working there any longer. What happens with that thought? That piece of information that now has created a mental image. How it influences you depends on what the mental image is. If the mental image is that you're going to be without work, it's very probable you will feel an emotion of anxiety. Right? You're going to feel it. You can literally feel anxiety. It's something in the pit of your stomach. So this emotion came from information that created this form or image, remember the Hebrew

meaning of the word *mind* in our text is *form*. The information created the image and that image sent a shiver down your physical being that you can literally feel the fear and anxiety.

When you feel excitement it comes from the mind. What generates the feeling of excitement? Something comes into the mind that forms a thought that creates an image that creates a sensation of excitement. All voluntary emotions are created by thoughts. All of them.

The problem is that often the emotion becomes so strong that it overtakes the mind. With time, that feeling, that sensation, that emotion, literally has you captive in bondage. The news comes that 10 people are going to be laid off. "I know it's me. It's going to be me. I'm sure I'm the one. How can I get by now?" Then you begin to create the scenarios, "What's going to happen when I lose my job? How are we going to survive? Where am I going to find another job?!" This begins to create the sensation and emotion of anxiety and the more you dwell on that image, what happens? The image becomes stronger that you're going to suffer immeasurably and the image strengthens the emotion.

The emotions might continue to build until perhaps you even get physically sick. Maybe you can't sleep very well because this emotion of fear and anxiety and worry has so gripped you that now the mind, which generated the emotion, is now captivated by it. You're trapped within your own fear and anxiety. It's like the dog that began to wag its tail but now the momentum of the tail is wagging the dog. That's why thoughts are so powerful.

A thought literally becomes an emotion that gives you the experience of what you're thinking. That's why emotions and thoughts are connected. The mind has control over both, unless you allow emotions to control the mind. When the emotions controls our thinking, then we spiral viciously downward into anxiety, worry, and depression. In order to change the emotion, we have to change the mind.

C. Change the Mind, Change the Emotion.

How do we do that? The text says, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed (formed, leaning, fixed) upon You." If we're to have a change of emotions, a change of mind, we've got to have a change of information. If the emotions and thoughts are negative, if the imagery is negative, we've got to change the information our minds are receiving. If you're not experiencing

the peace of God, your mind is not fixed upon God. It can't be. "You **will** keep him in perfect peace, whose mind **is** stayed upon You." If you're not experiencing peace right now, it's because you are not fixing your mind on God. Period. There are no extenuating circumstances, no other conditions that nullify this. Perhaps this sermon is bothering you because it's dealing with your situation, and your situation is this very thing, you do not have peace. Your mind is not stayed upon the Lord.

If you are not experiencing the peace of God, your mind is not right. You're not thinking according to the Scriptures. The information that's coming in is not biblically informed. The wrong information, the wrong ideas, is controlling the imagination and that sets emotion into gear and now the emotion has swallowed you up. "Garbage in, garbage out." "Stinking thinking." The place between the two ears is the problem. It's how you think.

III. How To Fix The Mind Upon God

A. New Information.

This is where I want to spend the rest of our time. I've got five things, all from the Scriptures, that tell us how to set our minds, how to stay your imagination, your thought life, on the Lord. It certainly does not mean that for every 60 seconds of every minute of every hour of every day that God is all you're imagining and thinking about. That's not what this means. You may be engrossed in what you're doing and your mind is still stayed upon God even though God is not necessarily the imagery you are thinking about at that moment.

So how do we do this? How do we utilize this ability to establish our minds? I want to say to you it's going to take intensive effort.

B. Intensive Effort.

This will take rigorous activity. It is not easy. You're going to have to really work at this. The mind is an amazing thing but it will not do this automatically. It has been trained by environment, education, sin, and self. You must do the work of renewing the mind. God has given us grace and the more you burn that grace like fuel, the more you will get. That's the hope here. God will keep you in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you. God has given you the grace to do this and once

you have learned to do this, then God is always there before your mind as a sentry to guard the mind from the wrong information or to say to you, “That’s wrong. That’s not truth.” It’s going to take intensive, rigorous effort because the mind is like water in some ways. It follows the path of least resistance.

Most of us are concerned doctrinally, theologically that we’re robots. Theologians have made a big deal between Calvinism and Arminianism, “We don’t want to be robotic. Calvinism makes people believe that we’re nothing but robots.” But, Arminians, as well as Calvinists, end up following something that would suggest that we are robots.

We live mostly on autopilot and we really don’t think that much. Your job may require a great deal of thinking but we’re not talking about a particular project or work. We’re talking about life. We all have to think in order to survive. Thinking is required to do your job or to go through school, but we’re not talking about completing school or getting a grade. We’re not talking about performing at the jobsite. We’re talking about life, having wellbeing, centered within. That requires thinking and the mind is like that water drip, it’s going to follow the path of least resistance, so what we mainly do is we don’t think about life. We let life take us wherever we go and we don’t resist. It’s just like autopilot.

