

LIFEGROUP STUDY
How To Train Your Brain:
Keys to Growing a Healthy Mind
20211031

LEADER NOTES

OVERVIEW

Welcome back to our Creekside LifeGroup study series, “How to Train Your Brain”! For the final study of this series, we’ll be looking at keys to growing a healthy mind. Our brains are constantly changing and being rewired. We need to deliberately engage in ordering that rewiring. Paul tells us this in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." How do we do this? We need to retrain our brains through choosing to do what Jesus says - to read the bible, pray, serve and so on. When we deliberately retrain our brain in a way that honours God we can know the freedom He longs for us to experience.

ICEBREAKER Doing What’s Good for Me

What habit have you engaged in over the last year or so to do something good for yourself? Perhaps you’ve taken up running. Maybe you’re changing up what you eat or you’ve set up a routine where you get a good night’s sleep. **How has doing what’s good for you shaped other areas of your life? Share your story with your group!**

STUDY

So far in this series we have talked about one enemy in particular and that enemy is the devil. He is the father of lies and lies are the primary strategy, the primary weapon he uses against us. But he is not our only enemy. He is not the only one using lies, deception, tricks, falsity and so on to move us into the slavery of sin.

Paul points out our enemies in Ephesians 2:1-3a. This is where our ancient brothers and sisters who were followers of Jesus identified the enemies. They were wide awake to the war. Look at the three of them.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh . . .

Ephesians 2:1-3a

Notice the three enemies and how the ancients labelled them.

the ways of this world . . . was simply shortened to “the world”

the ruler of the kingdom of the air . . . was for brevity’s sake labelled “the devil”

the cravings of our flesh was abbreviated to “the flesh”

These are the three enemies we face over and over again in life . . . the world, the flesh and the devil. And they all gang up on us.

Let’s define them.

The world . . . those elements in our culture consisting of ideas, values, morals, practices, thinking and social norms that are in opposition to God and the way of Jesus.

The flesh . . . our personal, ungodly, inner drive for self-gratification/pleasure especially pertaining to sensuality (i.e. sex, food), domination and control.

The devil is . . . a created immaterial spirit being, extremely intelligent, a cunning source of evil and the most powerful and influential creature on earth.

1. **Which of the three enemies identified above would you identify as the prominent one you are facing right now?**

- READ: Have someone in your group read out loud 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

"4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

2. On Sunday, Ken said that we are in a war. **What did he mean by this?**

LEADER NOTES: On Sunday Ken said we are in a war. This war is a battle for our mind. It is important to realize we are in this war. Denying it or ignoring it means we lose the war. Notice the “war” words in 2 Cor. 10:4-5 – “weapons” “fight” “power” “strongholds” “demolish” “take captive”. God wants us to know our brain is not neutral territory. There is a spiritual battle going on for control of our mind.

3. READ: Ephesians 6:12.

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Ephesians 6:12 NLT

- **How is this war different than war we typically think of?**

LEADER NOTES:

When we slow things down, when we are in those settled, quiet, reflective moments, and we think about what it is that Paul is saying, we realize that what Paul has written here is absolutely true and absolutely vital for us to understand, believe and live out. What Paul is pointing out is that there is a bigger reality. There is a fuller reality. There is a powerful reality beyond the reality we see physically. There is a way of seeing life and in particular here the war we are in, that goes beyond the surface, past the physical and focusses in on the source of what it is that is empowering this ultimate battle of truth over lies. There is a power behind what we see physically. This is the bigger reality. And we must see it if we are ever going to win the war.

4. READ 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 out loud again.

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”

- According to these verses, what three things are we to demolish? **How can we train our brain to demolish these things?**

LEADER NOTES: The three things we are to demolish are “strongholds” “arguments” and “every pretension” that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. “Strongholds” were fortresses in Bible times. They had thick walls that were tough to penetrate. A stronghold in our mind might be a prevailing lie that Satan is using to keep us captive. (ex. “You’ve always been a failure.”) An “argument” might be a statement Satan is using to cause us to doubt God. (Ex. “How can God exist with all the bad stuff going on in the world?”) A “pretension” can be an allegation in the form of a lie - (ex. “God doesn’t care about you”). We can train our brains to demolish these things by focusing our minds on God’s truth, particularly the truth we read in the Bible.

