

Sermon Title: What's On Your Mind? – September 22, 2013 (Scripture is from the ESV)

Introduction

Good afternoon, New Philly Hillside! It's a pleasure to be here. My name is John-Michael and I am one of the preaching pastors at New Philadelphia Church and also a community pastor at the Itaewon campus. My wife Sky and I are also the healing and deliverance pastors for the church. While we have a lot of pastor titles, we aren't on staff with the church but are instead full time missionaries directing an orphanage ministry called Jerusalem Ministry. If you have a heart for orphans or just want to learn more, please come up and talk with either of us after service.

The Question Every Boyfriend Fears

Today I want to speak on the question that every guy fears his girlfriend will ask: "What are you thinking about, right now?" I hated that question when I was younger. I always felt like I had to lie and say something like, "I'm thinking about how happy I am to be with you" or "I'm thinking about how beautiful you are." Lies. I was actually likely thinking about football, food, or else my mind was just on screen saver mode with nothing going on inside. As I matured I learned I needed to be a bit more focused during the date and be a little more romantic with the way I thought and the way I spoke. Discipline of the mind is crucial.

The title of today's message is: "**What's On Your Mind?**"

Before we get into the Bible, I want to present to you this argument that I believe to be true, "**You are always meditating on something, whether you know it or not.**" Please write that down: You are always meditating on something, whether you know it or not. And what you meditate on shapes who you are and the decisions you make. **What you meditate on shapes who you are and the decisions you make.** Sounds simple, right? But those two statements are far more powerful than you think.

I always thought that meditation was a discipline that was too high for me. I thought it was something for Buddhist monks, yoga nuts, and extremely anointed Christian leaders. But in the past few weeks I began to realize that ALL OF US are experts at meditation. Maybe we aren't meditating on spiritual things like the monks, gurus, and Christian leaders, but we are indeed meditating... all the time.

So what are you meditating on? Let me, for a moment, be that young hopeless romantic girl and ask you, "What are you thinking about, right now?"

Some of you are thinking about food. Some of you are thinking about someone else in the congregation. Some of you are thinking about how you look at the moment. And some of you, I hope, are actually trying to process what I am saying right now. Regardless, knowingly or unknowingly, you are always meditating on something. And what you meditate on shapes who you are and the decisions you make.

Let me give you some examples: While I was growing up my best friend was Hong. Hong is of Chinese descent, born in Cambodia during the end of the killing fields and then raised in America. While Hong grew up with his family and spoke Cantonese at home, his best friend was yours truly, a white guy, and Hong also attended public schools in an area where there were mostly white and black students and very few Asians. Hong also loved watching TV and his favorite shows were Saved By the Bell, Fresh Prince of Bel Air, and other sitcoms

featuring mostly white or black actors. And when Homecoming Dance at school came around each year, Hong never failed to attend the dance with a white girl or a black girl. It soon became clear he just didn't have any attraction for Asian girls. He had watched so much TV and been around white and black girls so much that **he had unknowingly meditated** on the beauty of white and black girls and was only attracted to them. I remember being at his house once in college and saw a Chinese calendar his mom had put up. Zhang Ziyi, the Chinese actress from Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, was featured on the calendar. I asked Hong, "Well, how about her? Do you find her attractive?" He paused and then shrugged, "Hmmm, I guess she is okay." I laughed and said, "Out of billions of Asian women you find one of the most attractive there is as just, "okay." Needless to say, Hong is now happily married to a white girl back in Virginia.

And now what about me? Pretty much the opposite happened. I didn't watch much TV growing up. I had to attend a different high school from Hong, that just happened to be one of the most diverse high schools in America. Pretty much every nationality of the world was represented at my high school. I was put into the "gifted and talented" classes that happened to have a number of Asian kids in them. I connected with them really well and by the end of high school most of my closest friends at school were Asian and my first girlfriend ended up being an Indian girl. In college I also happened to have a lot of Asian friends, and then God ended up leading me out to Korea. Then I was surrounded. And so while Hong is happily married to a white girl, I am happily married to my beautiful Korean wife, Sky.