If the pilot puts the plane on autopilot that means the plane is going to take him wherever he has programmed it. You are programmed from early infancy. I suggest we are programmed even before birth from human nature, but let’s just say your programming is your environment, your education, and the way you develop in your temperament and all of that is combined. You have already got an autopilot and that autopilot is going to lead you to the wrong destination. You’ve got to know how to take the wheel and turn off the autopilot and that’s not easy.

Let me tell you these five things to fix the mind upon God.

I. Capture the mind.

You’ve got to capture your mind because your mind is working on this autopilot, following the pathway of least resistance. Whatever feels good, we do. Whatever we think is right, we do because we always make our choices based upon what is going to cost us the least. Jesus warned us about that kind of thinking, “Whoever tries to save his life will lose it.” So following thoughts

that follow the path of least resistance is disaster. You've got to capture your mind. You've got to arrest it.

You must not let imagination "run wild." You must not let the mind lead you but you must lead your mind. You must capture it and harness it. We allow the imagination to establish scenarios, most of which do not come to pass.

You've heard 10 people are going to be laid off from your department of 25; you've already created scenarios that may or may not come to pass. You're allowing the imagination to take control. It's not just "worrywarts" who are good at this, everybody does this. There are some people who always have negative images and they end up being worrywarts. If they have nothing to worry about they create something to worry about. But I'm not just dealing with this sort of person. I'm speaking across the board; this applies to every one of us. Our imaginations are often allowed to run wild, so instead of letting your mind work in this unrestrained and careless way, capture it and put it to work God's way. When you start creating the scenarios stop and think about God's control over all things.

Instead of allowing the imaginations to run and create what you're going to believe and therefore feel, why don't you use the Scriptures? This is what God is saying. Capture your mind. Let your mind think along the ways of Scripture. Do you not believe all things work to the good? Can you not create this scenario?

Instead of worrying, create this scenario, "God, if I am one of the ones who gets laid off, then You are opening a new door for me. I've asked You to show me Your will, if I lose my job, then You're making it very clear that this is not where I'm supposed to be anymore. You have something else for me because everything You bring into my life is for my good."

In this way you're using your imagination but you're not allowing it to captivate you, you have arrested it and are using it appropriately. You are allowing the truth to form appropriate scenarios.

The same is true when you get a doctor's report you did not want to hear. Although the scenario has already been created in your mind, when that news is as you imagined or pictured what do you do? What do you do when the bill comes and you don't have the money to pay the bill? At that point, usually the autopilot takes over and we begin to think according to the way we've been conditioned and that's not Scriptural. We have to force the mind by capturing it.

“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossians 3:2)

Set. Fix. Set your mind. Capture it. Arrest it. Get a hold of it.

I invite you to turn to Philippians. We're going to spend the rest of our time there trying to expound on the phrase, “whose mind is stayed on You.” Two passages in Paul's epistle to the Philippians will demonstrate how to have a fixed mind on God.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,” (Philippians 2:5-8)

The phrase, “Let this mind” is the same Greek word used in Colossians 3:2, “Set your mind.” “Set your mind” is the same as “let this mind.” It's the same command.

What Paul does next in Philippians 2:6-8 is genius. He shows us how to do it. He doesn't do that in Colossians three as well as he does it here. What I want you to see is Paul showing us how to be like Christ, think as Christ thinks, how to set your minds on things above. He captures the mind and then he creates new images. The following is the new image:

“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Do you see what Paul is doing? He's creating word pictures. He's creating new, biblical scenarios. Here you have the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, who was equal with God and became a man, but not just a man. He became a slave. That triggers imagery. These are word pictures. This Slave, this Man who looks just like us because He was a human, “humbled Himself and became obedient.” Those words suggest different images of a man who has been placed under the authority of someone else and He became obedient even to the point of death on a cross. You can't use the word *cross* in a circle of Christians without seeing a wooden structure with our Savior bleeding on it.

“Let this mind be in you,” how do you do that? By thinking with new images. About what? In this case, Jesus! That's how you capture the mind. You grab it and say, “No, you're not going to

do the thinking for me. We're going to do the thinking and we're going to think according to Scriptural ideas."

