

Set Your Mind on the Lord
Romans 8:5

Richard Tow 3-29-15

Our study over the last few weeks has led us one phrase in Romans 8:5, "... those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (NIV).¹ To walk in the Spirit as KJV puts it, to live life as it ought to be lived, requires that our minds be set on what the Spirit desires.

Last week we dealt with a couple of practical steps toward thinking right. First we saw that we would need to be intentional about it. Phil. 4:8 makes that clear by telling us the kind of things we are to think on. We have a choice and responsibility as to what we will dwell on. Second, we saw that the Word of God is a revelation of the way God thinks; and our thinking is to be shaped by that revelation (Rom. 12:2). Therefore, we fill our mind with the word of God.

Today, I want to add one other step for managing our thought life. It is the most challenging and yet perhaps the most rewarding. I have certainly not mastered the practice, but I have tasted and seen that it is good. When I was a kid we would climb trees to get at the fruit. For some reason the best fruit always seemed to be at the top of the tree. Well in this study we have been climbing and eating some good fruit from the tree. But today we are at the top of the tree and this is the tastiest of all. This one practice will bring delight to your soul and bring power into your life. One thing that would revolutionize your life is to set your mind on the Lord—not just good things about the Lord and not just things He has said in His word, but I set my mind on the Person and His Presence with m. My goal this morning is to explain that more fully and to encourage you in that direction.

In Psalm 16:8 David said, *"I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. 9 Therefore my heart is glad..."*² What is David talking about when he says, *"I have set the LORD always before me..."*²

I. Center my Thoughts on the Lord.

I have set my mind on the Lord. I have made Him the center of my thought life.

Have you noticed how a compass needle always points north? You can momentarily disturb that; but it will always settle back to that position. When you center your thoughts on the Lord, you continually come back to Him as your point of reference.

He is Alpha and Omega. He is the beginning and the end of all things.³ All things come from Him and ultimately it all comes back to Him. He is the source of all and ultimately the fulfillment of all.

1 Cor 15:24-28 *"Then comes the end, when He (Jesus) delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For 'He has put all things under His feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."* That's the way this all

¹ All Scripture quotes are in the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² I am indebted to Dallas Willard for my initial appreciation of this verse as to David's choice to keep God always before his mind.

³ Rev. 1:8.

ends: with God as "all in all." It begins with God (Gen. 1:1 *"In the beginning God..."*) and it consummates with God as *"all in all."* Probably everyone here would agree with that theologically; but God wants it to be a practical experience in our daily lives. Is He *all in all* in your life? Is He the center of everything for you?

We live in a society that is corrupted by humanism. If you don't think that is true, just try to talk about God in any other setting but the church. It is considered politically incorrect to even mention Him unless it is as a cuss word. This week I was involved in training mediators at the university. Even to mention preaching brought a hush in the room. I could have shouted a vile cuss word and not got as strong of a reaction. Think with me for a minute how insane that is. Everybody there is going to die in the near future. For some it may be 60 or 70 years; for others it may be 5 or 10 years. Either way, it will be relatively soon. Yet all attention must be diverted away from the most central, most important subject. It's not just most important to a few people; it's most important to everyone there! Yet the subject of God is taboo; it is tenaciously avoided. I say all that to say, We can't let society tell us what is important. They're missing the point all together. We have to think for ourselves. If it all began with God and it's all going to end in God, then perhaps God should be central to everything and perhaps my mind should be set on Him.

And that is exactly what David did. *"I have set the LORD always before me; (Ps 16:8) Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. 9 Therefore my heart is glad..."* David got two major benefits from setting his mind on the Lord. First, it made him unshakeable. The events of life did not move him because he is grounded in the Lord. The needle of his compass comes back to the Lord no matter how disturbing things get around him. Isa 26:3 promises *"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You."* A mind that is centered on God, a mind that is stayed, set, fixed on the Lord will have peace. *"I have set the LORD always before me...."* (He is right here) *"...at my right hand-- I shall not be moved."* When we focus on the Lord, our faith toward Him is nurtured. Secondly, David lived in joy because his mind was set on the Lord. *"9 Therefore my heart is glad..."*

In Psalm 23 he wrote, *"The Lord is my Shepherd... Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil..."* Why (how is that possible)? *"For You are with me...."*

In Acts 27 Paul found himself at sea in a hurricane. It was a life and death situation. All the soldiers who were guarding Paul and all the hardened sailors on board were terrified. But there we see Paul calm as a cucumber. He is in the worst possible circumstance. He's not only out to sea in this killer storm, but he is a prisoner who the soldiers are planning to kill. Paul is not moved by any of it. Why? He had set the Lord always before him—storm or no storm, God was at the center of his thoughts.

