

Creekside Community Church: "Imitating Jesus"  
"Loving God like Jesus Loves God IV" Loving God with Our Thoughts  
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John Bruce, Pastor

In 1 Samuel 16, God tells Samuel that it's time to anoint a new king for Israel; which is a dangerous assignment for a prophet when King Saul is still on the throne. But Samuel obeys and God sends him to the home of a man named Jesse to anoint one of his boys to replace Saul. Jesse brings Samuel his oldest son whom Samuel assumes will be the next king. He's tall, athletic, he looks like a king. But God says to Samuel, "Don't look at his looks or at his height because he will not be your next king: for man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart." Jesse brings seven different sons to Samuel but God keeps saying, "Not him either." Samuel asks Jesse, "I know I've got the right house. Have you got any more sons?" "Just one but he's just a kid." "Go get him." So Jesse brings in his youngest boy, David, and God says, "That's him." Man looks at the appearance, God looks on the heart. What does He see when He looks at yours? This month as we continue to talk about Imitating Jesus, we're focusing on loving God like Jesus loved God. And what we learn from Jesus is that the degree that we love God will be reflected in how we use our time, our talent, our treasure and, today we want to talk about our thoughts - which for most of us is the last area of our life we bring under the authority of Christ. Christ can be Lord of my time, my talents and my treasure, but making Him Lord of my thoughts is life's biggest challenge - and the most important. Because the way I think will determine what I become. Solomon, the world's wisest man writes in Proverbs 23:7 "*As a man thinks within himself, so he is.*" Thoughts determine actions, actions determine habits, habits determine character and character determines destiny. Jesus also taught that our thoughts determine who we are. In Matthew 12:33-35 He says, "*Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.*" Jesus says that just as a tree is known by its fruit so our words reveal our true nature because our mouth speaks what fills our heart. We can fake it for a little while but eventually what we really think will come out in what we say and how we behave. That's why the first commandment is to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind. If Christ is not Lord of my thoughts, then He is not Lord of anything of mine. That's why Paul writes in 2 Cor 10:5, "*We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,*" So how do I make Jesus Lord of my thoughts and take every thought captive? How do I love God with all my heart and with all my mind? Jesus talked a lot about the importance of our thoughts and I want to look at some of the commands He gives His disciples about how we're to love God in our thoughts. According to Jesus, a mind that loves God will be an active mind, a courageous mind, and a humble mind.

First, a mind that loves God will be an active, fully engaged mind. The great Welsh physician and preacher, Martin Lloyd Jones, writes these very helpful words in his book, *Spiritual Depression*. "The main trouble in this matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this: that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self...Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts which come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man's treatment (in Psalm 42:1) was this. Instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself, "Why are you cast down my soul?" he asks. His soul has been repressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, "Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you." The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself." That's a great description of an active mind; a mind that chooses its thoughts and where it will put its attention, a mind that refuses to be passive and swept along with whatever thought pops up. And an active mind is critical to loving God. I've noticed that people who are lukewarm in their relationship with Christ are often lazy thinkers. There's no drive, focus or energy. You ask them, "What's going on inside of you? How's your relationship with Christ?" "I dunno." "Well, why do you think your wife is unhappy?" "I dunno" "What do you think God wants you to do?" "I dunno." The lights are on but nobody's home. They are the prisoner of their thoughts rather than the master of their thoughts.