Now that doesn't mean that just because you are in Korea you will marry a Korean. It's what you meditate on, what you look at and think about, that will begin to shape who you are and the decisions you make. Some of you might have never had a crush on someone of a certain type, but I guarantee if you meditate on the good things about them you will soon find your heart very open to them. **What you meditate on shapes who you are and the decisions that you make.**

Let me give a couple more examples. When Sky's brother Steven came to visit us here in Korea he mentioned a number of times about some girl actress named, "Soo Ji." Like I said before I don't watch TV much and I'm not that aware of most Korean celebrities, but I kept hearing the name "Soo Ji," and not just from Steven. Kids at my children's home, friends of mine, and random people would have pictures of Soo Ji on their cell phones or mention her in conversation in a longingly way. Then I found out Soo Ji was in a drama recently with Lee Seung Ki and that her popularity skyrocketed. She was on just about every commercial and billboard there is. So many guys were head over heels for Soo Ji, and a lot of them had never even seen the drama. They had just seen all the advertisements. They had heard all the public and the media speaking of how beautiful Soo Ji is. And soon many Korean men developed a crush on this young woman. They had unknowingly meditated on her so much that they began to obsess about her. You are always meditating on something, whether you know it or not. And what you meditate on shapes who you are and the decisions that you make.

One last example: body shape. Beauty is usually according to the brainwashing of the culture. For hundreds of years plump, pale skinned women were considered attractive. Look at European art from the Renaissance and you will see this to be true. But now in America people pay to get in a box and fry their skin brown. Pale-skin isn't deemed attractive in America. In England having crooked teeth shows you have character and is attractive, while in America everyone wants to fix their crooked teeth to look more attractive.

What does Korea portray as beautiful? An extremely skinny girl with big eyes and pronounced eyelids, perfect teeth, and cheekbones with a sharp v-line. I didn't even know what a v-line was until I was mentioning this sermon to my wife Sky and she told me about it. Sky told me that while she was attending college most of her American friends would always mention that she was too skinny and that she needed to eat more. But all her native Korean friends at college would instead say the opposite, that she had put on too much weight and needed to diet. Ridiculous! But that's what this nation broadcasts: get skinnier, get plastic surgery, change this about yourself, change that too, etc. Did Sky ever have trouble with the way her face was structured while in America? Never. It wasn't until after she moved to Korea and saw plastic surgery advertisement after plastic surgery advertisement and that she experienced insecure thoughts about her face. What you meditate on shapes who you are and the decisions you make. **If you meditate on what you lack**, which is what all those plastic surgery advertisements try to make you do, **then you will feel insecure and dissatisfied**.

Now let me ask you a few questions and let's see where your meditations are at...

1. Think about how much money you make each month right now. Think about how much money you want to save up in your bank account and how long it will take. How do you feel?
2. Think about your physical body. Are you happy with the shape you are in? Do you feel attractive? How do you feel?
3. Think about dating and marriage. Do you feel ready? Do you believe there is someone out there? How do you feel?
4. Think about your character. Do you feel the fruit of the Spirit is being produced in your life? Do you feel love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control? If there is lack, how do you feel about it?

How you feel determines a lot about who you are and the decisions that you make. **It reveals the true meditations of your heart**. If you feel good about each area, then you are likely very healthy and making healthy decisions. But if you feel lack, or feel overwhelmed, then clearly something is off. Your meditations are unhealthy. **You are either stressing over that issue, making poor decisions, or you're simply trying to avoid thinking about it because you feel hopeless that anything can change, which also leads to poor decisions**. If you are trying to avoid the issue then clearly you have meditated upon it and determined you are hopeless. For those who feel hopeless they tend to turn to credit cards, to eating disorders, to making poor relational decisions, and to only growing worse in their character. Something has to change. Specifically, the way they view and meditate on each area must be renewed. There has to be a renewing of the mind.

Now let's get into the Word of God. Turn with me to Joshua chapter one...

Joshua 1:7-8 – Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but **you shall meditate on it day and night**, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For **then you will make your way prosperous**, and then you will have good success.

There is a clear correlation in this passage between meditating on the Word of God and being prosperous and successful in life. What you meditate on shapes who you are and the decisions that you make.

When the Israelites came out of Egypt they weren't ready to inherit the Promised Land because they hadn't meditated on the goodness of God enough yet. All their lives they had lived apart from God, so when God suddenly showed up with the plagues and the exodus, they were in a place of shock. You would think that after witnessing the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, and the cloud by day and the fire by night that their faith would be rock solid. Quite the contrary though, time after time after time the Israelites complained before God and expressed their lack of faith in His goodness, His provision, and His power. Miracles are not the answer for creating rock solid faith. Miracles can provide a spark of faith, but unless there is a continual focus on the Lord that spark will quickly be quenched.

