

**1** It has been said you are what you eat and that would have went well with Pastor Larry's message on taking care of our bodies that started off this series of messages we are doing here at Fredericksburg UMC on Better Health. But I think as we move in this series on Better Health to talking about having better mind health we might say, "You are what you think."

We really are what we think, church. How we view the world, how we view ourselves, how we view others, how we view the events around us- all those things are shaped by our thoughts. I am always amazed about how great a mystery the human brain is to us human beings and how we have not even come close to fully understanding it and its vast power and intricacies. It is just amazing and a testament to the Creator's hand.

And, like our bodies, how we take care of our minds **2** and the thoughts we allow to enter our minds is really a stewardship issue. Just like our money and possessions so our minds are gifts from God that can be used to bring him glory by serving him and others.

We all know people for whom their mindset defines them both positively and negatively. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 23:7, "For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

On the negative side we have probably each come across folks with sour dispositions with no hope and little good to say. There are many forces both internal and external that can cause our minds to become less than God intends them to be. Sometimes it is feelings of unworthiness, bitterness or self-pity that reduce us to less than we really are. Sometimes a possessive nature, self-indulgence, self-protectiveness and self-centeredness can cause the soul to shrivel, create dysfunction within our minds, skew our perspectives and prevent healing. The problem with all of this whether it is self-made or from forces from the outside is that it is difficult to have a mind filled with flawed, pessimistic, cynical thinking and live and influential life for the Kingdom of God.

But thanks be to God that the Bible gives us a healthier way for us to care for the health of our minds. Those who fill their mind with positive affirmations, who concentrate on noble virtues that make life meaningful, these people set the stage for healing and wholeness and becoming all that God created us to be and experience. See church 2000 years before Tony Robbins, Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Shuler, Robert Kiyosaki, Napoleon Hill, T Harv Eker, Wayne Dyer and host of others there was Paul of Tarsus who said in our scripture this morning, **3** *“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.”*

Unlike our mindset gurus of today and previous years Paul is not concerned with followers of Jesus meditating on these things so they can get rich, be more productive at work, or reach a Zen like state, no, Paul says think about these things so we can bring glory to God by serving God and serving others. It is then that followers of Jesus experience that peace that comes only from God. In verse 9 Paul continues...*“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”*

What Paul is saying here church is that when we get our mind right, when we nurture healthful habits of the mind, we will be like the **4** *“tree firmly planted by streams of waters which yields its fruit in season”* that the Psalmist speaks about in Psalm 1. Paul’s message is that it is with a healthy mind engaged in service to God and others we find the peace and wholeness that comes from God. Peace of mind, grounded in Christ Jesus’ work on the cross and in the Word of God, brings forth good works in love. It makes sense that we would do as Paul instructs and feed our minds with a diet of eternal truths about God’s character, how he loves us, and how all of his promises have been made true in Jesus Christ. Paul writes in Romans chapter 12, *“Do*

*not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Having shared all this with you and given you some background about the Bible reading let me spend the rest of our time helping us recognize some truths to recognize when it comes to fostering a healthy mind in good stewardship of God's gifts and then I want to share with you some intensely practical ways you and I can foster a health mind.

Let's face it church maintaining a healthy mind in our world is no easy thing. We first need to recognize that the deck is stacked **5** against us! It is easy to in our world to let things creep into our mind from our society and culture that are not noble, right, admirable, praiseworthy or excellent. There is a battle raging all around us for our minds and I am afraid the media and culture is winning. While many of these things are no bad or evil in and of themselves they allow negativity and hopelessness and other unhelpful things to come into our mind. From Facebook and Instagram to twenty-four hour news to negative people at work and in our families to reality television, it is as hard as ever to maintain a healthy mind.