5. What thoughts do you need to demolish? For example – “*You don’t have what it takes.*” Or “*Don’t open your heart because people will hurt you.*” **What are you thinking that is hurting you or others around you?**

LEADER NOTES: God has given us – “ ... divine power to demolish strongholds.” All of us have lies that go through our mind. These lies can take the form of temptation, accusation or misinformation. In order to fight in this war, we must know the enemy and his tactics. Our enemy is Satan. His tactic is lie. Encourage your LifeGroup members to identify the lie and to see how that lie is hurting them or others around them. Through God’s power, they can demolish that stronghold.

6. Read the following quote from Dr. Caroline Leaf, author of Switch on Your Brain

“It has been found that twelve minutes of daily focused prayer over an eight-week period can change the brain to such an extent that it can be measured on a brain scan. This type of prayer increases activity in brain areas associated with social interaction, compassion, and sensitivity to others. It also increases frontal lobe activity as focus and intentionality increase.”

- What do you think of this idea that focused prayer has a measurable impact on the health of our brain? **Does it surprise you that neurological science seems to validate what the Bible teaches?**

LEADER NOTES: On Sunday Ken talked about some of the scientific studies of the brain that show the value of spiritual practices on the health of the brain. These positive findings need not surprise us. God created our mind and He invites us to engage our mind by thinking about Him. When we focus on mind on God, both the Bible and neurological science verify the same thing – it’s a great way to train our brain!

7. READ: Romans 8:5-6

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.” NIV

- Contrast the two mindsets that Paul writes about. **What does it mean to have our mind set on what the flesh desires? What does it mean to have our mind set on what the Spirit desires?**

LEADER NOTES: In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul outlines some of sinful desires we can set our mind on. To “set our mind” means to make these things the focus and ambition of our life – they can become our god. To have our mind set on what the Spirit desires is to focus instead on godly things. Paul outlines this Spirit focus in Galatians 5:22-23 – ‘But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.’ We get to choose where our mind is set. Will we focus our thoughts on what our flesh desires, or will we focus on thoughts on what the Spirit desires? This is key to how we must intentionally train our brain.

8. Paul writes, “ ... but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.” **When you experience fear or anxiety or worry, how might these words bring you hope?**

LEADER NOTES: When we experience fear, anxiety or worry, we need God’s hope. This hope comes as we remember the truth of who He is in our lives. God has given us his Holy Spirit to lead our lives. To be governed by the Spirit is to be led by and watched over by God. We can’t win the war on our own, but we have a God who has already given us the victory through Jesus (see Romans 8:1 and Colossians 2:14-15). God has promised us that the result of committing our lives to follow Jesus will be that He will fill us with His life and peace. In the midst of fear, worry or anxiety, we can be assured we have a God who loves us and who promises to bring us life and peace.

9. **What is a key takeaway for you from this series of how to train your brain?**

EXPERIENCING GOD: Train your Brain through PRAISE.

Here’s an exercise to try in group or on your own this week. Psalm 100 invites us to train our brain through praising God. Read through this Psalm and notice the action words. How do these words speak to your mind? How are your thoughts about God being formed by this Psalm? If you have opportunity, read this Psalm outside in nature, perhaps under a star-filled sky or as you walk in the woods. Allow yourself to feel the invitation to engage your body, mind and soul in all-out worship of God. Allow God to use this Psalm to train your brain as you worship Him!

READ Psalm 100, THE MESSAGE, out loud.

- 100** ¹⁻² On your feet now—applaud GOD!
Bring a gift of laughter,
sing yourselves into his presence.
- ³ Know this: GOD is God, and God, GOD.
He made us; we didn’t make him.
We’re his people, his well-tended sheep.
- ⁴ Enter with the password: “Thank you!”
Make yourselves at home, talking praise.
Thank him. Worship him.
- ⁵ For GOD is sheer beauty,
all-generous in love,
loyal always and ever.

PRAYER

This week, let's pray for our teaching pastors at Creekside, Ken and Pete. Next week Pete begins a brand new series called, "With".

- Pray for Pete as he begins a 4 week teaching series about the theme of the temple in Scripture.
- Pray that people would be encouraged to read their Bible and see how important the temple theme is. Pray that people would come to an even greater understanding of what it means that God desires to dwell among us.
- Ask God to give Ken and Pete His wisdom as they continue to plan and prepare for future teaching.