

## Radical Minimum Standard – Week 3 Mindset

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To celebrate Mother's Day, we have flowers for our mothers in the lobby, as well as several places for you to take a picture with your family. We hope you feel loved and honored today. There is something special about the unconditional love that a mother has for her children that reflects the unconditional love of our heavenly Father. A mother's love can be transformative. We are in a four-week series about discipleship, and for many people, the first person in their life who helped them grow as a disciple of Jesus, who championed their faith in Christ and trained them to follow him was their mom. I know that was the case for me. There are few things in the world that are more precious or powerful than the love of a mother. We are so thankful for you!

We are in week three of a four-week series about discipleship—not only how we come to have faith, but how we mature in our faith. In week one, we said, **“Discipleship is the process of becoming more like Jesus,”** and we looked at 1 John 2:6: “Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” That's the radical minimum standard: learning to obey all the things that Jesus taught us. Jesus said, “Every student will become like their teacher!” In week two, we said, **“Discipleship happens best in the context of community.”** This journey toward Jesus is a journey we take with other people. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” Paul was able to be a spiritual guide and mentor to others. But he also said in Philippians 3:17, “Join together in following my example.” We aren't looking for a comfortable, cozy community, tea and crumpets and second breakfast community. We want to be a part of a community with a mission and purpose outside of ourselves, one that can see the kingdom of God take ground not only in our own lives, but also in the world.

Today we're on week three: **Discipleship progresses, stagnates or regresses based upon the battle in your mind.** If you are serious about becoming more like Jesus, you must become serious about what happens in your head. We see this communicated in Scripture in such a compelling way: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Paul says everyone is becoming a certain kind of person; don't become the kind of person who is following the pattern of this world. The word translated “conformed” here is the same word used by ancient metalsmiths to describe the process of minting coins. The metalsmiths would heat the metal and then press it into a mold; as the metal cooled, it would conform to the image of the mold. Paul is saying if you aren't intentional and diligent, that is what will happen to you. You will be molded and end up looking like the world around you. You won't notice it, but you'll end up impatient, individualistic, self-focused, materialistic, and greedy, and you'll be consumed with the transitory affairs of the day. Paul says don't take that route, the route of being conformed; rather, be transformed, be shaped not into the pattern of the world but into the image of Jesus. That's discipleship. How does that happen? By the renewing of the mind! It's what happens in here!

I got home from work on Thursday, walked in the house, and saw that my son had a little accident [view the online sermon to see the photo]. When I asked him what happened, he said, “Mom and I were shopping at Kohl's.” I stopped him right there. I said, “How many times have I told you never to get in between your mom and a pair of shoes on sale!” Joking aside, he was practicing kung-fu moves and ran into a metal pole. But I keep telling him, “You've got to protect your head!” You want to ride a bike—wear a helmet. Ride a motorcycle—wear a helmet. Play hockey—wear a helmet. Play football—wear a helmet. Snowboarders wear a helmet. Firefighters wear a helmet. Construction workers wear a helmet. People know that when they are in dangerous situations, they must protect their heads. As essential as it is to protect what happens to the outside of the head, what happens inside is even more important.

There has been incredible research over the last few decades that has shown we are losing our ability to focus and concentrate. D. Graham Burnett is a professor of the history of science at Princeton University, and he notes:

Our attention is under constant assault these days. From the steady dings of notifications. The 40 tabs that greet you when you open your computer in the morning. The hundreds of unread emails, most of them spam, with subject lines pleading or screaming for you to click. Most of us are familiar with the feeling that gives us — fractured, irritated, overwhelmed. This new attention economy is a novel kind of human fracking and is creating conditions that are at odds with human flourishing. We need to mount new forms of resistance.

The assault on our minds is “creating conditions that are at odds with human flourishing. We need to mount new forms of resistance.” If we don’t, we will be the casualty. Nicholas Carr describes what is happening to our minds this way:

The internet seems to be chipping away at my capacity for concentration and contemplation. Whether I’m online or not, my mind now expects to take in information the way the web distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a jet ski.

Do you ever feel that? You used to be able to focus and concentrate and plumb the depths of topics and ideas, but now you are only skimming across the surface? Duke University professor Katherine Hayles recently stated, “I can’t get my literature students to read whole books anymore.” These are students passionate about books. They enrolled in one of the most elite schools in the world, and they can’t focus long enough to read a book.

