



**Educate  
+ Engage**



MIND  
MATTERS



Be Ye  
Transformed

### OVERVIEW

Our thoughts and our emotions are being formed and shaped every day. Once we understand how they are shaped, we can allow God to begin His transformational work in our lives.

#### Scripture Passage

Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

### EDUCATE

In our first lesson, we discussed God's intentional design for our lives. We are created to bear His image, and every part of us plays a role in doing that well. Today, we are going to talk about some things that keep us from fulfilling that design.

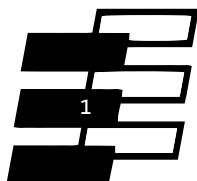
After God created the first humans in Genesis 1, we go on to see Adam and Eve committing the first sin and leading to the Fall. Once removed from the Garden of Eden, there was now separation between them and the perfection God designed them for. As time has passed, we have gotten further and further away from that original design. We now live in systems of brokenness that have been separated from God for a long time. Sin, disease, evil, and dysfunction are all present in our worlds. Getting back to the relationship with God we were designed for takes time and intentionality.

#### Point 1: Up until now, we have been shaped by what we have experienced in the world.

As you sit here today, your mind is not a blank slate. You have been shaped up until this point by the experiences you've had in the world thus far. The home you grew up in, the relationships you have with parents and teachers, the education you've received, and the friendships you've held have all played a part in how you view the world today. All your thoughts and emotions are filtered through this lens of what you have experienced in the world so far.

Another way to say this is that we have been formed by what we have experienced.

Here is an example: imagine you are hiking on a trail. Out of the corner of your eye, you see something coiled up on the edge of the trail, just under a rock. You quickly recognize that it is a snake! Before you even realize what is happening, you are jumping out of the way and yelling. It takes a while for your heart rate to come down and your breathing to return to normal after this encounter with a snake. You might even avoid this trail from now on!



## Lesson 2

Now, let's fast forward a few weeks. You are outside getting something out of a shed in your yard. Out of the corner of your eye, you see a coil on the ground. The next thing you know, you are across the yard, having sprinted away before there is even a thought formed in your head. Your heart is racing again and you can't catch your breath. You later realize that the coil was nothing more than a rope on the ground. But because you have experienced a snake before, your brain has been on the lookout in case you encounter it again, so it interpreted the coiled rope as something dangerous. Your brain made meaning (danger) of your experience (the snake encounter) and used it to interpret a new scenario you encountered (the coiled rope).

This design of our brains was not on accident! God created our brains to have the ability to be formed as we go through life. This is how we learn and grow, and this is also how we heal.

### **Point 2: We are designed to be able to heal and grow.**

Consider these verses:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5, NKJV).

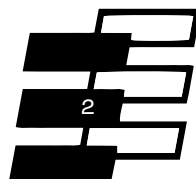
"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2, NKJV).

These passages acknowledge the concept we have been talking about: that our minds are not in a fixed state. They are plastic, which means they are constantly learning and adapting.

This is such a beautiful example of our redemptive God! Even though we are formed by what we experience, He knew that the world we would experience would not be perfect. He knew that we would encounter hurt and injustice that formed us in ways that did not reflect Him. Although those experiences have shaped our lives so far, we have in us the ability to change what we allow to shape our futures. God created our physical brains to be able to adapt and transform to look more like Him.

Paul, in the verse from Romans that we read, did not have the neuroscientific studies in front of him that prove this to be true, but he already knew the truth that our minds can be transformed as we follow after Christ.

As we learn more about our brains, we come to understand how these changes happen. They are not accidental or something we stumble our way into. Rather, our brains change as we pay attention to things. Our attention is the gateway to changing our brains. Focusing our attention



## Lesson 2

on something is not just as simple as forming a new memory of that thing. It starts out that way, but if we focus our attention on something over and over again, it becomes much more than that.

When you see one of your best friends walk into a room, you recognize them not only because you are familiar with their face, but seeing them activates all the history of memories you have together. Inside your brain, it literally looks like a web of memories all tied together and activated every time you turn your attention toward your friend.

The first time we encounter someone or something new, there is no web. But every time we add a new memory to that person or thing, the web in our brain grows larger and easier to access. These webs, or as they are actually called, neural networks, mean so much more than just memories. They serve as a foundation for your brain to use when it is trying to understand new information. The more we pay attention to these networks, the more our brains access them to understand new experiences. Every new experience is understood through the lens of what we have paid attention to in the past.

In other words, what we are paying attention to today becomes the lens through which we make sense of all our future experiences.

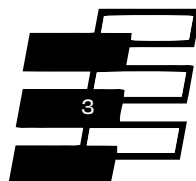
**Point 3: As we go through life, we are quite literally formed by what we consume.**

Discussion Question: What influences in your life do you think are forming you right now?

For the teacher, here are some suggestions: Parents, pastors, teachers, friends, social media algorithms, consumerism

We are all being formed daily. Some people or situations that are forming us may seem obvious, such as our parents or mentors. Others may not be quite as evident. Have you ever thought about the content you consume on social media regularly, and how it is being served to you? Algorithms are carefully created to serve content that will push you toward buying more things, watching more videos, and spending more time connecting with people online. Who is behind these algorithms? Unfortunately, they are not people who have your ultimate good in mind, but rather the bottom line of whichever company they are employed by.

The brain science we are discussing ties back to the truths already laid out in the Word of God: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17, KJV). In this passage Jesus prayed for His disciples and talked about sanctification, or becoming more like God. That process comes through God's Word. This makes sense! As we turn our attention to God's Word



## Lesson 2

over and over again, it becomes that lens through which we understand the rest of the world and ourselves. The truth of God's Word frames everything else we encounter in life. We are physically transforming our mind to look more like Christ.

Paul instructed: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2, KJV).

From Jeremiah 29:11 (NKJV), we are reminded: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"

The will of God for your life is not one of hurt, bondage, or distraction. Rather it says that the Lord plans to prosper you with a future full of hope. As we transform our minds through focusing our attention on God and His Word, we place our future in the hands of the God who wants goodness for us.

### Closing

Our ultimate goal in this life is to look more like Christ every day. He has equipped us with the ability to adapt and change our mindsets to move forward with this goal. When we place our attention on God's Word consistently, we allow His truth to become the foundation of how we view ourselves and the world around us.

### ENGAGE

This week, spend some time not only reading the word of God, but meditating on it. Choose verses or chapters that speak of God's promises and intentions toward you, and make it a point to repeat them throughout your day. Write them on your mirror, put sticky notes around your room or car, or journal what those promises mean to you and your future. Place your attention on the things of God, and allow Him to do the transformative work in your mind.

