

DAY 1 (week starting Monday 9th July 2018)**Read - Matthew 7:24-29**

Above all else, guard your heart, for from it flow the springs of life. Prov 4:23

We live from the heart. The part of us that drives and organizes our life is not physical, it comes from that part of us that we often call “the heart”, which is made up of our thoughts, our feelings and our will. These are the inner forces in us that produce our outward actions and our behaviour.

The human spirit is a fundamental aspect of every human being, and it takes on whichever character it has from the experiences and the choices we have lived through or made in the past. When the human spirit has been marred by bad choices and decisions that we have made, then our actions and our behaviour will display that brokenness. So when we look at the transformation that a relationship with Jesus brings about in our lives, the most important part of that transformation happens in our heart – that inner place where our thinking, our feelings and our decision-making take place. To build our lives on the “rock”, which is Jesus, is the beginning and the foundation of the transformation of the heart, so that our heart becomes more and more like the heart of Jesus.

In our meditations this week we will be looking at how this inner transformation takes place, and in particular the part that our minds and our thinking play in this process. How the inner part of our thinking can be changed.

***Lord I come to you
Let my heart be changed, renewed
Flowing from the grace that I've found in you
And Lord I've come to know
The weaknesses I see in me
Will be stripped away by the power of your love***

DAY 2**Read - Matthew 7:15-23**

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. v18

Clearly Jesus is saying that if someone is inherently bad at the core, their actions will produce bad fruit. And conversely, if someone is inherently good at the core, their actions will produce good fruit.

But is Jesus therefore saying that if you are a bad tree you will always be a bad tree? You are what you are and you cannot change? Just as a leopard cannot change its spots, bad luck, you are pre-destined to be a bad tree? Absolutely not! At the very heart of the Christian gospel is the good news that any man or woman who sincerely turns to God can be changed at the deepest level of their life. They can be spiritually born again. Their heart and mind can change. How they think can change. *“If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation, to old has gone, the new has come.” 2 Cor 5:17*

People can change from being a bad tree that bears bad fruit, into a good tree that bears good fruit. It has happened to millions of people in the last two thousand years since Jesus walked among us. People have changed from being the most broken and despicable human beings, to Christ-followers living amazing lives and making a positive difference in the world. Some have even become saints.

How would you rate yourself right now? A good tree bearing good fruit? A bad tree bearing bad fruit? Perhaps a bit of both? Maybe you have slipped a bit? Talk to Jesus about it. What needs to happen

DAY 3**Read - Romans 12:1-2**

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. v2

Just as we first turned away from God in our thoughts, so it is in our minds and our thoughts that the first movements toward the renovation of the heart must happen. Thoughts are the place where we can and must begin to change.

Christians are called to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world”, with its behaviour and customs that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Many Christians wisely decide that much worldly behaviour is off limits to them. Our refusal to conform to this world’s values, however, must go even deeper than the level of behaviour and customs – it must be firmly planted in our minds – “be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” It is possible to avoid most worldly customs and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn and arrogant. Only when the Holy Spirit renews, re-educates and redirects our minds are we truly transformed. (Life Application Bible p2050)

So how do we renew our minds and our thinking? We can start is by reading and meditating on God’s Word. Read a passage of scripture every day, pray about it and allow it to sink into your mind and your being. Writing down your thoughts as you meditate in a note-book you keep for this purpose is also a big help (this is called journaling). Ask God to speak to you through what you are reading.

***Lord unveil my eyes,
Let me see you face to face
The knowledge of your love as you live in me
Lord renew my mind
As your will unfolds in my life
In living every day in the power of your love***

DAY 4

Read – 2 Corinthians 5:16-19

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! v17

To have our minds and our thoughts renewed, so that we begin to think as Jesus would think, is partly the work of God in us, and partly the result of the effort we ourselves must put in to make that a reality.

God's grace, through the power of the Holy Spirit works in us. Our sins are forgiven and we are given a new start. We have been born again in the Spirit and we can rejoice because so much is new for us. This is the miracle of God's grace.

But that is just the beginning. Now we start a journey of growth that will continue for the rest of our days. This is the journey that will slowly make us more like Jesus, so that we begin to think and act as he would think and act. With the daily help and companionship of our Lord we must strive to bring every part of our character and our lives into line with his will. Sometimes we will make progress, and sometimes we will fall. But we must get up and try do better next time. Sometimes we will feel deeply blessed, and sometimes we will say with Paul, "*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, and what I hate I do!*" (Rom 5:15).

But always remember that the Christian life is a friendship with Jesus. He walks with us and helps us in his risen presence. We are not alone. We can talk to him along the way. He comes alongside us when we are weak. He is with us in our joy and our successes. The Christian life is not a do-it-yourself thing, it is a power-assisted life. God's Holy Spirit is always with us and in us.

Thank you Jesus that you are always near.

DAY 5

Read – Matthew 23:25-28

First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. v26

Jesus was criticizing the Pharisees, but he is also pointing us to an important truth here. Just as your body will become a product of what you eat and put into it, so our minds and our thinking are shaped by what we put into them. As they say in the computer world, "junk in, junk out". The things we fill our minds with have direct effect on our behaviour and ultimately, our character. If we watch pornographic movies, or movies full of violence and killing, or movies full of hatred and anger, or full of swearing and foul language, it has an effect on us. Think also of the books we read, or the music we listen to. Think too of the company we keep. When we are surrounded by bad characters, whether friends or family, or people we work with, or play sport with, it has a subtle and negative impact on us. These things sow seeds of ugliness in our psyche. It is difficult to filter out all the bad things that come across our path every day, but as far as we are able to, we should try to avoid such things.

Instead it is important to fill our minds and our lives with good and positive things. Listen to these words of Paul, "*Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*" ((Phil 4:8) These things will not happen by themselves. It will take a conscious effort on our part. But as you try, it will become easier and easier. They say that if you force yourself to do something for three weeks it will become a habit and it will become a natural part of what you do.

Spend some time thinking and praying about the things that fill your life.

DAY 6

Read – Isaiah 26:1-4

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. v3

A dear friend and mentor once said that the most important thing in my friendship with God was to take care of my mind. "Guard your mind", were his exact words to me. It was an important and encouraging word for me. After all, choosing what we fill our minds with affects our whole lives. It colours our feelings, influences our moods and shapes our behaviour. Thoughts matter. The good news of God's peace comes to us first of all through our minds. We also make contact with God through our thoughts. Let me explain this a bit more as we travel down the Serenity Path.

Centuries ago Isaiah wrote, "*You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you*" (Is 26:3). Think about that for a moment. We know the peace of God as we learn to keep God in mind. So, when we begin a new task, we do so with God. If we hear bad news, we remind ourselves of God's nearness. When something good happens, we thank God. Developing this daily habit of turning our thoughts towards God deepens our sense of God's closeness and accessibility. In the words of Brother Lawrence, we are starting to practice the Presence of God. As a result, our minds are opened to receive God's gift of peace. I hope you will find this out for yourself.

(Trevor Hudson. "The Serenity Path" – Day 14)

Blessed Jesus touch my life,

Come and live in me

Cleanse me from all sin and strife,

Jesus set me free

Fill my heart with your great love,

Never let me go.

Blessed Jesus let me be, yours and yours alone