Distractions come from every angle. A few weeks ago, Keren was tired and stressed. She said, “Can you take the kids for a while? I need an hour by myself to read.” Sure! I took the kids outside and started playing with them. Twenty minutes in, I looked up and couldn’t find Luke. Then my phone dinged. Keren sent me this picture [view the online sermon to see the photo]. She tried to lock herself in a room, but that pesky little kid found her.

There are constant distractions in life! Technology is waging a war against our minds! A couple of years ago I was hanging out with my family one Saturday afternoon. Someone sent me a Tik Tok video. I didn’t have Tik Tok, but I downloaded the app. I watched the reel, and without my doing anything, another video loaded. It caught my interest. Then another one loaded. Then another. They had created this feed that was fascinating to me. I assumed I had watched for twenty minutes, but then a little cloud popped up that said I had been on for TWO HOURS, and suggested I take a break. I couldn’t tell you how insulted I was. My screen was telling me I needed a break from screen time! I’m a human; what would you know! I realized I had been sucked into a vortex. Then I stopped and thought about it: Did a single thing I watched on that app enrich my life in any meaningful way? The answer was no, so I deleted the app. I thought, “I don’t think I have the self-control to have that on my phone.” It would be like carrying around a milkshake with me all day long. If it’s not there, I won’t drink it. If it is, I probably will. I had to guard my attention. It’s not about having superhuman self-control. It’s simple wisdom about environmental factors. Some people here today might need to delete an app or two, cancel a Netflix subscription, cut out fantasy sports or sports wagers, or deactivate Facebook for a while. You must get aggressive about the distractions you can control.

If we want to grow as disciples, we must win the war for our minds, reclaim our focus, and shut the door on the relentless distractions. Perhaps the clearest passage in the Bible about the life of the mind is Romans 8:6: “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and

peace.” We do not want to have our minds governed by the flesh, leading to death; we want our minds governed by the Spirit, leading to life. Here’s how I like to think about it: When our minds are controlled by the Spirit, our lives look more like Jesus. The battle begins in our minds. Here are five steps to give the Spirit control of your mind.

## **Refocus**

We must pay attention to what we are paying attention to. Your mental focus is like the engine of a train: wherever you focus, your life will eventually go. “Watch your thoughts, they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions; watch your actions, they become your habits; watch your habits, they become your character; watch your character, it becomes your destiny.” This is the reality of how we were designed by God to function, so we must be strategic. Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” If we are going to grow as disciples, we must, absolutely must, devise and implement a strategy that can keep our focus, not on the fancy, the flashy, the temporal, the entertainment cotton candy, but on the heavenly and the eternal. Philippians 4:8-9 puts it this way: “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. 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.” Brain scientists talk about neuro pathways, the biological wiring of our minds. The thoughts you think wear out actual grooves in your mind like a path in the woods. That’s why we must be so intentional about the things we focus on, and train our minds to focus on what is true, noble, right, pure, excellent, and praiseworthy. That’s how our entire lives can be changed.

## **Replace**

This is the process in which we exchange inaccurate ways of looking at things with accurate ways of looking at things, exchange lies for truth, worldly wisdom for heavenly wisdom. Jesus said, “When Satan lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet I tell the truth!” (John 8:44-45). Satan wants to ruin your life, and one of the most common ways he will try to do that is by feeding you lies and trying to convince you they are truth. Jesus wants to redeem your life, restore your life, and see you flourish in every possible area. One of the ways Jesus does that is by leading you to the truth. If we want to grow as disciples, we must replace lies and worldly ways of looking at things with truth and heavenly ways of looking at things. 2 Corinthians 10:5 puts it like this: “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Don’t allow your mind to believe anything and everything that wanders in there. Don’t obey inaccurate thoughts; rather, take them captive and make them obey Jesus. I was fishing with a friend the other day on the beach. We were talking about the deep things of life and I asked where he was growing these days. He said he was growing his mental focus. “I am replacing lies with truth from Scripture. I often believe the lie that says, ‘You need others to recognize you,’ so I am memorizing John 3:30 (‘He must increase, I must decrease.’), so that whenever I feel that thought, I can replace it with truth. I often believe the lie that I need to make more money to be fully satisfied. Whenever I feel that lie, I quote Hebrews 13:5: ‘Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have.’ I am tempted to get upset when my wife doesn’t respond in the way I would prefer. Instead of getting frustrated I quote Ephesians 5:25: ‘Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.’” Replacing wisdom thoughts with heavenly wisdom can change your life.