2. You have to see yourself before the Lord and the Lord before you.

The next thing necessary to fix the mind on the Lord is to have the appropriate image of your relationship to God. You have to imagine what is true, that you are before the Lord and the Lord is before you. The only problem with this word *imagine* or *imagination* is that we often associate it with fantasy, something that is not true. But that's not correct. Imagination can create a non-reality, a false, fictional reality, yes. But the imagination was given by God to put an image to that which is true. So your job is to be able to view God before you and you before Him. Listen to what David said,

*"I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved."
(Psalms 16:8)*

David is suggesting that the way to keep yourself internally stable, not moved by every whim of emotion is to imagine yourself before God and God before you. "I have set the LORD always before me... He is at my right hand." David has said, "Whatever the circumstance, whatever the problem that comes into my life, I immediately imagine that He is at my right hand, because He is!" He is not imagining something that is false. These are not mind games! This is truth over error. Some of you have problems with what I'm saying because it sounds like it's self-manipulating. But it isn't, this is real. "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

If you want to improve your prayer life where it does not seem that you're just praying to the ceiling, you must use your imagination. Often, when I get ready to pray, I imagine myself in the very throne room of God. I imagine that I am in that throne room and that Jesus is in that throne room with me. I ponder on that. I let that get ahold of my mind. Why? Because it's true. The truth is not that I'm sitting in my living room on 2935 Oaks Road and God is a million miles up there. That's not the truth! The truth is He is before me and I'm before Him and He is at my right hand. When I begin to let that control the mind and its imagination, it doesn't matter what comes into my world, I know I'm not alone. My God is with me. He's there. He's overshadowing me. His will, His perfect, blessed will is there to be done in my life and I don't have to worry. You have to learn how to imagine putting yourself before the Lord and that He is before you.

3. You must learn to pray about everything.

I want you to return to the epistle to the Philippians chapter 4 and verse 6.

“Be anxious for nothing,”

We all kind of chuckle under our breath when we read that, don't we? Be honest. Don't you chuckle at that? Or do you get frustrated at that verse because you know you've never done that? You've never had a moment when you weren't worried about something. “Be anxious for nothing.” Why do we laugh or have trouble with that verse? Because we're not doing what Paul's about to show us. You're not using the mind appropriately. You're letting the mind, with the old conditioning, the old ideas, and images, have control.

“...but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

What are you to pray about? The better question would be, “What are you not to pray about?” The answer would be nothing. We are to pray about everything.

“⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

Guard. There it is again. What does Paul mean here? When you can imagine and see with your mind's eye that you are before the Lord and the Lord is before you, then it is not difficult to pray about everything. If you can see by the power of a sanctified imagination that you're always with Him, He is at your right hand, and that He will never leave you or forsake you, then you can incorporate everything about your life in prayer to Him. You can pray about everything. As you go through your day, everything becomes a matter of prayer. Good, bad, or indifferent, a running conversation occurs between you and God. That is what Paul is teaching right now. The way for God to be a sentry on your mind is to learn how to bring everything to God. You have to learn to participate in God's life and cooperate with Him in everything in your life.

4. You must practice meditation.

We must direct your attention to the subject of meditation because if you pray about everything there is the possibility that you will only increase your anxiety.

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

You have to practice meditation. I told you this would be intense and rigorous. You’re going to have to practice meditation. If you merely pray about everything, the enemy and your own flesh will take your prayer time and entice you to use it as another opportunity to worry about what you’re praying. There is literally sometimes when it’s good not to pray. When is it good not to pray? When you while praying just think more about the problem. Often, the more people pray about it the more depressed, afraid, or anxious they become. The enemy has used your prayer time as a means of exercising anxiety.

Paul says pray about everything but while you’re praying about everything, train the mind to think positively. This is not the power of positive thinking. It’s the power of thinking rightly. The only biblical positive thinking is biblically right thinking. So Paul says don’t use your prayer time as a worry session. As you pray, think right! If it’s true, noble, just, pure, of a good report, virtuous, praiseworthy, then think on those things. Who is described by those words? Jesus! We must meditate on Jesus.

David explained why God blesses some men and others are not blessed. It is because of meditation.

“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.³ He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.⁴ The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.” (Psalm 1:1-4)

Why is this man blessed, that is, favored by God? He doesn’t live like a sinner. He doesn’t walk, sit, or stand like a sinner. That encompasses all of life. He doesn’t live like the ungodly, but secondly and just as importantly, He meditates on the law of God. He thinks about the right information. He puts in the computer the right equations. Now David says this man is favored because he is meditating on the law.

But you and I as Christians at this point in redemptive history have something better than the law to meditate on? Jesus! The law points to Christ—He’s the fulfillment of it! He’s the express image of the Father, what is better to set before your mind than Christ, God in flesh, our Savior and Redeemer? What better to set the concentration of the mind upon than Jesus? Don’t just pray, but while you’re praying let your mind be on Christ, think about Him in His beauty, purity, and virtue, in His praiseworthiness, in His nobleness, in the good report of Him and this will create the correct images you need in order to live as a blessed person.

