

A hand is shown from the bottom left, reaching upwards with fingers spread. The background is a soft, warm sunset or sunrise sky, transitioning from a pale yellow at the bottom to a light pinkish-orange at the top. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

May/June 2026

WHAT'S ON  
**YOUR  
MIND?**

**ALSO: 'COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE'**

Dear Friends:

So many messages today compete for our attention. Each day, our minds are bombarded by all kinds of ideas and information. In the midst of this we need to know what it means to honor and love God with our whole mind—and how this helps in so many good ways to shape what we think, say, and do. In May, missionary and teacher Kent Van Til explores how we can do this, and he helps us to see from the Bible's teaching that God's Holy Spirit guides us to learn about, know, and love God with our whole mind and even our entire being. By asking, "What's on your mind?" the May devotions invite us to pause and reflect on becoming like Jesus and even to "have the same mindset as Christ" (Philippians 2:5).



In June, with the help of Pastor Hernandes Dias Lopes, the Portuguese-language minister for ReFrame Ministries, we focus on Isaiah 40 and the theme of bringing comfort to God's people. This passage provides a deep well of spiritual insight and truth for our daily lives. The magnificence of God as our Creator, his powerful sustaining hand over all that he has made, and his compassionate, tender, and nurturing care over his children call us to seek comfort in God alone. Only God can be our unmoving and enduring rock for finding true meaning and security.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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**“What’s on Your Mind?”**  
**Kent Van Til**



**“Comfort, Comfort  
My People”**  
**Hernandes Dias Lopes**

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**ReFrame  
Ministries**

is the new name of  
Back to God Ministries International

# may

## What's on Your Mind?

**Kent Van Til**

What's on your mind? This question can be a nice conversation starter. It can also help us understand our relationship with God. The *mind* is very important. It is the source of our thoughts—both good and evil. It is the source of our desires, our ideas, our virtues, and our vices.

Scripture points out the importance of the mind. “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37; see also Mark 12:30). Many other texts speak of the mind as well. This month let's focus on the mind, how it can be a spiritual battlefield, and how God can transform it to be more like the mind of Christ.

What's on your mind?

Kent Van Til served as a missionary in Costa Rica. He taught theological ethics there and later in the United States. He is the author of four books. The most recent is a spiritual biography of his grandmother titled *A Name for Herself: A Dutch Immigrant's Story*. Kent likes to fish, hunt, make music, and entertain his grandchildren.

**ROYALTY, NOT “ROYAL SCREW-UPS”**

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession. . . . —1 Peter 2:9

We are often our own worst critics. I find that many of my inner thoughts tend to be negative about myself. “Kent, what were you thinking?” “You keep doing that. . . .” “Now they are going to think you’re a jerk.” And so on.

The truth is, we often have good reasons for chewing ourselves out. We mess up. Daily.

That’s why we need to go to the Bible and remind ourselves what God thinks of us. This beautiful text in 1 Peter helps us see how blessed and loved we are. We are chosen by God to become part of his family. This means we are royalty. We are princesses and princes in the kingdom of God, the Lord of the cosmos. We are also a priesthood, meaning we are made holy, pure, and dedicated to the One who is totally holy and pure. And we are called to praise this amazing God who has called us “out of

darkness and into his wonderful light.”

Wow! We are not total screw-ups! No other creatures in the universe have more going for them than we do. Oh, sure, we don’t see the final product yet. But what Peter describes is the reality that God sees, and this is the reality we need to see.

When you are tempted to be negative, try talking to yourself this way: “Yes, I messed up. But I am chosen by God to be part of his family—holy, royal, and called to serve the King of the cosmos faithfully.” This is how God sees you.

Lord, thank you for re-making us in your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you for calling us to live in your glorious light. Help us to think of ourselves as you do. In Jesus, Amen.

## WITH ALL OUR MIND

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”  
—Mark 12:30

As Jesus answers a question about the greatest commandment, he quotes from Deuteronomy 6 in the Old Testament. He emphasizes that loving God involves our whole being—every part of us. In this way Jesus draws attention to the Hebrew teaching of the *heart* as the center of our being, the seat of our mind, our will, and our emotions. Our mind is a fundamental part of our whole being.

Our mind is at the core of our self. Our everyday living flows from our thoughts and desires, and these are reflected in our words and deeds—all that we do and say. Most of our thoughts and desires go unnoticed by us and others, however. So if we want to obey the greatest commandment, we need to pay attention to our thoughts and desires. We need to pay attention to our mind.

With our mind we can tell the difference between right and wrong. We can make plans and figure out how to reach our goals. Our mind reflects our character and disposition. No wonder Jesus reminds us how important it is to love God with all our mind.

Yet I find that I rarely examine my mind to see if it is focused on loving God or on a swamp of ugly thoughts and desires. Is that true of you too?

This month let's focus on serving God with all our mind. Let's consider how God can transform us to live as he calls us to live—like Jesus.

O God, help us to think about what we think about. May our thoughts and desires be worthy of the children you call us to be, in Christ. Amen.

## SEEK THE KINGDOM

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” —Matthew 6:33

Did you play hide-and-seek as a child? I did, and I play it now with my grandchildren. (They are easy to find when they're under a blanket on the couch.)