Your life will be shaped by what you believe is true. Some of you know the story of Hiroo Onoda, a Japanese soldier in WWII, who was stationed on the island of Lubang in the Philippines in 1944 and told not to surrender, even if caught. The war ended a year later, but he never gave up. He lived in the jungle, engaging in guerrilla warfare and evading capture for 29 years, because he believed the war was still going on. It wasn’t until Japan sent his commanding officer to the island to officially relieve him of duty that he stopped the fight. He lost three decades of his life because he believed a lie. *Don’t lose another*

*day*, don't ruin another relationship, don't waste another opportunity because you believe a lie. Take those lies captive and make them obey the truth.

### **Reframe**

This is the process in which we learn to think about our lives and the things that have happened to us from a renewed, redeemed perspective. Romans 8:28 tells us, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." If we know this is true, then it changes the way we frame things in our minds. Reframing is such a powerful tool. In Romans 8:36, Paul described some of the hardships he faced in ministry by quoting an Old Testament passage: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." This was the daily reality he faced. He said, "We are discouraged, we are dejected, we are demoralized, we are defeated!" But then he said, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). He faced the same hardships, prison, persecution, suffering, insults, and rejection, but he reframed them. He didn't see himself as a victim of circumstances, but victorious over circumstances because of Jesus. That is the mindset of a disciple. That's the power of reframing.

Several years ago, I was praying for a guy here at church who had just welcomed his first child home from the hospital. After praying, I could see heavy tears in his eyes. I asked what he was feeling. He said, "I don't want to make the mistakes my dad made in my life. I want to be there for my son. I want him to see a better man growing up than I saw when I was growing up." I could totally appreciate the place he was coming from, but I said, "I want to challenge you to think about it a little differently: Instead of focusing on not being like your earthly father, what if you gave all of your energy to being like your heavenly father?" Almost instantly I could see a shift in his countenance as he considered whether he was focusing on his lack or his abundance, on what was wrong or what was right. That man is now one of the most engaged, loving, inspirational fathers I've ever been around, and the shift came from reframing the situation.

### **Rejoice**

We can choose to draw attention to the goodness of God and all the blessings God has showered on us and give him thanks and praise. Philippians 4:4 instructs us, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" We have a biblical command to rejoice, to give thanks and praise to God. We must be constantly mindful of God's goodness and blessing. There is a Jewish tradition that talks about what happened during the parting of the Red Sea. The ocean opened, there was a wall of water on either side, the Jewish people were walking through. The tradition talks about how almost everyone was focused on the walls of water on either side of them, the pillar of clouds behind them keeping Pharaoh's army from attacking them, or the freedom that lay ahead of them. But while everyone else was looking all around at God's miracles and provisions, two of the Israelites, Reuven and Shimon, kept looking down. "What is this muck? There is mud all over the place. This is just like the pits of Egypt." They grumbled all the way across the ocean floor. Because they never looked up, for them it was as if the miracles never happened. They were left confused and wondering why everyone else on the shore couldn't be kept from singing songs of praise. They were so focused on the distractions that they missed the drama of deliverance. That can happen in our lives if we are not diligent! Keep your eyes up. Take time every single day to rejoice that there is a God who made you, who loves you, and who has saved you, and that every good thing you have in your life has come from him.

### **Review**

This is one of the most practical and powerful steps you can take every day. At the end of the day, take a few minutes to review your day in a prayer of examen. Psalm 139:23-24 says, "Search me, God, and

know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Ask God to help you review the day you just lived. Ask these questions:

- Where did I feel closest to God today?
- Where did I feel furthest from God today?
- What brought me joy today?
- What brought me pain today?
- Where did God provide for me today?

As you review your day, you are invited to allow the Holy Spirit to teach you to examine your life, so you can see how he is working, and learn to respond to his movements.