

Reprogramming our thinking is indispensable for the Christian life. Scripture tells us that transformation involves the renewing of our mind, and it is hard to see how any progress toward sanctification could occur without it. Real spiritual food is to do the will of the Father, and life to the full is the result. We make a mistake if we think only of the reward in practicing obedience, because we make doing God's will a chore that must be endured until we receive the prize of life to the full. We will not last long in the Christian life this way, so a transformation of our thinking to seeing obedience as the reward is necessary. To help us toward this goal we will begin to change our thinking this week through the following practices:

Day 1

Re-asses responsibility.

Why did God have to make reality the way he did? Have you ever found yourself thinking about this? Why did God have to make all the foods that are bad for you taste so good? Why did God make all the fun stuff so dangerous? Why did God make teenagers so reckless? There are thousands of these questions that occur to us all the time. It's one of the things that makes obedience so difficult, as we look at the trials of our life and think God could have made everything so much easier. If only God was as smart and as good as us! The truth is that God made the world great, but that sin is the reason why we face so many trials, difficulties, and so much pain. The reason you like all the calorie rich food is so that your ancestors didn't starve to death eating sprouts when a dead cow was right there in front of them. They didn't understand calories, but they understood how good BBQ was. We find fun in danger because if we didn't, the world would never get filled and subdued, and if teenagers weren't reckless, they would never really learn anything. God made the world exactly the way it needed to be made, so rather than assigning Him the responsibility for pain, disappointment, and tragedy, maybe we should understand that it was human sin that caused all the problems. Not only was God innocent in the tragedy of life, but God walks through the tragedy of our lives with us, helping us to see the glory of the world He created, and taking all the pain and suffering of our sins on Himself in the person of Jesus. Just because the world isn't convenient for me in the moment doesn't mean it isn't good. The issue is with me and my vision, my assessment of responsibility. When I start to see the glory of the way God made the world, I start to change my attitude about the goodness of obedience.

Verses: Psalm 11:7; Ephesians 4:22-24; Romans 3:23; Psalm 33:4

Prayer Topics: God's righteousness, Man's sin, Humility, Wisdom, Gratitude

Day 2

Think "Who," not "What".

I've mentioned that my grandson Mason is the happiest 4 year old on the planet. Mason's happiness means he's up for just about anything. You can ask him if he wants to go to the tax preparers convention and he would respond in the positive enthusiastically. Of course he doesn't know what that is, but that's the point. Most of the time, if you are going somewhere, he wants to go too. He very rarely knows what is ahead, but that doesn't really matter because he knows who he is going with. When he lived in South Korea he would cry if his dad went downstairs to the mailbox without him. That's really the point of obedience. When we are obedient, we are walking with God. It doesn't really matter what God calls us to, it matters who we are going with. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they hid themselves from God. In the parable of the prodigal son, it is the son who leaves the father, not the father the son. Jesus says that He stands at the door and knocks, and often we ask what he brought us instead of just opening the door. The reward of obedience is being in the presence of God. To seek any other reward is

to seek something less than we could have. God can give us nothing greater than himself, because nothing greater exists. Jesus said that we will face persecution. The reason is simple. They persecuted Him. Jesus said that He was one with the father, and his joy was so radiant that people followed him wherever he went. When we are one with God, the same will be true for us.

Verses: Micah 6:8; Psalm 119:10-11; Genesis 5:24; Galatians 5:16; Matthew 6:33

Prayer Topics: Walking with God, Fellowship with God, Relationship with God, Obedience

Day 3

Practice active gratitude.