In our text for today Jesus talks about seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness as our first priority, our main goal in life. And when we do that, all of the things we need will be taken care of. The point here is not to wish us good luck in finding something well hidden. Rather, Jesus urges us to pursue God's will, placing his purposes first in our lives so that we may live as he calls us to.

The good news is that God and his kingdom can be easily found. We can find God and his kingdom in the life of Christ and among believers who listen to God's Word and strive to live by it. They aim to live righteously by acting justly and with mercy for all people, as Jesus did.

Jesus' teaching ministry can be summed up with these words: “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). God's kingdom is found in Jesus, who said, “Follow me” (Mark 1:17), and taught that he is the only way to God and his kingdom (John 14:6).

If we don't have a specific destination, we will just wander. Christians know, as Jesus showed, that their ultimate destination is God and his kingdom. This is what we must aim for as we follow Jesus' teachings by the power of his Spirit.

Dear God, may the aim of our thoughts and desires be toward you. May your Spirit help us to seek your kingdom first in all we think, say, and do. Amen.

## RESIST EVIL THOUGHTS

Every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.  
—Genesis 6:5

Wow! The people in those days must have been really, really bad. Look at all those totalizing terms: *every, only, all the time*. And all of this troubled God deeply.

Some people, and even some societies, can go very bad. Notice where it starts—in the thoughts of their hearts. In the story that follows, God sends a flood to destroy everything corrupted by the evil and violence of that time.

Today, if the Spirit of Christ is working in us, that should mean we are not at risk of being “only evil all the time,” right? Well, let’s not kid ourselves. We can still be quite bad if we regularly let the thoughts of our hearts yield to evil. Such thoughts will not remove us from the saving power of Christ, but they will allow the devil to use us for evil purposes. Evil thoughts will also set us apart from the

will of God and from the good that he has in mind for us.

So let’s watch the thoughts of our hearts. We need to monitor them. We need to recognize which thoughts are good and which ones are evil. We need to resist the evil ones.

Jesus redeems us from the flood of judgment, but the struggle against evil will continue until he returns. In the Lord’s strength and by the power of his Spirit, we can turn from evil and seek to do what is good.

O God, thank you for redeeming us from absolute destruction. Please continue to help us by renewing our minds in Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

## A RENEWED MIND

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. —Romans 12:2

Notice the big contrast in this text. We can follow the “pattern”—or the behaviors, standards, and customs—of the world. Or we can follow the will of God. And the way to do that is to be transformed by the renewing of our mind in Christ so that we can see how to live by God’s will.

Our world is influenced by evil powers, led by the devil, the prince of darkness. The patterns, behaviors, standards, and customs of this world promote selfishness, boasting, abuse of power, and disdain for others. We see it every day in the media. And it can be difficult to resist, especially when it seems normal.

God wants to rescue us from destructive thoughts and patterns. Each person—empowered by the Holy Spirit—needs to seek God to be transformed.

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” writes the apostle Paul. This is a good shorthand description of the Christian’s lifelong calling. It describes how to become more like the Savior. We need to shed our old, evil thoughts and put on new, holy ones. We can leave behind the desires of the world and grasp the love of God. We can put away self-promoting customs and embrace the self-sacrificing love of Christ.

We need to resist and reject the customs and patterns of the sinful world. Our minds need to discern what the true will of God is and to live by it.

Dear Lord, we need to be transformed. Renew our minds to be like the mind of Christ so that we may live by your will. Amen.

## DESIRES

Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. —James 1:14

Temptations are thoughts. We see things or people that appeal to us, and we want them for ourselves, even though we know that would be wrong.

Humans will always have sensations of desire, and we really can't be responsible for those initial impressions. For example, I am a heterosexual male. When I see a beautiful woman, my first impression is "Wow, she is really a knockout!" That is a natural response. To stop having such a sensation would probably require that I be struck blind.

After that initial impression, though, I am responsible for my thoughts. Those thoughts may lead toward temptation and evil. To think, "Wow, it would be a dream come true to get together with her," for example, is not just an initial impression. That would be an evil thought leading to sin. Jesus said that "anyone who

looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). That is very easy to do. And it is sin.

Every day, we see things or persons that can tempt us. It can happen when you see a car, or a house, or a person, or pretty much anything you might desire. But when we move from an instinctive first impression to a conscious thought of wrongful desire, we sin. And God is not to blame for that. God makes beautiful things, but the desire is ours—and ours to control.

O God, keep us from temptation, deliver us from evil, and forgive us our sins. By your Spirit's work in us, help us to control our thoughts, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## REST IN PEACE

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD,  
make me dwell in safety. —Psalm 4:8

We sleep, but the Holy Spirit and the demons do not. So even our subconscious can be a battleground of spirituality.

C. S. Lewis recommended the following steps in prayer before we go to sleep. First, ask God to show you what sins you might have committed during the day. Those sins include thoughts, words, and actions. Confess those sins and ask God to forgive you for them, as well as other sins that might not even come to mind.

Second, surrender your concerns and anxious thoughts to God. Let go of worries that might keep you awake. Give them up to God. As another translation of this psalm puts it, "You let me lie down in peace, and keep me perfectly safe." We can be safe not only from violence or physical turmoil but also from the attacks of the devil. We live under the care of the loving God not only

when we are awake but also when we are asleep.