As I mentioned before I help direct the healing and deliverance ministry of this church. Time and time again I tell people we are counseling that while a healing and deliverance session has power to release people into greater levels of healing and freedom, it is not the end all by any means. Jesus Himself said that when demons are cast out of a person they go to dry and arid places and seek for more demons to join them so they can go back and attack the person again. Jesus said that when they come back and find the person clean and in order within they then attack with greater strength and the person ends up in worst state than before (Luke 11:24-26). Why does this happen? Because Jesus was not mentioned as reigning in the house when the demons returned. During healing and deliverance we clean house, we go through all the heavy sin and trauma and make the person clean inside with Jesus as Lord. But if the person lacks the maturity to continue to walk with God, to read the Word and pray and fellowship with the saints, then clearly Jesus is not the true Lord of their life. **Clearly Jesus is not reigning within them.** Their thoughts and meditations are not on Jesus, so they become easy bait for Satan. How does Satan attack us? By getting our minds and thoughts on things that are outside of God's will. **If our meditation is not on God's Truth, then we are easily deceived.** What you meditate on shapes who you are and the decisions that you make. You are either being shaped by the Word of God or by something else.

The Israelites were not ready for the Promised Land because they had not meditated on God's goodness enough. So God had their children remain in the Wilderness for 40 years before they were ready to go in. This was not just to cleanse the Israelites from the older, unbelieving generation, it was also to enable the next generation to be so soaked with God's presence, provision, and truth, that they would be ready to take the Promised Land.

The reason why God has us wait so often is so that we can meditate on His truth enough to be ready for what is coming. **Waiting is a form of meditation.** When you are waiting you are always meditating on something. And if your meditations are on wrong things, then you obviously need to wait longer so God can correct you and make you ready and right.

Psalm 139:23-24 – Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and **know my thoughts!** And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Isaiah 40:30-31 – Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but **they who wait for the Lord** shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not be faint.

If you are waiting on the Lord, then you will not be disappointed. Isaiah 49:23 says “Those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.” Your focus must remain on the truth of God’s Word and on the goodness of God’s character.

Job’s Righteousness

Right now in my Bible reading I’m going through the book of Job. Job is one of the greatest examples of the power of meditation. Job was a prosperous man, an extremely prosperous man. His thoughts were always on the Lord and He was blessed! God was so pleased with Job that He even mentioned Job to Satan in conversation. Satan then expressed his belief that if Job is tested, Job will eventually fail. God then agreed to allow Satan to test Job.

What follows are two of the saddest chapters in the Bible. Job loses all of his possessions, all of his children, his body becomes infested with disease and sickness, and to add to it all his wife tells him to curse God and die. Amidst all of this Job does not curse God or sin. Satan isn’t finished though. Satan then sends friends of Job to him to “comfort” him. But instead of comforting Job, they attack him left and right with accusations against Job. He is clearly in a miserable state, perhaps the most miserable any human being has suffered. Job begins to wish he had never been born and he also begins to question what God is doing. But throughout all his long discourses of his struggles, Job can’t shake the goodness of God. He continually remembers God’s character and power. Job’s fear of the Lord keeps him from cursing God. In the end, God shows up and declares His character and power, reinforcing these things to Job. Job repents of even doubting for a moment of God’s sovereignty. God then not only restores Job’s prosperity, but gave him twice as much as he had before.

There is no way Job could have endured such testing from Satan if he had not meditated on the goodness of God throughout his life. Because Job was so consumed with God’s goodness and sovereignty, that even after all the worst events of losing everything including his children Job was still able to bless the name of the Lord. That is powerful!

How Do We Apply?

So how do we grow the integrity of Job? How do we meditate on God’s goodness and be consumed by it? Turn with me to Deuteronomy 11:18-21...

Deuteronomy 11:18-21 – You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

God doesn’t tell us to meditate on the Word by chanting it over and over for thirty minutes. God doesn’t tell us to meditate on the Word by sitting down with our legs crossed and closing our eyes as we speak it out over and over. Instead God tells us to meditate on the Word of God by having it a part of our daily life. It isn’t just a matter of reading the Bible twenty minutes a day. It’s thinking about God’s truth and letting reminders of His Word be present throughout our day. We are always meditating on something, whether we know it or not.

When I was still in college I realized that I wasn't as grateful a person as I should be. I was more quick to complain or see the bad in things. Why? Because my mind had been trained to be pessimistic. And this hindered me a lot in my daily praise to the Lord. So what I started to do was take time every night before I would sleep to think through my day and give God praises for every big and little thing. James 1:17 says every good and perfect gift comes from God. I began to thank him for my breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I thanked him for the smile from that friend, for the beautiful weather that day, for the time to relax after dinner, for my health, and for other things. It wouldn't take that long, but I found myself realizing I had a lot to be thankful for. And the more I was thankful and gave God the glory, the more I recognized how good God is. My attitude began to go from pessimistic to optimistic **to downright content regardless of the circumstances.** I didn't realize it at the time, but what I was doing was meditating on the goodness of God every time I would give him thanks. I wasn't chanting, "God you are my provider. God you are my provider." Instead I was seeing him in my daily life. **Your time reflecting on God's goodness and giving Him praise is a clear form of meditation.** When you reflect you are causing your eyes to focus on God's goodness. Because of all the time I have spent in praise I am much quicker to see a beautiful skyline when I'm outside or to notice something else that is special from God. My eyes are trained.

