Worship with the Mind

Mark 12:29-31
"'Hear, O Israel [hear, O church… hear, O Hayward Wesleyan church]… the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

A couple of years ago I asked our middle school students to write down questions they had relating to God, Jesus, religion, Christianity, life, etc. Here are some of their questions:

- How was God created? Who made God?
- Who wrote the Bible?
- Is heaven fun?
- Is it okay if a Christian smokes?
- Why don't some people believe in God?
- When we ask God to forgive our sins, and then we go out and sin again, does God still forgive us for that new sin?
- Why doesn't God send Jesus again to help?
- How do you know when God is talking to you?
- How can I stop from getting so angry?
- Why do I feel so alone?
- How do teachers lose papers?
- Can I pierce my tongue?
- Are there aliens?
- How do you know that "god" really was there? People could have made up the Bible. How can you believe in "god" and know he is real? How do you know "god" is "with" you? Why do you believe? How do you know there is a "god"?

Amazing questions, eh? I wasn't so much surprised by the questions those middle schoolers had as much as the depth and circumstance out of which those questions came.

I mean we all have questions about God. Questions like:

- How does the account of creation recorded in Genesis match up with the scientific evidence?
- Why did Jesus have to die?
- Why do I have to come to church?
- How do I really understand the Bible and apply it to my life?
- What about all of the other religions in the world? How do we know that Christianity is right? What's wrong with Hinduism, or Islam, or witch doctors?
- What does God really think about homosexuality, or abortion, or the death penalty, or presidential politics? Who would God vote for?

These questions are ones born out of curiosity and current societal structures. We as humans want to make sense of the observable and non-observable world around us. We want to fit it together. Make it work.

And yet, there are deeper questions and thoughts:

- ones that we struggle to understand and fit together…
- questions that are much deeper on our hearts and minds…
- ones we don't often share or maybe don't really want to entertain a probable answer or thought…
- questions that we struggle to make sense from a supposedly loving and all-knowing God

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW PAIN? SUFFERING?
WHY 9-11 GOD? OR KATRINA IN NEW ORLEANS AND MISSISSIPPI? OR THE TSUNAMI IN ASIA? OR FAMINE AND HIV IN AFRICA? ARE THESE NECESSARY FOR SOME REASON?
WHERE ARE YOU GOD WHEN I NEED YOU? I DON'T FEEL LIKE YOU CARE! ARE YOU ABSENT?
WHY DOESN'T GOD MEET MY NEEDS?!
WHY DOES GOD LET BAD THINGS HAPPEN?
WHAT'S WRONG WITH SEX OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE? WHY CAN'T I LIVE WITH MY PARTNER AND TRY THEM OUT BEFORE WE GET MARRIED?
HOW DO I DEAL WITH MYSELF GOD? YOU MADE ME!

- WHY DO I LIKE TO LOOK AT PORNOGRAPHY?
- WHY DOES ALCOHOL HAVE SUCH A HOLD ON MY LIFE?
- WHY CAN'T I CONTROL MY EATING HABITS?
- WHY DO I HAVE THOUGHTS ABOUT A WOMAN OTHER THAN MY WIFE, OR A MAN OTHER THAN MY HUSBAND?
- WHY CAN'T I CONTROL MY ANGER, OR MY LUST, OR MY GREED, OR MY PRIDE, OR MY EMOTIONS?

I FEEL SO OUT OF CONTROL IN MY LIFE, GOD…

These are hard questions and thoughts. There are many others I haven't mentioned, but that you are thinking about right now.

Maybe I highlighted your questions, maybe I didn't, but we all have serious questions about God, faith, life, family, community, work… and on and on the list goes.

And yet in the midst of these deep questions that haunt our hearts and minds, Jesus tells us to:

Mark 12:29
"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

Are you serious God?! Really?!

You want me to love and worship you

with a…

…decrepit heart

…a malnourished soul

…a warped mind

…and a weak will?