What this means is that if we are going to be good stewards of our minds that God has given us we must be deliberate and intentional about it. It is kind of funny with Pastor Larry talking about the need to have healthy bodies last week that in our day it is all the rage to be deliberate about our food, right? I mean we count calories, read labels, check out ingredients, download healthy recipes, spend hours at the gym and yet you and I are rather mindless about the spiritual, emotional and intellectual content of the thoughts and ideas we consume. Going back to our scripture the people Paul was writing his letter to experienced a world and culture that cultivated that cultivated a mind that focused on what was false, dishonorable, unjust, unfair and shameful. It was in such a world back then and to us living in the world today that Paul called

upon followers of Jesus to focus on a different reality brought to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus so that we would not fall into despair because yes indeed in our world and their world back then the deck is stacked against us.

A second truth to recognize when it comes to fostering a healthy mind is that getting our minds right comes not from within us but from a power that is beyond **6** us. The writer of the Psalms writes, *“I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.”* Unlike some of our modern folks that call us to look within ourselves to find our power and gain a healthy mindset, the follower of Jesus looks beyond himself or herself to an external power- to God Himself, the Lord, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. When we do this it is an antidote, a cure, for the half-truths and lies we have been fed either by society or by other people. Isn't it great that we do not have to rely on our weak selves that are prone to mistake and error but instead we can rely on the holy, perfect, powerful Creator of the Universe.

A third truth when it comes to cultivating a healthy mind is to recognize that the health of our minds need not be dependent on our current circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Paul, when he writes this letter, and when he says to think these great thoughts, is writing from a jail cell. He was living under a brutal regime and under the constant threat at any time they could come and execute him. Yet, Paul did not let his circumstance define his mindset. Paul not only called the receivers of his letter to think great thoughts and have a healthy mindset he practiced it himself. So many times we cannot control outside forces friends, but we can control how we respond to them. We have to live in the world. We have to hear and absorb and experience things that are not necessarily helpful for a healthy mind, but we do not have to let those things win and rule us because we have one who has promised to always be with us no matter what.

Let me give you some real practical ways now to foster a healthy mindset. One way to do this is to start with scripture. **8** This might be a daily Bible reading, scripture memorization so that God's word becomes implanted in your heart. You might download the Spoken Bible App and listen to it on your commute or while working out. You might listen to Christian music which often contains scriptural truths. By doing this you will be filling your mind with the things of God. You will be filling your mind with things that are noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, praiseworthy and excellent.

A second way to fill your mind with things that are noble, right, pure, lovely admirable, praiseworthy and excellent is to spend time connecting with the Creator. **9** Keeping in touch with the outside and with nature points us to the Creator so that we can enjoy God's beauty and rest our minds from all that runs through them both good and bad. It is what the writer of Psalm 8 was doing when he said "*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*" Maybe you and I can connect with the creator through physical activity- hiking, running or biking on wooded trails, walking on the beach or whatever it is we like to do. Research has demonstrated that exercise can have a profound effect on the mind.

Last way I want to share with you today to help us cultivate a healthy mind and be good stewards of what God has given us is to get proper rest. **10** This is one God commanded and practiced all the way back in the first book of the Bible- Genesis. Our minds need to rest. God knew this. When we refuse to rest we are being disobedient and harming not only our physical health but also our mental health. It has been said that God can do more with our six days of work and one day of rest than we can do with our seven days of work. God rested. Shouldn't we?

Before I end this morning let me say a quick word because it would be easy to leave this morning and think that if you are struggling with some form of what we have come to call mental illness or any struggle concerning the mind that somehow you might be less of a follower of Jesus. I want to say loud and clear there could be nothing further from the truth. No matter where we are in any of this God loves you and I at this moment as much as he ever has and ever will whether you have had things happen to you that cause you to struggle or you have something physical that causes you to struggle. He loves you and me. God has given us a gift by speaking through Paul and encouraging to think on the things that are noble, right, true, lovely, admirable, praiseworthy and excellent. But for some of us God also has given to us the gift of medicine we may need for a healthy mind. God's gift to help us have a healthy mind also comes through trained professionals who we can go to for help to keep our minds as healthy as possible. I hope we can all support one another in this endeavor to care for the minds we have been given to the end that God might receive the glory. Let us pray.