It is always tempting to see the events of our lives as either tools or obstacles to some reward. The stock market goes up, and we are closer to retirement. We get a Christmas bonus, and we can put in a new swimming pool, and if we don't, we just have our cousin Eddie kidnap our boss. We tend to evaluate everything by whether it gets us closer to, or farther away from, our goals and desires. The problem is, this way of thinking actually makes us miserable. If the only reason I exercise is for the way I look in the mirror, then I will find my exercise makes me more and more miserable until I find that I can not bring myself to do it any longer. If I train myself to actively look for things in seeking of the reward to be grateful for, and in doing so make the work toward the reward the real reward, I will find that the work of seeking out the reward becomes more pleasurable in itself. God desires us to become more industrious not just so that we will have more things, but because industriousness is a good in itself, for it is one of His qualities. God desires us to be patient, not just because some blessings will come our way that wouldn't otherwise but because He is patient. Through so many of the trials and hardships of life we find that there are so many hidden blessings that can be found if you are willing to look. Active gratitude is a kind of gratitude that goes beyond seeing the obvious in the reward to finding the hidden blessings in the work, the trials, and the hardships that lay between us and the reward. When we actively look for things in our life to be grateful for we open our eyes up to the many blessings we may have missed. We start to see that the blessings of obedience come before the fruit is fully matured, that instead it is there from the start, it is there as long as we are walking with God.

Verses: Colossians 3:15-20; Psalm 107:1; Psalm 100:1-5

Prayer Topics: Thanksgiving, Joy, Gratitude, Discernment, Having eyes and ears opened

Day 4

Change the inputs.

We are bombarded everyday with endless messages. There are opportunities for silence to be sure, but they are only found if sought. I remember my first walk-man was not a walk-man but a GPX knock-off. I also remember (old) people saying how ridiculous it was to listen to music everywhere you went. The reality was that the expense of batteries made it near impossible for me to listen to music everywhere I went, and that silence was still a common companion. The pervasiveness of modern media means that we are seeing more messages and each message has an agenda. The agenda is generally not contentment, gratitude for blessing, and the benefit of work and sacrifice before reward. Most of the time, the message is buy now, take shortcuts, and that we are owed something, by someone, somewhere. If we are going to transform our thinking so that we can experience the joy of obedience we will find it necessary to change the inputs, to change the messages that we receive on a regular basis. Scripture's admonition to us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds will be almost impossible if we do not do something to change the way we are assaulted with inputs that are antithetical to the

biblical worldview. This week, try switching off some of the inputs that do not represent God's perspective. Try leaving the television off more often. Try taking a break from social media. Leave your phone unattended for a few hours a day. Read your bible and pray more regularly. See what happens when you change the inputs.

Verses: Romans 8:5-6; Philippians 4:8; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Romans 12:2

Prayer Topics: Hearing God's voice, Self-talk, God's word, Satan's lies, purity

Day 5

Live in grace.

The world measures worth by performance. We are what we can produce. In the kingdom things work differently. All value in God's kingdom comes from Him, and Him alone. Everything that has value gets that value from reflecting some of the glory of God. To have any value is a gift from Him. To be connected to God as a vine to its branches is the only source of any value, and it comes not from our strength or righteousness, but flows directly from the grace of God. God had no need to create us and bestow us with glory and value, but desired out of love to share his goodness with us. God created a world that reveals its nature as it shows us the character and nature, the glory, of the God who designed and brought all things into being. We have the opportunity as humans to see this glory in the world all around us in a way that no other creature can. We also have the opportunity to live in gratitude for the unmerited gift of imaging our great and glorious God. Not only this, but we can live in the knowledge that God, far beyond the grace of our creation, redeemed us when we walked away from Him, the source of our glory and value. What an amazing thing to live as beloved children who have not only been created, but redeemed by the love of our God. What better thing is there in this world than to walk with Him in every circumstance in life, to know that in the ups and downs, the glory, and the pain of life we are united to Him and can reflect His majesty in all situations. This is a much more full and rich life available to us than the one we experience when we are just doing work for wages, just getting through experiences to reach a reward.

Verses: Matthew 20:1-16; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 2:8-9

Prayer Topics: Love, Grace, Gratitude, Joy, Worship