Some of you may find that church on Sunday morning is kind of:

…an oasis for your heart

…a get away from those thoughts and questions that plague your mind

…a place where strength is restored

…and your soul is nourished

And it should be. Gathering together as the people of God should be a weekly practice we all participate in. Because in this place, during this hour, we anticipate and expect God by His Holy Spirit to meet us here, work in our lives and change us. I have often prayed during the traditional pastoral prayer that we all would walk out of this room as different people, transformed by God's Holy Spirit.

However…

Do you find that on Monday things are a little different in your spirit than they were on Sunday morning when we were all together?

Do you find that as the week goes on, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, that the oasis has turned into a parched desert, strength is weakening, your soul is left unattended, and your mind turned off?

Do you find that on Friday and Saturday, as you are reeling from the heavy demands of work, family and community commitments that the week held, you find yourself in desperate need again of that luscious oasis, place of light and love, a five-course meal for the soul, and answers and thoughts to the questions your mind has been free to ponder and ask?

If you find yourself in this frequent weekly (or monthly) rhythm, then you probably suffer from a condition known as RSS.

Restless

Sunday

Syndrome

If you find yourself restlessly living from Sunday to Sunday, or experience to experience, then you might be a prime candidate for RSS.

Restless
Sunday
Syndrome

Not that going to church on Sunday is a bad thing! It's not! We need to get together every week to:

- encourage each other
- worship God together
- drink coffee and eat cinnamon rolls in the gym together
- talk to your friends
- invite family and friends to the weekly gatherings
- learn what it means and what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus

RSS (Restless Sunday Syndrome) is not a healthy syndrome if your spiritual soul is only fed once a week on Sunday morning.

RSS (Restless Sunday Syndrome) is not a healthy lifestyle if your mind is only engaged toward God and the things above solely during an hour on Sunday morning.

Worshiping God is not a once a week thing on a Sunday morning. I'm pretty sure that God wants to be an active and engaging part of all of our lives, not just in the church pew on Sunday morning.

Why? Why is RSS such a prevalent problem? Why do many God worshipers suffer from this previously undiagnosed syndrome?

I think one of the symptoms is that we as a people in general, love to surround ourselves with experts.

I heard about a book from a friend written in 1959 by sociologist Erving Goffman called The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Goffman argued that we create extensive educational systems and professional roles in any given field for the sake of status and our comfort.

In other words, all professions are at least part con job. And more than that, the con jobs work because folks want to be conned. It gives us all the illusion of competency, control, stability and comfort.

So when I go to the doctor with a weird rash on my skin, I want somebody in a lab coat with a clipboard and a plague on the wall who says, "Mr. Mavis, it appears you have some sort of epidermal systemic vascular contusion or lesion. Here is a prescription for 500 milligrams of salicylic acid as we wait for further diagnostic analysis."

I don't want some guy named, Chuck, dressed in blue jeans who says, "Wow! I don't know what the rip that thing is. You could die for all I know. Here, take an aspirin and don't call me in the morning!"

What Chuck says may be the truth, but I don't want that. Con me, Chuck. Make me feel better. Use some big words to cover the fact that you don't know, and we're not in control of what happens. Con me. So doctors, professors, scientists and professionals often do.

And pastors often do. Instead of saying, "I don't know" we say: "Pray this prayer; take this class; read this book; do this thing."

We use big words like: hypostatic union, eschatology, sola scriptura, pneumatology, mosaic and adamic covenants.

Now there is some value in these words, but we use them sometimes to make you think we know more than we do because people want us to know more than we do. Because to tell you the truth, God is freaky! That is, He is holy. He's more scary than the nastiest rash!

But we all want an expert. We want someone who knows what she or he is talking about. We want someone who has a Bible College or Seminary degree telling us what to do. We want an ordained Reverend with a big Bible, a kind smile, wise words, and maybe a nice tie (and hopefully good breath!) between me and God. We want a buffer of professionalism and expertise between ourselves and God. A 'God pro.'