Finally, ask God to protect you while you sleep and when you are awake. God alone provides us with true rest. Rest is shalom/peace. In God's shalom all is well. All is in harmony. This is the peace that Jesus leaves with his disciples, and all who follow Jesus are his disciples. Ask the Lord for this peace. It is available always, whether you are awake or asleep.

Thank you, God, that even while we sleep, you care for us. You give us the peace that the world cannot give. And in you we find eternal, peaceful rest. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## BEDTIME PRAYERS

When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. —Proverbs 3:24

Have you ever had a strange dream that woke you up in the middle of the night? Many of us have. Our subconscious is active even when we are asleep.

In addition, the Holy Spirit is at work in us, even when we are not conscious of it.

This is one reason why we need to talk to God before we sleep. Bedtime prayers are important. What can we say to God before we go to sleep? We should thank him for his protection during the day, even if we are not always aware of it. We should thank him for keeping us from sin and from causing harm to ourselves or others.

We should also prepare for the next day. We can trust that tomorrow is in God's hands. We can cast our worries on him, knowing that God has already seen what awaits us and has arranged things for our good.

If you have concerns that could keep you awake, lay them before God. You might not see a way out, but God has already provided the ultimate way through Jesus Christ.

The practice of bedtime prayer can and should begin at a young age. I remember my mother and father teaching me an evening prayer. And I teach this one to my grandchildren:

Jesus, tender shepherd,  
hear me. Bless your little  
lamb tonight. Through  
the darkness be near me;  
keep me safe till morn-  
ing light. All this day  
your hand has led me,  
and I thank you for your  
care. You have clothed  
and warmed and fed  
me. Listen to my even-  
ing prayer. Amen.

## CONFESS YOUR SINFUL THOUGHTS

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. —James 5:16

None of us likes to confess sin. The first step in confession is to acknowledge that we have done something wrong. That doesn't make us feel very good about ourselves. But we must confess our sins, even if they are only sinful thoughts.

Confessing our sinful thoughts is not a natural practice. We might think that if we haven't *acted* on sinful things we have thought about, why bother? We may tell ourselves that what we think doesn't really matter, but it does. All seven of the deadly sins are based in our thoughts: envy, greed, gluttony, sloth, anger, lust, and pride. These deadly thoughts are the fertile soil from which sins of word and deed can sprout and grow.

We tend to think that since they are *only* thoughts, they don't need to be confessed. We might even think that we

have our problem under control—or soon will. We would much rather manage our problems than confess our sins.

But we need to confess our sinful thoughts, not just manage them. And if we are fortunate enough to have good Christian friends with whom we can confess our thoughts, we should talk with them. We need to admit that we cannot conquer sin on our own. We need the power of God's Spirit to free us from sin and evil. If we wish to be like Christ, we need God's Spirit to cleanse our thoughts.

O God, confession is hard. We would rather be in charge of our thoughts. But help us to confess to you. Give us the courage and humility we need to confess our sins. Amen.

## LIAR, LIAR

“When [the devil] lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”  
—John 8:44

A lie led to the beginning of human sin. Back in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve accepted Satan’s lie: “You will not certainly die. . . . You will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4-5).

Ever since then, the voice of the liar, the father of lies, has carried on. Satan apparently can’t speak the truth; lying is his native language. Today Satan keeps telling us versions of the same lies he spoke in Eden: “God doesn’t really want the best for you.” “You will never have any fun if you follow the moral standard set by God.” “You really won’t suffer any consequences for doing that.”

What lies is Satan telling you lately? “It really doesn’t matter if you watch some porn.” “Paying all your taxes would be crazy, given the way the government spends money.” “You deserve a new car, a new sex partner, a higher salary.”

Pay attention to what you are thinking. Listening to the father of lies can be the first step into sinfulness.

These lies include conspiracy theories that flood social media. Satan is in charge of those too. He is quite capable of using politicians and media personalities to promote his lies. The fact that others may agree with Satan is no excuse.

Our thought world is a war zone. Listen to the one who has already won the war. Reject the one who can never be trusted.

Father, we are surrounded by lies. We hear them at every turn. Help us to recognize and reject them. May we reject the father of lies too. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

## OUR MINDS BELONG TO GOD

We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.  
—2 Corinthians 10:5

Neuroscientists have discovered that we average about 6,000 thoughts per day. What a challenge it is to “take captive every thought” for Christ!

There are strongholds of thoughts within us that resist submission to God. You probably have one or two of them. They are little parts of our character and thought patterns that are opposed to God. They have signs set up that say, “God is not needed here.” Perhaps it is the way you think about sex. Perhaps it is the way you view a neighbor or a relative. Perhaps it is the way you use the earth’s resources. Or something else.

Yet there is no piece of our mind that does not belong to God. Every inch of it must surrender to God. How? First, “be still, and know that [the Lord is] God” (Psalm 46:10). Admit that the stronghold you have set up in your mind is chal-

lenging the right of the King of kings to rule your life. It opposes true knowledge of God. Second, confess this sin to God, and perhaps also to a trusted Christian friend. Third, with the help of the Holy Spirit, challenge the strongholds of falsehood with the true knowledge of God. You can do this by saying to yourself, “No, that isn’t right. I know that is not what God wants.” And, if necessary, tell yourself the same thing later when the devil responds with, “Did God really say . . . ?”

