

Renovation series	2. Renovation of the Mind	3/12/2006
B 2Lent	Mark 8.34-35, Colossians 3.1-10	(Preach date)
C Proper 13 (Colossians)	by Tim Isbell	

Thesis: The ultimate freedom we have as humans is the power to select what we allow or direct our minds to dwell on.

(This sermon is part of the series: Renovation, based on Dallas Willard's book Renovation of the Heart. I strongly recommend that you read the book.)

Read Mark 8.34-35.

Can I let you in on a secret? Sometimes I get spiritually stuck.

It happened to me a few weeks ago. I listened to a CD by Dallas Willard, and it reminded me that he wrote a book titled *Renovation of the Heart*. And it struck me that another dose of renovation of my heart is what I needed. So I dusted it off my shelf.

Read it back in 2003 and made some cryptic notes on yellow paper. So I skimmed my yellow paper notes, which convinced me to page back through the entire book to reread all the underlined stuff. And that convinced me to reread the whole book.

Every page spoke to me fresh, and I got much more from it than the 1st reading. I realized that I needed to absorb everything Dallas Willard had to say about reforming my heart.

Today I'm back to it again to unpacking some concentric circles that Willard used as illustrations in the book.

Concentric circles

These are the six essential aspects of life. They are highly interrelated, but it's helpful to think of them as concentric circles.

Spiritual formation is the process of leading us to the point where all six parts are organized around God as they are restored and sustained in him.

Each circle does not exclude the outer ones but incorporates them in part.

You might expect that the order for renovating these six circles starts from the inner or the outer one, but it is most helpful to start with the second one: the Mind. Then move to the innermost one, then to Body, Social, and Soul.

(I've included "Body" as one of the circles, but I do not have a sermon to post for that one. On that Sunday, I preached other material from this series in our Mandarin and Cantonese worship services, and someone else preached the Body leg of the series for

me in the English service. I don't have a copy of their notes. So you can either edit the concentric circle PPT slide to omit the Body circle or develop it yourself from chapter 9 of Dallas Willard's book: Renovation of the Heart. I suppose there's a good 3rd alternative: encourage your congregation to read the book and especially look at Chapter 9. Sorry about that.)

Today: The Mind

The ultimate freedom we have as humans is the power to select what we allow or direct our minds to dwell on.

Consider the mind in 2 dimensions: thoughts and feelings.

Thoughts

We cannot evoke thoughts by feeling a certain way, but we can stimulate and, to some degree, control our feelings by directing our thoughts.

Four main factors

1. Ideas are very general assumptions about reality.

Examples: freedom is every person's right, there's a solution to every problem, my problems are insolvable, science explains everything, my children should be happy when I discipline them, there are not enough hours in the day, the housing market will crash soon, the internet makes people more connected, every kid needs a computer in her room, I am blessed, my children's future depends on me making the right decisions about care and education, progress is inherently good, politicians are crooked, democracy is the best government, evolution explains the species – God created all things, gays should be able to marry – or they shouldn't, a woman should have the right to choose abortion – or she shouldn't, chastity before marriage is good – living together before marriage is modern courtship.

Renovation of our thoughts involves recognizing the evil idea systems in our surrounding culture and replacing these with the idea system that Jesus embodied and taught.

That's part of what it means to be an apprentice to Jesus.

2. Images are mental pictures or icons that connect our minds to idea systems.

The American flag, Christian cross, burning crosses of the KKK, donkey/elephant for Democrats/Republicans, pornography, MTV, Cosmo girl, Rolex watches, alarm clock ringing, emergency vehicle siren, Twin Towers, Statue of Liberty, baby's new sound, baggy pants on young men, body piercings, tattoos.

In our culture, we're proud of our freedom to see and hear anything. Satan loves when we exercise this freedom, for he paralyzes many professing Christians who have adopted this pseudo-free lifestyle. Many of us allow images into our minds that eventually overwhelm us. Nothing enters the mind without having an impact toward good

or evil.

Teaching point: Ideas and images are the primary strongholds of evil in humans; they are the primary focus of Satan's efforts to defeat God's purposes.

Temptation in the garden was Satan planting the idea that God was depriving Adam/Eve of something good by his command not to eat the fruit, so we think we are wise to push the image of God out of our mind and replace his image with our own.

Temptation defined:

- The thought of sin is not sinning; it is not even temptation.
- Temptation is the thought plus the inclination to sin; it often includes lingering over the idea and seeking it out.
- Sin itself is when we inwardly say "yes" to the temptation, whether we act it out or not.

The Renovation of the Mind is to progressively replace destructive images and ideas with the images and ideas that filled the mind of Jesus. Substituting healthy images is part of our apprenticeship to Jesus.

3. Information is accepting reality as fact.

There's much misinformation in our culture about God and real goodness.

Failure to know what God is like and what his law requires destroys the soul. The only way to get the right information about God is from the Bible.

4. Thinking is the activity of searching out what must be true or what cannot be true in light of the given facts or assumptions.

Thinking extends the information we have so we can see the larger picture.