I am not saying that pastors are all con artists or unnecessary. What I am saying is that we all want a God pro to teach us and train us and lead us into the presence of God.

WE CAN'T DO THAT FOR YOU!!

Only Jesus can do that for you.
Only Jesus is the God professional…
the God pro!

Jeremy, as a pastor, can only show you what I do with Jesus as my God pro and then lead and teach by example.

Jesus said:

Matthew 23:7-10
"[Pharisees and teachers of the law] love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi'. But you are not to be called 'Rabbi' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'Father', for you have one Father and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher', for you have one Teacher, the Christ."

Jesus is your Rabbi, your God pro.
God is your Father.
Jesus is your Teacher.

Jeremy, Mark, Heath, Loretta, Tim, and Ben, we are all sisters and brothers with you because we have one Father.

We do not have the answers to your deep questions. But God does… and Jesus is His answer.

Really, that is not just some fancy, churchy statement. God does have the answers to your deep questions and Jesus is His answer.

God uses us as pastors and other wise and discerning people in this faith community as tribal elders. We remind and point the tribe to God and His answer Jesus. We are used by God to help facilitate this connection.

Worshiping God, the Father, with your mind means that you bring your questions to Him and allow Him to answer them.

Trust me, God can handle your small or large questions. He can take it. Why do we think that God is somehow threatened by the questions are minds have?

God, do you really exist?
Answer: Gee, Jeremy, that's a tough one, gonna have to get back to in say, 20-25 years?

God, how does the current scientific evidence and your Bible work? I mean, it seems like science contradicts the Bible? Our world makes it seem like we have to decide to believe scientific evidence, or to believe the myth of the creation account of some intelligent designer.
Answer: Wow, Jeremy, I never saw that one coming. I wish I would have thought about that as I was creating the fossil record and the millions of substrata on top of the tectonic plates. I'll have to work on fixing that problem for you. I'm really sorry about that.

God, why do I get so angry?
Answer: QUIT ASKING ME ALL THESE HARD QUESTIONS!!

Maybe worshiping God, the Father, with your mind means that you bring your questions and thought to Him and allow Him to answer them.

Chuck, or Jeremy, is going to try really hard for you, but really he's got the same questions, too. Because Jeremy is concerned about some really nasty rashes as well.

Back to that Sunday morning thing… RSS… Restless Sunday Syndrome.

Do we need to allow God to transform and infuse our whole week (every day) and not just on Sunday morning?

Romans 12:1-2
"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

- offer bodies as living sacrifices
- don't conform to world's pattern
- be transformed by renewal of mind

Interesting. So maybe God wants all of us RSS sufferers, and even those who have been sitting here judging the RSS sufferers, maybe we need to be doing something with our minds and our worship throughout the week and not just on Sunday morning.

So you may be asking:

Jeremy, how do we live for God during the week? How do we actively offer our bodies, don't conform, and renew our mind, each and every day?

But then you would be asking the right question, but to the wrong person. Jeremy doesn't know the ANSWER to your question to God.

Jeremy only knows the answers he has gotten from God by asking him these questions.

So in a risky effort to be transparent with you…

How do I not conform to the patterns of this world?

Philippians 4:8
"Finally, brothers, 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."

I have found (and continue to find) that what I think about often usually comes out. So if I'm thinking a lot of garbage (bad stuff), what comes out? Garbage. It's the old saying: GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT.

A couple of years ago we only had one TV channel. For some reason, our rabbit ears and TV could only receive the FOX 21 TV signal. So we were limited to one channel's programming. In their late evening lineup, it would be *Frasier*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and then *That 70's Show*. I would watch those three shows usually without thinking. That's what TV is good for sometimes, not thinking.