It is a never-ending battle. But Christ has already won it.

Holy Spirit, you live within us. Help us to recognize evil strongholds in our minds and to break them down with the power of your truth. Amen.

## USE THE ARMOR OF GOD

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. —Ephesians 6:11

Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against hostile spiritual powers. These powers are organized but unseen, a truly diabolical enemy. Led by Satan, these evil powers are always scheming against the Lord and his kingdom, trying to overthrow the rule of God in our lives and in this world.

So what are our weapons in this warfare? They make up the armor of God, as Paul describes it in our text for today.

Put on the belt of truth. The beginning of evil is the acceptance of a lie. Followers of Christ who know and honor the truth are uniquely positioned to win against the deceitful spiritual powers of evil.

Wear the breastplate of righteousness. Knowing and doing what is right is to live with integrity. It takes courage to do what is right, even when others may say it doesn't matter.

Be quick to share the gospel of peace. The powers of evil have already been beaten through Jesus' finished work. This is good news that can help to convert enemies into allies.

Carry the shield of faith. Faith is belief and trust in the living God and his promises, even though we cannot see him. Though it can seem that evil is winning, it has already lost to Christ, and in him we will win.

Pray and follow God's Word. God hears all our prayers, and he delights in giving us the full life he promises in his Word, which is the sword of the Spirit. God's Word is the whole and final truth.

Lord, we need your protection in the spiritual battles we face. Help us to put on the spiritual armor that you provide for us in Jesus. Amen.

## WISDOM AND REVELATION

[May] the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.  
—Ephesians 1:17

True knowledge is a gift from God. When we know God for who he truly is, that is the most important and basic truth that anyone can accept.

The apostle Paul prays that God will give his readers the spiritual powers of wisdom and revelation. Paul knows that God is eager to give Christians these gifts. When we have godly wisdom, we understand how God's world works, and we understand what to do. When we receive the spiritual power of revelation (vision), we can see what lies ahead and be confident that the future is in God's hands.

Wisdom and revelation from God lead us to know God better. Our increasingly wise thoughts inform us that the power and love and goodness of God are without end. And through revelation the Spirit shows that no matter how

much we meditate on God and his Word, we will never see to the end of his goodness, power, and love.

Increasing knowledge of God sets us on the path toward holiness. This is not just a matter of accepting facts about God. We learn and experience that God is good and loving and just. And when we grow in the knowledge of God, we begin to offer him our reverence and obedience, which he truly deserves. Let's pray daily for wisdom and revelation so that our knowledge of God may continually increase.

O God, we need wisdom and revelation so that we may grow to know you better. May we know you as you truly are, and may we revere you as you deserve. Amen.

## IN GOD'S IMAGE

God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

—Genesis 1:27

What do you think of yourself?

One person might say, "I'm a guy who made millions selling cars." Or "I was the first woman in my family to go to college." Or "I'm just a hard worker who wants to take care of my family." We all have a variety of abilities and callings.

Ultimately, though, it is essential for us to recognize that we are made in God's image. This means that in many ways we can act, think, and create, as God does. We can also have a relationship of friendship with God our Creator himself.

I have a friend who did development work in some of the poorest villages in Central America. The people there needed help with many things: agriculture, literacy, health, marriage, parenting, and so on. But this wise friend, Moses, did not go into a village and try to fix everyone's problems.

Instead he started a Bible study. And he began with this passage in Genesis. He shared with his listeners that they were all created in God's image. He helped them to see that they could think and act creatively and have a life-changing relationship with God. And when people accepted this truth about themselves, they could begin to believe and see that they could bring changes into their lives and communities. They couldn't change anything on their own, but they learned that in the power of God they could do all kinds of things!

Lord God, help us to see that we are created in your image to carry out your work in this world. Help us to remember and to share this truth with others. Amen.

**SING!**

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.  
—Psalm 96:1

Whenever my Aunt Rosemary was working in the kitchen, she would sing. I don't remember whether the songs were popular tunes, hymns, or made-up melodies, but they were lovely. Whenever I went there to play with my cousins, I could count on hearing her beautiful voice.

Singing is a great way to engage the mind with goodness (assuming the song doesn't celebrate some kind of evil). This is why the Bible calls on us to sing to God and glorify him. The pleasant sounds of our voices give honor and glory to God as we sing biblical songs. Even if the songs we sing are not specifically Christian, our voices glorify our Creator just as the buzzes of bees and the songs of birds do.

Not all of us have beautiful voices, but that doesn't matter. A voice raised to heaven is a voice beautified in heaven.

Singing is known to engage our minds at the deepest levels. Even in the last days of her life with Alzheimer's disease, my mother-in-law could sing old hymns she had learned in her youth. She didn't know where she was, but she still remembered the words and the tunes of those songs.

Our thoughts can be put to good use in song. Composing music and lyrics in honor of the Lord who gives us life and blesses us with all good things, we can apply our whole selves in praise to God. We can lift up our hearts and voices and sing!

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, you heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Amen.