Jesus taught His disciples that to love God they needed an active mind; active in what they put in and active in what they kept out. In Mark 4 Jesus teaches in parables which nobody understands. Jesus explains to His disciples that the reason He teaches in parables is to separate those who are truly interested in the kingdom from those who are not. Those who are interested in God's kingdom won't be content until they understand what Jesus is saying. They keep coming back to Him to find out what He means. Because it is only those who actively pursue truth who discover truth. That's why Jesus says in Mark 4:21-25, "*And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."*" If you're rearranging furniture in your bedroom, you don't put a lamp under the bed, you put it on the table where it will light up the room, right? In the same way, the only reason Jesus hides anything by teaching in parables is to reveal it to those who really want to know. That's why the Bible is harder to understand than People Magazine. We have to work to understand it. But that's why it makes so much of a difference in our lives once we do. For that reason...*And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to."* Listen carefully. Pay attention. Why? "*By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.*" Our capacity to receive truth depends on what we've done with the truth we've received. Take what Jesus says seriously. Listen attentively. Ask questions. Don't rest until you understand - and you'll discover that both your understanding and your appetite for spiritual truth will grow. Ignore what Jesus says and you'll eventually lose even what you thought you understood. That's why so many Christians are like buckets without bottoms. Truth just flows in and flows out. They're always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth. Have you ever noticed that nobody listens to the flight attendants spiel before a plane takes off? "Ladies and gentlemen, the Captain has turned on the Fasten Seat Belt sign. If you haven't already done so, please stow your carry-on luggage underneath the seat in front of you or in an overhead bin. Please take your seat and fasten your seat belt. And also make sure your seat back and folding trays are in their full upright position. If you are seated next to an emergency exit, please read carefully the special instructions card located by your seat. If you do not wish to perform the functions described in the event of an emergency, please ask a flight attendant to reseat you. At this time, we request that all mobile phones, pagers, radios and remote controlled toys be turned off for the full duration of the flight, as these items might interfere with the navigational and communication equipment on this aircraft. We request that all other electronic devices be turned off until we fly above 10,000 feet. We will notify you when it is safe to use such devices. We remind you that this is a non-smoking flight. Smoking is prohibited on the entire aircraft, including the lavatories. Tampering with, disabling or destroying the lavatory smoke detectors is prohibited by law. If you have any questions about our flight today, please don't hesitate to ask one of our flight attendants. Thank you." It's in one ear and out the other. But what if at 30,000 feet, the flight attendant announced, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Captain has informed me that we need to prepare the cabin for a possible emergency landing. We have approximately one minute to prepare, so your undivided attention is very important. Please locate the exits closest to you. Each exit is clearly marked with a sign overhead. If needed a lighting system along the aisle will direct you to all exits. If you are closest to a door there will be an evacuation slide. Cross your arms and jump into it. Should your exit be blocked with smoke, fire or any obstruction, do not attempt to open or use that exit, but proceed to the nearest usable exit. Please follow the Flight Attendants now while they instruct you on brace positions." Do you think anybody onboard wouldn't be paying attention? That's the kind of attention and focus Jesus is talking about here. If I love God, I will be active in what I put into my mind. I'll be reading the Bible, listening to sermons, reading other books, intent on learning everything I can about God and Jesus and how to live as His disciple. Because input determines output. Jesus is our example. Remember how at young age of 12, Jesus was in the temple, asking questions of the teachers of the Law, learning everything He could. The Bible says the teachers were amazed at His answers - which tells me they were unable to answer His questions. We also saw the prominent place the Scriptures played in Jesus' adult life and how all of His decisions were shaped by the Word of God. Jesus was a walking Bible.

What I put into my mind determines what I think about. That's why Jesus taught His disciples to be active in what they put into their minds and equally active in what they didn't allow into their minds. Look at Luke 21:34-36. "*Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are*

*about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.*" Jesus is talking about staying alert, tuned in and ready for His return. What keeps us from being alert is a distracted heart, a heart weighted down with dissipation, drunkenness or worries. We know how drunkenness and worries can control our minds, but dissipation may not be as obvious. Dissipation is the undisciplined and wasteful consumption of anything, so much of anything that it adversely affects our mind and our body. Too much TV, too much Facebook, too much internet, too much entertainment, too many sports, too many worries, too many distractions. We lose touch with reality, with what's important. What goes on in my mind depends on what goes into my mind. If I'm struggling with lustful thoughts or covetous thoughts or angry thoughts, it's usually a result of what am I reading and watching. Think of what you put into your mind like you think of what you eat. Some things we eat taste great but leave us feeling crummy. Other things we eat make us feel good. It's the same with the things with which we engage our minds. Some lift our spirit, others depress our spirit. Some enoble us, some debase us. So here's my challenge. Try a media fast for a week; no newspapers, magazines, blogs, non-music radio, surfing the web, Facebook - anything that distracts you from Christ. Use your time to read the Bible and other books which draw you closer to Christ, listen to sermons or to great music. And see if after a week you are not more at peace and have a keener sense of God's presence in your life. Loving God with all our mind means maintaining a focused mind, an alert mind, an active mind, a mind ready for action.