He was more aware of what God was doing than all the circumstances around him—because he had set the Lord at the center of his thinking. He was more attuned to God's voice than to the crashing waves and thunder—because he had set the Lord always before him. His mind was fixed on the Lord. When we live that way, we position ourselves to receive God's assurance and guidance regardless of what is going on around us. We position ourselves to be comforted, strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

"I have set the LORD always before me...." That was David's mindset. That was Paul's mindset. And that is the mindset we want to embrace; always mindful of the Lord.

In contrast to those who would set their minds on the Lord, Romans 1:28 talks about people who do just the opposite of that. *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting."* Their choice was to exclude God from their thoughts. Not only did they not want God as the center of everything, they wanted Him out of their thinking all together. They didn't even want to acknowledge Him. The next few verses then

reveal what kinds of things filled the vacuum. Rom 1:29 “*They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*” By pushing God out of their thoughts, they opened the floodgate of evil. But the good news is this. By setting our minds on God and the things of God, we open the floodgate of His goodness. As the old song says, “And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own, And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known.”⁴ Thomas Kelly calls this way of living, “Life from the Center” with a capital C indicating God is the center that we fix our attention upon. He writes, “Life from the Center is a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It takes no time, but it occupies all our time.”⁵

The Bible clearly teaches that God is with every one of us 24 hours a day. The promise God makes in Heb. 13:5 is that he will never leave us nor forsake us. The Lord is with you as you sit in church this morning; but He is also with you as you make your way down a busy street or as you do your job on Monday morning. The problem is never about whether the Lord is with us. The issue is our awareness of His presence and our willingness to engage Him. Setting our mind on the Lord also means:

II. Cultivate Awareness of God!

Brother Lawrence wrote a little book years ago entitled *The Practicing the Presence of God*. Some of you have probably read it. He tells about how he learned to commune with the Lord while doing his daily routine. That is walking in the Spirit. That is setting our minds on the things of the Spirit.

Why is it that two people can be in the same worship service? One is caught up in the presence of the Lord, gazing on His beauty⁶ and delighting in God’s nearness. The person standing right beside him is looking around wondering when the service is going to be over so he can get home and watch the game. God is there for both of them. The issue is awareness and the decision to engage the presence of the Lord.

In Genesis 28, Jacob was at a place he later named Bethel. He was just trying to get a good night’s sleep there but God appeared to him in a dream. When he woke up he suddenly realized God was there (vs 16), “*Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it*” or as the NIV puts it, “*...I was not aware of it.*” Awareness!

In 2 Kings 6, the King of Aram was at war with Israel. God kept giving Elisha a word of knowledge as to what the enemy’s strategies were and it was driving the King of Aram nuts. So he sent a strong force of soldiers to capture Elisha. All these soldiers surrounded the town where Elisha and his servant were staying. The next morning when the servant stepped out of his tent, he saw the enemy everywhere. He panicked and ran to Elisha with the news. There was the prophet full of peace and assurance. Elisha simply prayed that God would open his servant’s eyes to the spiritual realm. When God did that, he saw the hills full of God’s horses and chariots of fire. One person panicked; the other took it all in stride. What was the difference? Awareness. Awareness of God’s presence with them. Elisha simply asked the Lord to strike the enemy with blindness. He then led them away. Elisha was aware of God’s presence and he interacted with the Lord in solving the problem.

When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, He appeared to them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He wanted them to be aware of His presence. He wanted them to know that He was there

⁴ C. Austin Miles, “In the Garden” *Hymns of Glorious Praise* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House) p. 304.

⁵ Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941) p. 124.

⁶ Psalm 27:4

for them. They could rest in that presence knowing that He would protect them and care for them. He gave them a visible, outward sign to help them trust Him during their journey. But He has given you and me something far better. He has sent the blessed Holy Spirit to help us through our journey.

Listen to Jesus promise in John 14:16 (Amplified Bible) “*And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, and Standby), that He may remain with you forever.*” All those words in that verse are efforts to fully translate one Greek word, *Parakletos*. *Parakletos* is made up of two parts: *Para* means “to the side of,” and *kaleoo* “to summon.” So the Holy Spirit is one who is called to our side to help us.⁷ He is with you every breathing moment of every day. “*I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand....*” I am aware of His presence. I’m interacting with Him in my heart. I’m thinking about Him; I’m even thinking *with* Him.

We are all aware of those things that we have set our mind on. Jeanie and I can go into a café together. When we walk out, she can tell you what colors were in the décor, what designed worked and looked good, what didn’t go with what. I never noticed any of it. I could, however, tell you a lot about how well the place was managed, where the inefficiencies were, maybe even the general morale of the team. There are some restaurants I avoid because I can hardly bear the ineptness of the leadership. It’s not just that I want good service for me. Awareness of the mismanagement makes it hard to choke down even good food. There was one restaurant Jeanie wouldn’t go back to because the décor was too repulsive. It didn’t bother me because I wasn’t even aware there was a decorating problem.