## WHAT DO YOU WANT?

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? —James 4:1

Desires are thoughts. Sadly, they often begin with the words of our two-year-old selves: "I want that!" We can easily think, for example, "I want a car (or a house) like that." Or, "I wanted the job he got." I want, I want, I want.

Not all of our desires are bad, but many are. If we want something that belongs to others or if we want something at the expense of others, that is typically wrong. Pleasure and enjoyment are great blessings, but if we seek such things only for selfish reasons, that can be wrong too. We can easily deceive ourselves into thinking, "I *should* have that . . . and why shouldn't I?" Our desires can cause battles within us.

How do we know if what we want is right or wrong? We can take it to God in prayer. And if we think, "I can't possibly ask God for that," it is probably a wrongful desire.

We can also have lots of good desires, though. We may want our children to do well in school. We may want our friend's marriage to be saved. We may want our church to grow. God is pleased when we ask for good things like these with the right motives.

As we think about our desires, let's focus on those that can bring about good for our neighbors, family, and friends. Let's think about what can bring growth in God's kingdom throughout the world. Things like these are in line with the desires of God's heart.

Lord, may you be our hearts' desire. May we desire your good for ourselves and for others. May we share the joy of having life with you so that others may enjoy that too. Amen.

## ONLY ONE TRUTH

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."  
—John 14:6

Notice that in this passage Jesus does not just say he knows the truth or can teach the truth. He says, "I *am* the truth."

This means that to know Jesus is to know the truth. The truth is that there is one God, who can be found only through Jesus Christ. The truth is that the God who created the world and filled it with good things is the same God who came to give us salvation and new life. We are made in the image of the one true God, and we find our true selves when we receive full life in him.

The counterpoint of Jesus' statement here is that all other claims to truth are false, including all the other "isms" of the world: consumerism, communism, capitalism, hedonism, nationalism, and so on. If you think that the truth is that we need to make more money, or have more fun, or have your political party succeed, you are

telling yourself a lie. Only Jesus is the truth.

All truths eventually arrive at Jesus. Some brilliant scientists and philosophers have accepted Jesus because he has greeted them at the end of their investigations. Some addicts have received Jesus because they have discovered that only he can save them from themselves. Some have seen Christians faithfully living out the truth and have learned that Jesus must be the truth who makes that possible.

Jesus is the truth. Let's show it, tell it, and live it today.

Lord and God, help us to seek your truth and to ignore all the false claims that tempt us in our lives. May we be so true to you that others see it and want it too. Amen.

## SLAVE OR FREE?

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”  
—John 8:32

Sometimes we use polite, little lies to try to be kind or avoid being rude. We might say, “Yes, I can tell you’ve lost some weight.” Or, “You have not aged a bit.” Or, “Wow, you almost scored a goal on that play.” But our passage here is talking about truth and lies at a more profound level than the social niceties we practice.

Are you a slave to sin and death, or are you free from them? In John 8:34, Jesus says that “everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” That certainly includes me—and you too. If we wish to be free from that slavery, we must embrace the truth that is Jesus. Only he can liberate us from the sin that enslaves us.

Which sins enslave you? Are you a slave to anger, or lust, or greed, or envy, or sports, or beauty, or money? We are all slaves to something. We might tell ourselves that we will be

truly happy once we get this or that thing, or when we reach a certain goal. But only faithful followers of Jesus have a real shot at freedom from slavery to sin. All other plans for liberation just end up in a new form of slavery.

An example of this is political revolution. In Nicaragua, for example, the Sandinistas overthrew an oppressive oligarchy led by Anastasio Somoza. Now, under the Sandinista leaders Daniel and Rosario Ortega, things are worse than ever before.

Let’s not flip from one slave master to another. We can find freedom by following Jesus. Only then will we be free.

Lord, we keep enslaving ourselves. Give us the desire to be free, and free us to live fully in you, we pray. Amen.

## PRAYER, THE SOLUTION FOR WORRIES

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.  
—Philippians 4:6

The Bible urges us not to worry or be anxious. But that is not always easy. We may ask ourselves, “What if some disaster happens?” or, “What if I lose my job?” or, “What if my health fails?” Such questions show our concerns about a future we can’t control.

As we learn from experience, there are many things in life that we can’t control. And yet we can also trust that at all times in the future God will be our faithful Lord and Savior. God will always seek our good. So, in him, we can have confidence about the future.

When concerns arise, we need to turn to God in prayer, knowing that he has all that we need. God is our Father, and he loves to give good gifts to his children. We can turn to God and remember his faithfulness in the past, to both ourselves and other believers. We

know that God has our destiny in his hands and has prepared a place for us in eternity.

And we can give thanks. We can thank God because he has provided for our needs in years past. We can thank him for providing for the needs of so many believers throughout the ages. Ultimately we can thank God that through his Son we are saved from death, sin, and futility.

Our lives can potentially be full of anxiety. But each day we can bring all our concerns to him, knowing that we are ultimately secure in his hands.

Father, comfort us in our worry and anxiety. You have been faithful in the past; guide us to trust you in the future. Help us know the comfort of your Spirit always. Amen.

## FILLED MINDS

Whatever is true . . . noble . . . right . . . pure . . . lovely . . . admirable . . . excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.  
—Philippians 4:8

Is your mind filled with things that are true, pure, excellent, and praiseworthy? Or is it distracted by things that are false, polluted, ugly, and dishonorable? We likely have some amount of each, since we are all sinners.