Second, according to Jesus, loving God with all our mind means maintaining a courageous mind. It is impossible to follow Jesus without courage. C.S. Lewis wrote, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at its testing point. That's why when Jesus talked to His disciples about their thoughts, the command He repeated more often than any other was "Fear not." Look at John 14:1. "*Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.* He repeats it in John 14:27. "*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. Do not let* your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. I've always struggled with fear. Fear of being abandoned, of being embarrassed, of not being in control. I hated that about myself. I didn't want to be afraid. Fear tormented me. But there was nothing I could do about it, was there? Jesus says there is. Jesus says that if we're His disciple - that's who these commands are given to - we can choose to not allow our hearts to be troubled or afraid. We can choose to have Christ's peace. How do you do that? Jesus always gives the same answer. Believe. Don't let your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in Me. Fear is the natural result of not believing the truth about God. Luke 12 is a chapter about conquering fear. In vs. 1-3, Jesus talks about hypocrisy, the fear of what people think and He tells His disciples not to be a hypocrite because God is going to reveal everything that is hidden anyway. In vs. 4-7, Jesus talks about being afraid of what people can do to you. He reminds His disciples that the hairs of their head are numbered because they are so valuable to God. In vs. 8-10, Jesus talks about the fear of being identified with Christ and reminds His disciples that all who confess Him before men He will confess before the angels of God. In vs. 11-12, Jesus talks about the fear of being inadequate to tell somebody else about Him and assures His disciples that it won't be them who speaks but His Spirit will teach them what to say when they need to say it. In vs. 13-34, Jesus talks about the fear of not having enough and reminds His disciples that the God feeds the ravens and clothes the flowers will do much more for His own children. For the rest of the chapter, Jesus talks about our fear of the future and the certainty of His return and how to prepare for it. The point is, fear is a result of lack of faith in God. That's why Jesus was the most courageous of men. He is always bold, direct, never avoiding conflict, walking into situations from which most people would flee. And over and over, He taught His disciples that courage is a result of what they believed about God. I turned 65 on Friday which is why the earth didn't end that day. Nothing ever happens on my birthday. But I have had a few more health issues the past 12 months than I've had before. And with every new symptom came this sense of dread. "What's wrong with me? Am I going to die?" John 14:1 has been very helpful to me. Jesus tells me, "Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." I realized that fear is an issue of obedience and Jesus wouldn't command me to take control of my fear if He hadn't made me capable of doing it. So each time a new symptom appears, rather than letting my mind run wild about what does this mean for the future, I focus on trusting Jesus. God has already ordained the number of days I'll be here and I'm not going anywhere until that number is up. Until that day, I'm immortal, so why not enjoy the trip? Instead of focusing on what you're afraid of, focus on the fear itself and remind yourself that we're to not let our hearts be troubled or be afraid but instead to believe that God is the God of the Bible. The more consistently we confront our fears with faith, the deeper that habit will grow until it becomes almost automatic. Because loving God with all our mind means a courageous mind.