For example, this morning in my time of prayer I was reading John 2 about the miracle of the water and wine at Cana. I read it a couple of times and I asked the Lord, “Jesus, what do You want to show me about You? What do I need to see?” I then meditated on the text.

What is meditation? The word means to mutter to oneself or to deliberate with oneself.

Do you talk to yourself? I talk to me all the time. Everyone talks to themselves. Biblical meditation is talking to yourself about what you are seeing in the text about God, yourself, your sin, your life, etc.

This morning I took that text and deliberated with, not just myself, but with Jesus. “What do You want me to see in this text?”

As I meditated on it, mulled it over, looked at it from different perspectives, I saw that Jesus’ first miracle of turning water into wine was a miracle where nothing huge was on the line or at stake. Nobody’s life was threatened. This was not heaven or hell. Nobody was dying. Nobody was sick with a fever. Nobody was lame or blind. It was just that a party was about to have a big letdown. That was the problem. A party was about to have a big problem and somebody was going to be embarrassed. So Jesus, out of compassion, performed a miracle. Then it dawned on me—He had compassion on a couple at their wedding feast over something as incidental as running out of wine. If He would do that for them, He will certainly take care of every small detail of my life. Immediately I was filled with an emotion of joy, just by meditating. That’s an example of what I’m talking about. You have Jesus to meditate and think on.

5. You must do the things that godly men do if you are to be godly.

Go back to Philippians. We've been told that we need to pray about everything, we need to meditate on the right things and now he says if you want to be mature you have to do what mature people do.

"The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:9)

There's peace mentioned again. You've got to capture your mind. You can't let it run on the pathway of least resistance. You've got to learn to set the Lord always before you because He's at your right hand, and you've got to learn to pray about everything, but not just pray but at the same time focus on the beautiful, wonderful, attributes of Jesus and His Word that tells us about Him, and then you do what godly men and women do. What do they do?

1. Memorize Scripture

They don't memorize Scripture so they can say, "OK, Lord, I memorized Scripture. I did what You wanted me to do." Scripture memorization is not about gaining favor and blessings from God. It is not to be used legalistically. Memorization is to be able to put God's Word in your heart so you can think on it, meditate on it at any time. It helps to shape and renew the mind. That's what godly people do. They hide the Word in their hearts so they might not sin against God.

2. Meditate on Scripture

You are not going to grow spiritually if you don't do this. This is not a legalism but is the way that you are obedient, burning grace as a fuel. This is how you consume grace, by meditating on the Word of God. Stop reading the Bible, start thinking about it!

3. Solitude

You have to break the message of the world and all of the messages that it sends. You've got to stop all the messages of the world for a brief time and just recalibrate. That's what Jesus did. If you want to be like Jesus, you've got to do what Jesus did.

That's what a disciple does. Remember? A disciple does what Jesus did so that he can be like his Master.

4. Fasting

You've got to bring the body into submission. Fasting can do that. It can tell the appetites, "You will not have it your way."

These are things godly people do. Passivity will never work. You cannot idly sit and wait for God to do something to you that jolts you out of lethargy or spiritual immaturity. God is waiting for you to obey Him. Grace is waiting on you. But you're still in the garage waiting for God to supernaturally turn the motor on. Then perhaps you'll think, "Oh, maybe God wants me to drive it."

The car is fueled and the key is in the ignition. It's there ready to be used. There is nothing to wait for.

There is one more element, making six, that we have yet to discuss but we don't have time to get into it and that is the last phrase of our text—"because he trusts in You." But faith and the mind's activity to be proactive in the way I've outlined are linked. Faith and these five things I've talked about. Your faith influence's the mind but your mind influences your faith. They are linked together.

What I want to say as I conclude is quit waiting on a miracle. Spiritual maturity is not going to happen that way. You're not going to grow in grace by waiting for a miracle. It's not going to happen. He's done everything you need for you to run the race and to run it well, but you're going to have to capture the mind and do these five things if you're going to grow in grace. These are all biblical propositions, truths, ideas, that form the mind and they work. The more you do it the more automatic and natural it becomes so now your emotions are not controlling you, your mind and the truth is controlling your emotions. You will actually feel the truth and experience it in the body because the truth is informing the emotions. When emotions are in accordance with the truth, then a person has a body working according to the Spirit. The Spirit is leading the body because the mind and the emotions are working in tandem with the will and the will is biblically informed to choose as God would have it choose.

Quit waiting for a miracle. The miracle has already happened. Jesus has already died, resurrected, and given you the Spirit. Now put this truth to work and experience it. It will not be easy but anything you become proficient in never starts easily. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right, and it's worth the effort. You will do what you want to do. May God help you to want to do this, to grow in Him. Amen.