Let's look first at filling our minds with what is true. This can be hard today when there is often little regard for speaking truth on the internet and in the media. We need to ask God to show us what is right and true, recognizing that we can depend on his Word in the Bible and on teachings that are solidly based on all of it.

We can also seek what is lovely, good, and praiseworthy. God and his creation are beautiful. God's love and his salvation are the most beautiful things of all. When we seek the lovely and beautiful, we will find God behind it all.

However, if we not only see but also revel in what is ugly, distasteful, violent, or worse, we'll find ourselves following the way of the devil, who is behind all things that are repulsive and corrupt.

Let's be sure to fill our minds with thoughts that honor God, others, and ourselves. Let's steer away from thoughts that spread lies, hurt others, drag reputations down, or create cynicism. God knows what we are thinking, and in his strength we can control our thoughts so that they honor him.

Lord, help us to fill our minds with pure, true, wholesome things. Let us not stray into ugly, dishonorable thinking that can lead us to destruction. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## I KNOW

“There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.”  
—Hosea 4:1

Teenagers will often verify that they “know.”

- “Aiden, you need to be home by 11:00.” “I know.”
- “Sophia, you can’t wear that skirt.” “I know.”
- “Jack, that room of yours is a disaster.” “I know.”

In situations like these, the facts are not in question. Both the parents and teens “know.” But like many teenagers, we don’t always act on the basis of the facts we know.

God’s people had the same problem. Though they “knew,” they did not “acknowledge.” As Hosea pointed out, the people didn’t acknowledge God. They didn’t pay attention to God’s law—his guidelines for daily living in community. Instead, they mistreated each other in all kinds of ways.

The people did know that God is loving and just, but they ignored that truth. They did

know that following God’s law was the right way to live, but they ignored that truth as well. The results of all this were devastating. God said he would reject his people since they did not acknowledge him.

The same process can occur today. Do you “know” that the just and powerful God of the universe sees you? Of course. Do you “know” that following God’s direction is the only way to live in peace with God and neighbors? Of course.

If any of us is pretending that we don’t need God or his law in some part of our life, we need to stop and acknowledge the truth.

God, we know that you are faithful, just, and loving. Help us to acknowledge these great truths in our lives today. Amen.

## NEVER STOP PRAYING!

“Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.”  
—1 Samuel 12:23

When I was in my twenties and going through some hard times, I asked my mother to pray for me. She said, “Do you mean, in addition to the prayers that began before your birth and have not ceased to this day?” I hadn’t realized that my mom prayed so fervently for me, and that was humbling.

Samuel prayed persistently for God’s people, and we do well to follow that example.

Are you a persistent and fervent prayerer? I can’t think of anything we can do that is more pleasing to God and useful to others than prayer.

Silent, or internal, prayer is a miracle brought about by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Through the voice of the Spirit, who comes to live within us, our thoughts are heard by the triune God. We can think with and talk to God about anything, at any time,

and in any place. Through our thoughts we can connect with the most powerful being in the universe, who loves us more than any other. We don’t even need an introduction; God already knows us intimately.

If you are looking for a dialogue with God, turn to Scripture, read a few verses, and pray whatever comes to mind. Any fears, worries, and wrongs you have done can be laid at God’s feet and forgotten.

Samuel and my mother were fervent and faithful prayerers. Knowing that God loves us so much, how can we not pray?

O God, we come to you in prayer through the work of your Spirit in us. We know that you hear us. Guide us to pray faithfully. Please fill us with your grace and peace each day. Amen.

## SWEET-SMELLING PRAYERS

They were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. —Revelation 5:8

Did you know that our prayers are like a scented offering to the Lord? Imagine God sitting on his throne, inhaling all of our prayers. He is surrounded by four creatures that are beyond our imagining, and by 24 elders who represent all of his people redeemed by Jesus, the Lamb of God. The amazing creatures and the elders hold out bowls of fragrant offerings to God, and these represent all of our prayers.

We might not usually think of scents when we consider God's holiness or God's presence, but perhaps we need to. We know that God created the nose of the bloodhound, which is about 50 times more sensitive than our own. So perhaps we can imagine God deeply breathing in the most attractive scent in the universe—our prayers. He takes a deep breath and smiles. God loves us more than we can

imagine, and he delights in hearing whatever we have to say. Whether we express joy or thanks or wonder or sadness or grief or concern or anxiety, the God who loves us is always eager to hear us.

We can imagine that our prayers give God a scent more satisfying than fresh-baked bread or fresh-cut flowers. Our prayers are precious scents, offered to God in golden bowls.

Did you know that your prayerful thoughts and words are enjoyed as the loveliest of scents in the highest heaven?

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, accept our offerings of prayer. May they be a pleasing scent to you as you sniff out what we truly need. Thank you, Lord, for hearing all our prayers. Amen.

## SINGING PRAISE TO GOD

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

—Revelation 5:13

Maybe you have heard Handel’s *Messiah*, which includes this song and many others that we find in the Bible. Maybe the music of that stirring oratorio is going through your head right now.

