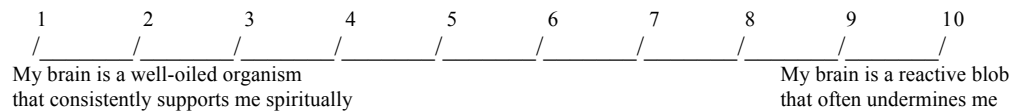


Positioning Myself For Success In 2015

1. Warm up question: How was your Christmas holiday? Tell us about it!
2. On Sunday, we began a new sermon series called “Mastering Your Mind.” At its best, our brain can operate as a well-oiled, well-disciplined organism trained and equipped to support beautiful spiritual living. But if we neglect our brain, it can end up being shaped by random outside forces into a reactive blob that undermines our every effort to live well. The Bible puts it this way, “As a man thinks in his heart, so shall he be. As a woman thinks in her heart, so shall she be.” Proverbs 23:7.
 - a. We’ve all experienced the frustration of a brain that absorbs, and then keeps regurgitating, negative messages that drag us down. Can you think of a negative thought pattern that dogs you – or used to dog you? Where did that negative thought pattern come from?
 - b. On the following scale, how well would you say your brain is serving you? Tell us why you pick the number you do.



3. The Bible teaches that our ability to live on a high plane is intimately tied to how our brain functions. Read Romans 12:1-2.
 - a. What does it mean to “be conformed to the world”?
 - b. What does it mean to be “transformed”? Transformed into what?
 - c. What does it mean to “renew the mind”? What does a renewed mind look like? How does it function?
4. Romans 12:1-2 clearly states the goal, i.e., to live with a transformed mind that has been renewed, but doesn’t tell us how to get there. Romans 8:5-9 does; let’s read it.
 - a. Have you ever “lived in the flesh” or known someone who did. What does it look like?
 - b. Have you ever “lived in the Spirit” or know someone who did. What does it look like?
 - c. Jeff described an experience where his mind triggered a claustrophobic panic about sitting in a cramped airplane seat, but prayer and meditation on Philippians 4:13 – “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” – reversed the downward spiral and calmed him. Have you ever had an experience where

directing your mind toward spiritual things reversed a negative spiral of thought? Tell us about it.

5. According to Romans 8:5, how we live depends on how we “set our minds.” Those who focus, i.e., “set their minds,” on things of the Spirit end up living in the Spirit. Those who focus on things of the flesh end up living in the flesh. Neuroscience confirms this biblical observation. Studies show that regular repetition of an activity or thought pattern results in significant changes in the physiology of the brain that reinforce and support that activity or way of thinking. The parts of the brain that process the activity, and the neuropathways that connect those parts of the brain, grow far more powerful with repetition. Jeff described this as “the physiology of what it looks to transform our minds by setting them on the things of the Spirit.”
 - a. As an example of how the brain responds to repeated activity and thought, Jeff used the example of learning to tie a tie. Can you think of a task that was difficult at first, but now is so second nature, you don’t even have to think about it?
 - b. The same thing happens emotionally and spiritually. Learning new, more positive ways of reacting to life is awkward and clumsy at first, but with focus and repetition eventually becomes second nature. For example, MRI scans show that when an occasional prayer prays, their frontal lobe (which empowers positive emotions) lights up only a little. But when an experienced prayer prays, their frontal lobe lights up a lot. What are the implications of that for spiritual living?
 - c. What do you think John Ortberg means when he says, “Habits eat willpower for breakfast”?
 - d. Another study showed that people who simply thought about exercising their pinky finger 15 minutes per day over several months saw noticeable strengthening of the part of the brain that controls pinky function. What are the implications of that for spiritual living?
6. Dr. Andrew Newberg, the world’s foremost authority on the interaction between the brain and spirituality says, “With spiritual practices, the more you do it, the more you do it. That is, the more people can be encouraged to prayer, to engage their church and the people in it, to do charitable work, the more these concepts become part of how your brain functions. With ongoing practice, you can do these things more easily and you want to do them more. You become ‘wired’ for it.”
 - a. Take a look at the spiritual practices listed on the next page. For each one, have someone briefly describe how that practice might help us learn to live at a higher plane in life.
 - b. Based on what we’ve learned about how the brain works, why is it so hard to develop a new spiritual habit?

- c. Based on what we've learned about how the brain works, what happens when we push through our brain's initial resistance to develop a new spiritual habit?
- d. Our Soul Care Planning process invites us to consider which spiritual practices we feel called to engage in the next year of our lives and in what form. As you look at the list of spiritual practices, which one represents a growing edge you feel most called to further develop? How do you anticipate that further developing that area will benefit your life?

Note: Your Oasis Leader will pass around Soul Care Assessment booklets. We are all encouraged to spend some time this week prayerfully engaging the assessment and preparing a personalized Soul Care Plan. We invite you to bring a copy of your Plan to church Sunday and drop it in the box at the Info Desk. During worship, we'll bring the box to the altar and say a powerful group prayer for all our Plans.

Building Blocks For Spiritual Living

- D** Have I **decided** to follow Jesus? (A conscious, intentional decision to seek to live in the way of Jesus.)
- W** Am I living a life of **worship**? (Regular worship attendance.)
- C** Am I **connecting** to people in a deep spiritual way? (Participation in Oasis Group or Discipleship courses.)
- Q** Am I making **quiet time** for daily conversation with God? (Prayer and Bible study/meditation.)
- G** Am I living a **generous** life? (Regular financial sharing with God's work.)
- S** Am I living a life of **service**? (Consistent spiritual service.)
- ?** What **unique things** am I called to do to further my spiritual growth? (Health, financial goals, relationship goals, etc.)