To serve God, we must think straight; crooked thinking, intentional or not, always favors evil.

To think of God truthfully leads invariably to worship. Worship is the single most potent force in completing and sustaining restoration in the whole person.

The way forward

Memorize scripture. Rather than random verses, memorize some key passages such as Col 3.1-10.

Carefully choose what we feed our minds: good images, good stories, and good poetry.

A destructive image stuck in my mind earlier this week. While driving, I told God that I need help replacing it with something else, but I didn't know how – and didn't think he had a solution either. Within 15 seconds, I turned a corner, and there was a huge rainbow.

I looked at it and said, nice try, God, but I don't think that will replace the image. But he reminded me that he gave me the freedom to choose what I feed my mind. So I tried turning my mind from the image to the rainbow but doubted it would help. But the rainbow crowded out the image. A few days later, God gave me another image to go

alongside the rainbow.

Connect with others who are serious about reforming their minds.

Try a Transformation Partnership. (For more on this, go to www.isbellonline.org > Christian Teachings > [Transformation Partnership](#).) SOMEHOW FIND SOME FRIENDS WHO ARE AS SERIOUS ABOUT REFORMING THEIR MINDS.

Feelings

Feelings are a primary blessing and a primary problem in human life.

We cannot master feelings head-on. That's why we don't start with feelings; we start by adjusting our thought-life, and our feelings will follow. It does not work the other way around.

People whose feelings master them are people who believe that their feelings must be satisfied in their hearts.

A healthy person knows that they do not have to fulfill destructive feelings. Such people let God be God; they trust God in everything, including trusting him with their feelings.

To be formed into Christlikeness, we must take good care of our feelings and not just let them happen.

Do not deny feelings – instead, replace destructive feelings with good feelings or subordinate destructive ones.

Distinguish feelings from their underlying conditions and then act on the underlying condition.

<i>Feeling of ...</i>	<i>Underlying condition:</i>
<i>Anger</i>	<i>Fear, frustration, hurt</i>
<i>Anxiety</i>	<i>Perfectionism, ambition, over-scheduled</i>
<i>Being in love</i>	<i>Loving relationship</i>
<i>Resentment</i>	<i>Unforgiveness</i>

Feelings spread and can take over the mind.

When they do, it's tough to reason with them because their feelings have control.

Addiction occurs when we seek feelings for their own sake.

When we seek satisfaction in feelings, we become addicted to affirmation, sex, drugs, power, etc. Such feelings do not self-limit. They don't satisfy for long. Addiction is when our desire for a certain sensation has control of our mind.

Feelings are among Satan's primary ploys, including in sickness, aging, and death.

Three Godly feelings of a reformed mind:

1. Love – we love someone/something when we promote its good for its own sake.

Love is not the same as desire. I might desire a frozen yogurt with nuts, but I do not wish it well; I want to eat it.

Desire and love are different. Desire is a good thing only when we subordinated it under love.

2. Joy

Joy is natural in the presence of real love. It's a pervasive sense of overall well-being, even during suffering and loss.

3. Peace

Peace is a sense of the rest of our will, which results from knowing how things will ultimately turn out.

Peace with God only comes from acceptance of his gift of life in his Son.

Apprentices of Jesus know the secret of this peace is trusting God in everything.

Love, joy, and peace are essential elements of the reformed mind.

The positive movement into love, joy, and peace will eliminate the destructive feelings as governing factors in our life. We do not succeed by first trying to root out the destructive feelings.

Love, joy, peace fostered in divine fellowship w/ God simply crowd out fear, anger, unsatisfied desire, woundedness, rejection.

The way forward

- Receive love, joy, peace from God and others who already live in him; eventually, you will extend love, joy, and peace to others.
- Come to terms with your feelings and give them up to God. Write down your destructive feelings and agree with the Lord to abandon them.
- Confer about these destructive feelings with a wise Christian friend or counselor. Ask for prayer from them, prayer for love, joy, and peace. And ask for prayer that God will help you abandon the destructive ones.

I've noticed that sometimes when I preach on a subject like this, God arranges my week to experience the very thing about which I'm preaching. It happened this week. I just felt awful: no joy, no peace. Finally, I admitted it to Robin, and her first response was to talk me out of it. I just felt worse. A few hours later, she came back offering love, joy, and peace, making all the difference. She didn't know what today's sermon was about, but her spiritual formation level is deep enough that she was able to give me what I needed to push out the destructive feelings and replace them with love, joy, peace.

I hope some of you are joining me on this journey to engage with God so he can renovate our very lives.

It's what God wants from every human he creates.

It is possible.

God means us to walk routinely and easily in the power of Christ.

Want some more resources? ...

Resources

- *Renovation of the Heart*, by Dallas Willard. Navpress.
- *What Would Jesus Think*, by Mary Whelchel. Chariot Victor Publishing.
- *Learning to Tell Myself the Truth*, by William Backus. Bethany House Publishers.

Other resources:
Click on the link for the Google Slides . (Similar to PowerPoint)
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