Praising God through song is not just a nice thing to do now and then. In this text, singing is shown to be one of the most worshipful things a believer can do. All creation is called to sing to the God who is worthy of “praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

In song we can take part in worship with our whole being. If we are conscious of the words we are singing, our mind is deeply involved. If our emotions are affected by the music and the words, it can feel as if every part of our being is engaged.

I have been able to sing in a number of choirs. When I am

singing a Christian song with a group of good singers, it can feel as if we are praising God in heaven.

Not all of us are good singers or even musically inclined. But we don’t have to have great voices to sing wholehearted praise to our Creator and Savior. We can sing to and for the one true God who deserves all honor and glory and praise. And as our song reaches the Lord in heaven, it is purified, offering a sweet sound to his ear.

“Now blessed be the Lord our God . . . through all eternity; the whole earth let his glory fill: Amen! So let it be.”

## CHRIST'S OWN MIND

Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 2:5

One of the most important goals for a believer in Christ is to have the same mindset as Jesus.

Wouldn't that be amazing?! In Philippians 2, the apostle Paul describes the attitude Jesus had when he came from heaven to earth to live among us and to save us from sin and death.

In his descent, Jesus gave up all the power and glory he had in heaven by becoming a human being. He also came without status or privilege by taking the nature of a servant. Then he gave up even the life of a poor servant by submitting to death on a cross. In sum, the greatest being in the universe gave up everything and became a victim of excruciating punishment at the hands of brutal, mocking humans for our sake.

To share in Jesus' mindset, we are called to join in Jesus' way of life. He showed complete

sacrifice and humility. Jesus, who had all power and glory and majesty and privilege in heaven, gave it all up. He did not cling to anything that he rightfully had as the Son of God. He gave no thought to his own status or well-being. He gave it all up, for all of us.

Is there anything you have that you might feel you deserve or have a right to?

If we want to be like Christ, we need to give up any sense of entitlement so that we can serve God wholeheartedly and faithfully.

Lord Jesus, we wish to be like you, but the cost is great. By the power of your Spirit in us, help us to deny our own rights and desires and to seek yours. May your attitude be ours. Amen.

## SEEK WISDOM

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault. —James 1:5

The highest degree a person can earn in a field of study is a doctorate. But education is not a true measure of wisdom. There are lots of foolish people with doctoral degrees, and there are many uneducated men and women who are wise.

Wisdom is not the same as academic learning. Wisdom not only understands many things but also knows how to interpret what it senses and how to use that knowledge wisely.

Wisdom is a way of life, while knowledge can be little more than a collection of data. Computer programs can store more data than our brains can. But a computer cannot be wise. Wisdom is not mere knowledge. It also involves “know-how.”

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a perfect woman who brings life, peace, and blessing for all who seek her. When you find wisdom,

you will know what to say and how best to think and live. You will discern how things came to be. You will understand what is right and how to avoid wrongdoing.

Why would anyone be content with ignorance or foolishness when they could have the beautiful gifts of wisdom? Wisdom is found in hearing God’s Word, reflecting deeply on its teachings, and learning from other believers who are wise.

True wisdom leads to the true God. Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). True wisdom finds the source of all wisdom.

Lord, thank you for the gift of wisdom. Help us to follow Jesus, who shows us the way of true wisdom and leads us to eternal life with you. Amen.

## BOTH MIND AND SPIRIT

I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. —1 Corinthians 14:15

This passage addresses the gift of speaking in tongues. I do not have that spiritual gift, but many believers do. Paul supports the fact that Christians may speak in tongues, and he notes that it's also important for the community to understand what is said when a person speaks in tongues. When we can speak and pray and sing and listen with understanding, we use our minds in worship to the glory of God.

Our worship must include both spirit and mind. If the Holy Spirit does not meet with our spirit, our words of worship can be cold, ineffective statements. And if our mind is not engaged in our prayer and singing to God, our worship can become just exuberant blather. Only mindful, spiritual worship is real worship.

Worship should include our whole selves—mind, body, and

spirit. It's also important, then, that worship should be done *by* the congregation, not *for* the congregation. Worship is not a spectator sport. So while watching a singer perform can be inspiring, and while hearing a preacher's sermon can be stimulating, we need to discern that these things truly lead us to worship God.

Worship leaders have a great responsibility. They must direct the spirits and minds of worshipers toward God. They may not dazzle people or manipulate feelings. They must guide whole persons to Christ.

Father, Son, and Spirit, we want to worship you with our whole selves. Help us to engage both spirit and mind as we come into your presence in worship. Amen.

## OUR MINDSET

Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. —Romans 8:5

There are two basic directions we can follow in life: our own desires or God's desires. If we believe in Christ, we should aim to follow God's desires.

Here's a little test we can give ourselves. We can write down our desires in two columns. In one column we can note how many of our daily desires are for sinful or selfish things. In the other column we can note the desires we have for good or godly things. How many of our thoughts seek to satisfy our evil desires, and how many seek to do God's will and show love to our neighbors? If your mind operates like mine, the first column will have lots of examples, and the second will have just a few.

This is the spiritual and mental struggle of the Christian life. As believers in Christ, we have been reborn to new life in the Spirit. We are no longer stuck in the realm of sin and death,

with its lies and false promises, but we are not yet fully regenerated either. Our life in the Spirit is a work in progress.