Third, loving God with all our minds means maintaining a humble mind. Jesus says in Matthew 11:29: "...*for I am gentle and humble of heart.*" That's why in Philippians 2:5 Paul tells the Philippians to have the same mind as Christ, "*who although He existed in the form of God* (meaning He possessed the very essence of God) *did not regard equality with God a think to be grasped but emptied Himself* (meaning He laid aside His rights and privileges as God) *taking the form of a bond servant, being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" (Philip. 2:5-8) Paul says we need to think like Jesus. How did Jesus think? Humbly. He wasn't interested in Jesus, He was interested in us and humbled Himself to become our Savior. He refused to hang on to his rights and privileges but went from the top to the bottom, from heaven's throne to a manger and eventually to a cross. And if I'm going to think like Jesus, I also need to think humbly. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, humility is thinking less about yourself. And the way Jesus taught His disciples to do that if by believing what God says about me instead of what I or anybody else thinks about me. Let's look at Luke 9:46-48 "*An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest.* (This seems to be a regular conversation among Jesus' disciples. Which of us is the most important, the most spiritual, the most indispensable?) *But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart,* (again, we're talking about how we think) *took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.*" This is a conversation Jesus has with His disciples which is repeated over and over, at different times and in different circumstances. Jesus is intent on teaching the disciples to think like He thinks, to think humbly. Because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Do you want to experience God's grace or God's opposition? Then learn humility. Each of the disciples are comparing themselves with one another in their own mind. So Jesus takes a little kid standing next to Him and says, "Want to know who's great? This kid is great." What makes this child great? If we don't read this passage carefully, our answer will likely be about the child. People say children are humble, innocent, trusting, full of simple faith. That must be why Jesus says this kid is great. People who say that don't know much about children. More importantly, they aren't paying attention to the passage. Because what makes this child great has nothing to do with what the child does. What makes this child great is that he or she is important to God. Jesus says, "*Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.*" Jesus says that the way we treat this child is the way we treat Jesus and His Father. That's what makes the least of these from a human perspective great - because they are important to God. Who is more important to God, Christ's disciple or a child? They're equally important to God - and that's the secret of humility. Humility is finding my identity, my worth, my greatness not in what I can do or in how I compare with others. Humility is a result of finding my identity, my worth, my greatness in what God thinks of me. That's why when Jesus disciples return from preaching and report to Him that even the demons are subject to us in Your name, Jesus replies in Luke 10:20 "*Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.*" Don't get excited about your success - even when your success is a result of God using you. Get exited about the fact that you are beloved by God and He has saved you and written your name in heaven. Humility is a result of finding your greatness in what God has done for you, not in what you have done for Him. And the more I rejoice that my name is recorded in heaven, the more I find my identity in the fact that God loves me and saves me because of what Christ has done and not because of anything I am or do, the more self-forgetful I become; because I have nothing to prove and its no longer about me. That's why humility is not thinking less of yourself; humility is thinking less about yourself. It's getting over yourself, realizing that life doesn't revolve around you, that you're not the star and everybody else is an extra in the movie of your life. Some of the proudest people I know don't believe they're proud. "I'm not proud, I don't think I'm great. Just the opposite. I feel inferior to everybody. I have nothing to offer. I feel threatened when I'm around strong people." But that's not humility, that's inverted pride. You're still self-absorbed. You're still defining yourself by the way you or other people define you rather than by how God defines you. Pride is always thinking about yourself, evaluating every circumstance by how it affects you, every comment by what it says about you, and every person by what they think about you. Humility, on the other hand, is self-forgetful. Humility is secure in the knowledge that its not about me, its about God; that I have nothing to prove to anyone and therefore I can forget about myself and focus on God and on others. When I was a young pastor, I compared myself with other pastors, because I thought that if I was one of the better pastors, I would be significant. By the time I was a middle aged pastor, I had stopped comparing myself with other pastors - but felt like a failure most of the time because I knew the Bible better and how far short I fell of what the Bible calls pastors to do. Now that I'm an old pastor, I think I finally believe the gospel - that I'm not saved by being

a perfect pastor but by Jesus who is the perfect pastor. He is never wrong, unfaithful, lazy or fearful like me. He loves His flock perfectly. And God has clothed me with His perfection. My identity is derived from my performance but from His. We're saved when we first believe the gospel. Then we spend the rest of our lives learning to live out the implications of the gospel.

You may have experienced what people call being in the zone. Maybe you're playing a sport or engaged in a hobby or just doing your job - but for the moment, time seems to stand still. You're completely focused, free of fear and of thoughts of yourself, totally absorbed in what you're doing. I believe that's the way Jesus wants us to think all the time. The Christlike mind - active, courageous and humble - is the happy mind. Because it has shed the things that distract us and steal our joy. That's why Jesus calls us to take every thought captive and to learn to think as He thinks. That's only possible if we've become His disciple and are following Him. Christian means Christ in one. I'm not a Christian because I attend church or because of the family I grew up in. There's only one thing that makes me a Christian. Jesus has come to live in me. And if you would like Jesus to come and live in you, you can invite Him to do so this morning. He's promised that he who comes to Me, I will in no way cast out.