But one day I started thinking about what I was watching… particularly That 70's Show. I liked it because it discussed typical older teen behavior and some unique family dynamics in Wisconsin. However, I really thought deeper about the core behavior of the main cast: smoking pot, having sex, and drinking beer. Without thinking I was being affected (garbage in) by the subtle practices. Now, I didn't start smoking pot or drinking beer, and I won't comment on the other one☺. But garbage was coming out of my mind from that show I would watch almost every night. So I stopped watching it.

That show did not fall into the categories of Philippians 4:8 (true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable). Also, I was religiously watching a show for more time that I spent in "church service" on Sunday morning (about 2 ½ hours). I didn't think that the amount of influence this show had on my mind time-wise, was a smart thing.

And maybe you will have to address this in your own life as well. When you ask God the question: How do I not conform to the patterns of this world? maybe you will have to look at what are you taking in: watching TV (with people, or by yourself), participating with friends, and certain activities that wouldn't line up with Philippians 4:8.

GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT

I have asked my God pro: **How do I offer my body as a living sacrifice?**

God has said:

"You know, Jeremy, by thinking about—

- not being selfish and self-centered
- being humble and not proud
- not making a big deal out of things that aren't a big deal
- setting aside what I want for what others want or need
- being kind when someone wronged me"

Things that happen to you that require a godly response generally happen throughout our week, not on Sunday morning. Everyone is on their best behavior on Sunday. Not many of us are out of line during the church service. I haven't had to discipline any in here this morning. You've all been very well behaved! Practicing godly behavior is easy when you are sitting next to someone in church who is also godly. The tough part is during the week when a customer is unappreciative and demanding; or your boss is unreasonable and mean; or when your co-workers are subversive and deceitful; or when _____ you name the circumstance.

You all know that there are no shortage of ways in which circumstances and situations need the presence of God in them and not the presence of our natural human reaction. There are too many middle fingers flown and under-the-breath cursing during tourist driving season on Hayward's city streets or county highways, than kind and forgiving attitudes of busy, stressed out people who can't wait to get on vacation in our backyard.

Very difficult things to think about and practice. But it requires offering ourselves as a living sacrifice in order to bring the attitude and mind of Jesus into this world, into our backyard.

How do I renew my mind?

There are many ways that God has taught me to renew my mind. One way is to saturate my mind with Scripture. Not always to understand and pick it apart, but just to swim in God's Word each day and be surrounded by God's intended world (which, honestly is tough to do with a very active lifestyle). Just like food sustains and nourishes our physical body, so the Word of God sustains and nourishes our spiritual soul.

Another way is with your imagination. We can renew our mind through our God-given and God-inspired imagination. Now, granted, our imaginations can be used for evil purposes, but God made our minds and its imagination, and intended it for good.

Think about this…

It was with imagining being in the very presence of God, that Mercy Me penned this song:

I Can Only Imagine

I can only imagine
what it will be like
when I walk by your side

The Bible doesn't go into great detail about what heaven is like or even what God looks like. But maybe worshiping God with our mind, means allowing our God-given imaginations to be active throughout our week.

I can only imagine
what my eyes will see
when your face is before me
I can only imagine

Perhaps, worshiping God with your mind means

- bringing your deep questions to God
- looking to Jesus as your Rabbi, your God pro, your God expert
- be transformed by offering your bodies as living sacrifices, not conforming to the world, and renewing our mind

I can only imagine
when that day comes
and I find myself, standing in the Son

Perhaps our imaginations are very helpful in worshiping God throughout our entire week, even despite our RSS tendencies. Let your imagination turn toward God often:

I can only imagine
when all I will do
is forever, forever worship you
I can only imagine

chorus
Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel,
will I dance for you Jesus, or in awe of you be still
will I stand in your presence, or to my knees will I fall
will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all
I can only imagine

[invite everyone to sing with me…]

Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel,
will I dance for you Jesus, or in awe of you be still
will I stand in your presence, or to my knees will I fall
will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all
I can only imagine, I can only imagine

I can only imagine
when all I will do
is forever, forever worship you
I can only imagine, I can only imagine

Let's pray…