When a playboy walks in a room, he is aware of who he might hit on. A con man is looking for a target. His antenna is on that frequency.

An evangelist walks in the same room and sees people in need of Christ. His antenna is on that frequency. He’s aware of people who might be open to the gospel.

People are aware of very different things in exactly the same room. What frequency is your antenna set on? What have you set your mind on?

Psalm 16:8, “*I have set the LORD always before me....*” First and foremost, I am aware of His presence with me. I give attention to His presence. I cultivate a sensitivity to Him by thinking about Him and talking with Him. When there is a pause in my activities, I look toward Him. I may ask Him to help me with the next thing I’m about to do. I may say a quick prayer for one of you as He brings you to my mind. I may thank Him for the beautiful day. During that break, it may be only five seconds long, we talk. We cultivate our friendship. We enjoy each other’s presence. I’m having an ongoing internal conversation with my best Friend. I talk with Him about big things, but I also talk with Him about little details of my life. As I’m pulling an item off the shelf at the grocery store I ask Him to help me pull the right brand. That kind of thing doesn’t make a lot of difference in my life. But that’s what I’m doing at the moment, that’s the decision I’m making and I’m involving Him in everything I’m doing. Since He is infinite, no problem is too big for Him and nothing I’m doing is too small to converse with Him about it. I don’t have to be weird and tell everybody that God told me to buy Kellogg’s brand cereal. I could have picked a cereal without Him. But I like talking with Him and He likes talking with me, so we talk with each other even about the little things that are going on. If I live that way, it’s not hard to get in a conversation with Him about big problems. We’re already in fellowship; we just pick up where we left off.

⁷ (from *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft).

“*I have set the LORD always before me....*” I center my thoughts on the Lord like the needle on a compass. I cultivate an awareness of His presence.

III. Involve Him in Everything I’m doing throughout the day.

In church this morning, each of us had a unique worship experience. That experience was significantly affected by the choices we made: the choice to engage in worship; the choice to listen for His voice during the sermon. None of that is just happening to us. We are setting our mind on the Lord and interacting with Him. But it is the same issue throughout the week. I can be on the job exclusively focused on the problems at hand and not even aware that God is with me or I can be interacting with Him and including Him in everything I’m doing.

When I am conducting a mediation at my office, I am thinking on several different levels all at the same time. I am listening to the words that are being said. I am also listening to the emotions being expressed for clues as to what is going on below the surface in each party. Then I am relating that to any legal issues that may apply and also developing strategy as to what direction I need to take the conversation. At the same time I may be writing notes or typing statements for the agreement. But above and beyond all of that I am in a running conversation with the Lord. I am asking Him to speak to the disputants’ hearts and soften them toward one another. I am asking Him to give me wisdom as to what to say and what to do next. I am listening for any instruction He may give me.

We all have the ability to think on multiple levels at the same time. I can be filling my car with gas, observing the red Durango driving by on the street, and thinking about what Suzie said this morning all at the same time. So setting our mind on the Lord is doable for each and every one of us. It is something we have to choose to do. It is something we have learn to do more effectively. But it is doable. In his book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Bro. Lawrence recommends that we accustom ourselves to this by degrees.⁸ Learn little by little to fill in the gaps with a word of thanks to the Lord, or a question to Him about a matter, or quick prayer for someone. In the same way a musician learns to play the key of C, then learns the sharps, then the flats, then minors, etc. we learn to set the Lord always before us. Elaine did not learn to play the piano the way she does overnight. But there was a day that she decided to do it and a day that she started, and many days that she kept at it. Practice, Practice, Practice: you just begin from where you are and keep at it.

Everything we do should be a joint project carried on by us and our senior consultant, the Holy Spirit. We don’t just consult with Him during morning devotions; we talk with Him all through the day. This is abiding⁹ in the vine, drawing upon His wisdom, drawing upon His strength, never going it alone. To abide in Christ (John 15) is to stay vitally connected with Him, drawing upon His grace in all that we do. If I’m trying to figure out a computer software program, I’m asking for His help as I do it. If I’m maneuvering through traffic, I’m asking Him to give me patience. Then when things calm down, I’m thanking Him for the help. I don’t work alone, ever.

This is the way Jesus lived. In John 5:17 He said, “*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.*” It’s not either/or; it’s not just that God is doing something and it’s not just that I’m doing something. We do it together. I’m not in this by myself! He goes on to say in verse 19 “*Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.*” I take my cues from the Father. I’m looking to

⁸Bro. Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God: Being Conversations and Letters of Nicholas Herman of Lorraine*, translated from French (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co.) p. 40.