Two systems are in operation. In one, our desires oppose God, and we continue to sin. In the other, we are newly reborn into a life powered by the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, we are justified by Christ's fulfillment of the law and his finished work, and we are given eternal life through the Spirit. So we are freed from the curse of sin and death, and we are called to live by the Spirit so that we become like Christ. True life is found in him.

Spirit of God, you are the source of our new life. Fill us and guide our desires and actions. Do not leave us to our own desires, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## FIGHT THE GOOD MENTAL FIGHT

I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin. . . . —Romans 7:22-23

It is hard to overstate how much our minds are like battlefields. This is true for all believers in Christ, including the apostle Paul, who describes his own struggles in our text for today.

In this passage Paul says that one set of thoughts in his mind is turned toward God and aims to do good. The other set of thoughts, however, is turned toward evil and wants to sin. Paul thanks God in Christ that he is indeed saved. But in the very next verse he recognizes that he is still of two minds; he is a slave to God's law at the same time that he is a slave to sin. In verse 24 Paul seems to despair of living in this sort of spiritual duplicity. "What a wretched man I am!" he says.

In this way Paul expresses the frustrating way the Christian life goes—we are pulled one way and tugged the other by

opposing powers within us. Though we are truly and irrevocably saved through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are at the same time slaves to our sinful old selves.

Thus we are in constant battle. Who will rule our heart and mind today? Who will rule our thinking about our work, marriage, or politics? The inner thoughts that we barely even notice may really be spiritual combat.

Though the battle rages on, we can ultimately say, with Paul, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

O God, you have freed us from the curse of sin and death. But we need your power in our minds each day. Guide us to live by your Spirit. Amen.

## THE GOD OF THIS AGE

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ. . . . —2 Corinthians 4:4

In this passage Paul speaks of people's minds being blinded by "the god of this age." This is a reference to Satan, the devil, who is still very active in our world today.

Has the god of this age, the devil, blinded you? I think an honest answer would be that although we can see the gift of the gospel, we can certainly be blinded by the devil's distractions and attractions today.

For example, how about constant and malicious online stories about political opponents?

How about porn? Looking at it may make you feel virile and powerful—for a short time. But it is not reality, and it is not God's will for our sexuality.

How about scrolling through favorite social media hour after hour? Too often we see only one side of the story in increasingly demeaning ways.

How about false religion like the prosperity gospel, claiming God will make you wealthy if you just follow its teaching?

How about "action movies," in which people are killed or tortured in gruesome ways for entertainment?

The god of this age is present in so many ways today, making all of these things seem normal and desirable. Most of these influences, and more, are also just updated versions of what people faced in Paul's day.

Give your mind a break. Let the true gospel enlighten you.

Dear God, so many influences today are used by the devil to lead us astray. Help us to reject the evil they present as if it were normal. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## HEAVENLY THOUGHTS

“You have heard that it was said. . . .  
But I tell you. . . .”

—Matthew 5:21-22

In this passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, our Lord cites several references from the Old Testament Law, such as “Do not murder,” “Do not commit adultery,” and so on. Then he adds his own divine wisdom on the deeper meanings of those laws, insisting that even our thoughts and motives are subject to the Law's commands. So if we think about killing someone, or committing adultery, or any other sin, we have actually committed that sin. Ouch!

Jesus' main message here is about the life in the kingdom of God. He shows us that kingdom living goes beyond simply following God's law. In the kingdom of God, even our thoughts must be pure, good, and truthful.

Now, if we are saved in Christ, our sinful thoughts certainly won't change that. Similarly in

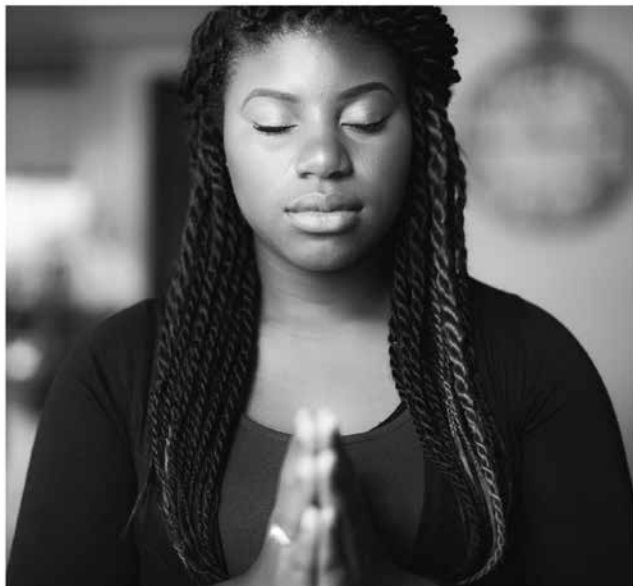
some ways, we can say that people do not go to prison for thinking of murder. So does it really matter if we revel in sinful thinking?

It does matter. We are saved so that we will become more fitting, effective agents in God's kingdom. When our thoughts align with Christ's, we gain power and understanding into the ways of God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, more and more of our mind can become like the mind of Christ. And if our mind is like Christ's, we will share in his compassion, confidence, hope, and power.

Let the mind of Christ grow effectively in you.

Lord Jesus, make us effective servants in your kingdom. May even our thoughts and desires be worthy of you. Amen.

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