⁹Psalm 91

Him at all times. Verse 30 *“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”* Jesus lived His life on earth in dependence on the Father. Everything He did, He did empowered by the Holy Spirit. And that is the way we are to live. He has called us to the same lifestyle.

The invitation is, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”* (Matt 11:28-30). The yoke is easy because He is in there yoked with us and pulling the load. Life is hard when we’re trying to pull the load all alone. Life is lonely when we are not interacting with the Lord. We are designed for relationship. There is an epidemic of loneliness in America. We’re more connected through technology than ever, and at the same time more lonely than ever. I read a study this week that researched the effect of our intercourse on Facebook. It found Facebook to be something that gives people a momentary feeling of connectedness, but then in the long run actually leaves them feeling more isolated.¹⁰ There is a lot that could be said about interpersonal relationships. But I do want to make this point: part of the solution to our loneliness is learning to abide in Christ, learning to live in a continual conversation with God, learning to involve Him in all we do. A relationship with God does not fully substitute for relationships with people. On the other hand, multiple relationships with people will never substitute for a healthy relationship with God. We need both and only God can give us both.

We’re talking about doing life with God, rather than just *for* God. We’re talking about an orientation toward God in our thought life. We’re talking about putting God at the center of all our activities.

If we live in constant interaction with the Lord in that way, even the most menial task becomes worship unto the Lord. If we carry on a conversation with the Lord all week in that manner, it is very easy to move into worship during a church service. All of life becomes a worship time; the church service simply becomes the culmination of our intimacy with the Lord throughout the week. The same could be said of prayer. The most important aspect of prayer is to incorporate it into our daily lives in the way we are talking about this morning. The special prayer meetings are simply an extension of that lifestyle.

One of the major hindrances to Christian growth and development is the compartmentalizing of our lives. The person sets aside a few hours a week to religious activity; then lives his real life the rest of the time. So he’s excluding God from 90% of his life. This is why you encounter people who are very pious as they sit on the pew Sunday morning; but you sure don’t want to do business with them Monday morning, because they will lie, cheat, and steal and simply say, *“But that’s business.”* God wants all of it. He wants to be involved in every part of your life—not because He is a hard task master, but because He wants to help us along on our journey.

Practicing the presence of God in our daily lives builds our affinity toward the Lord. The more we interact with Him, the more we want to be with Him. Friendships with people are developed by spending time and conversation together. We bond with others as we have shared experiences with them. This is also true in developing our relationship with the Lord. We bond with Him emotionally as we walk with Him and talk with Him and work with Him and make Him the center of our lives. Religion segments life in a dichotomy of sacred and secular. But the Holy Spirit has come to bring wholeness to every aspect of our lives. He has come that we might have life and live it to the full with Him.

How many have decided to set your mind on the Lord?

¹⁰ Ethan Kross, Philippe Verduyn, et al., “Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults,” <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0069841> (accessed March 28, 2015).

Life Church

Set Your Mind on the Lord

Romans 8:5

3-29-15

Intro

- A. Rom. 8:5 “...those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (NIV).
- B. Psalm 16:8 “I have set the LORD always before me....”
- C. What does Setting Mind on Lord Involve?

I. Center my Thoughts on the Lord

- A. Like needle of Compass
- B. Alpha and Omega (Gen. 1:1—1Cor. 15:28)
Humanism v God-Centered
- C. Benefits of setting mind on the Lord
Ps 16:8-9; Isa 26:3; Acts 27
- D. Contrasted by those in Rom. 1:28

II. Cultivate Awareness of God’s Presence

- A. Bro. Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of the God*
Gen. 28:16
2Kings 6
John 14:16 Parakletos
- B. Aware of that to which we give attention to
- C. Cultivate awareness by talking with Him even on little things

III. Involve Him in Everything I do

- A. Experiences affected by Choice to Engage
- B. We Think on Multiple Levels
- C. Everything should be Joint-Project with Spirit
Abiding in the Vine (Jn 15): staying vitally connected
Jesus Example (John 5:17, 19, 30)
Loneliness
- D. Even most Menial Tasks become Worship
Compartmentalizing life
Friendship Built through Shared Experience

How will you advance in your practice of the presence of God?

Possible Discussion Questions

Set Your Mind on the Lord

1. How do you currently cultivate awareness of God's presence in your daily life?
2. How do you want to increase your awareness of God's presence with you?
3. Do you consider everything you do as a joint project with God?
Are some things too trivial to involve God? Why or why not?
4. How does a lifestyle of interaction with God affect your special prayer times?
How does a lifestyle of interaction with God affect your special worship times?
5. How does a continual conversation with God benefit the believer?
6. What is God speaking to you about this subject?