If you feel insecure about your body then you need to reflect on Psalm 139 that you are fearfully and wonderfully made and reflect on other Scripture where God calls you the apple of His eye, made in His image, and a crown in His hand. Take time to reflect on things you are thankful for. You have 10 fingers and 10 toes and eyes to see and ears to hear! As you take time to reflect on how God carefully made you, then you will no longer feel lack or insecurity regarding your body. We need to reflect on His goodness and give Him praise!

Another form of meditation is sharing testimonies. A testimony is powerful because the person sharing it has clearly meditated on what God has done. It's the story of their own life and how God worked in them! When people share their testimonies, whether big or small, it causes every person listening to meditate on the goodness of God. Testimony sharing is teaching God's truth and character to our children, to those who visit us, and those that we meet on the way. Share your praises! Share what God has done! Meditate on Him!

Memorizing the Word of God is another form of meditation. God says to lay His words up in our hearts and to write them on the doorposts of our house and our gates. If you can't remember God's word, then how can you say you have truly meditated on it? The level of your meditation of Scripture and the meditation of who you are in Christ will determine your spiritual authority. If you don't know the Word of God, then Satan has no fear of you. But if you know the Word of God and who you are in Christ, then He can't touch you! You will endure every test, just as Job did. And you will come out like gold, blessed even more than before because Satan's testing didn't break you but rather caused you to meditate even more on the goodness of God. **It is when we are tested that we are confronted with whether we really believe in God's goodness and deliverance or not.**

Do you believe in God's goodness and provision for your finances and for your future marriage? Have you meditated on His truth regarding His provision for your life? What's on your mind? What are the meditations of your heart?

I want to close this message by reflecting on the parable of the talents. In the parable found in Matthew 25, Jesus speaks of a master who gives money in the form of talents to three of his

servants. To one servant he gives five talents, to another two talents, and to the third he gives just one talent. The master leaves on a journey and is gone for some time before returning. The man who had five talents reports to the master that he was able to make five more talents. The man who had two talents was able to make two talents more. Both are praised by their master. But then the man with just one talent has to give his report. He shares with his master that because he knew his master is a “hard man,” he was “afraid,” and so he buried his talent out of fear. The servant then presents that one, dirty talent back to his master. His master then berates him and calls him wicked and lazy. His master takes the one talent and gives it to the servant who has ten. And then he casts the wicked and lazy servant out.

What was the meditation of the servant who had just one talent? It was that his master was scary. It was that he had one measly talent, so what could he do with it? It was also fear that he might make a mistake. His meditations paralyzed him and even caused him to blame his master for his misdoings. His meditations were clearly wrong.

I find it ironic that the man who had the least to lose was the most paralyzed. He hadn't meditated on the fact that his master had trusted him with a talent. Instead he was hopeless that anything good could happen. And sadly this is the case of many Christians today. Their meditations are on lack, on insecurities, and on the lies of Satan. They say things like, “I'll never become as good of a leader as so and so.” They say things like, “I'll never get a good enough job” or “I'll never find the right person to marry.” Some of them don't actually complain, but the fact that they never ask for more and believe God for more shows that they are just as hopeless and faithless as those who complain. **If you ask then that demonstrates you believe you will be answered.** If you ask then that demonstrates you have faith that someone is listening. If you ask then it shows you have been meditating on the Truth of God's Word that, “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

As most of you know, I have been serving at an orphanage in Seoul for almost eight years. I can tolerate an orphan complaining a little or an orphan struggling to ask for something. **But I cannot tolerate a man or a woman of God complaining about lack. I cannot tolerate a man or woman of God who is acting like that pathetic, paralyzed servant.** Nothing should box us in! Nothing should paralyze us! There should be no lack in our lives!

Our master is not a hard man. Our God is good! Our God is the definition of love! Anything you lack He desires to provide for. He has come that you may have life and have it to the full. He desires for you to be secure. And He desires that when times of testing come that you will be like a man who built his house on the rock and is not shaken by any storm of life.

Get your meditations right. Wait on the Lord and put your hope in Him. Reflect on what He has done. Share your testimonies and ask others their stories as well. Read, memorize, and meditate on His Word, especially regarding the areas you struggle in. Soak Him in, and then run without restraint. Experience His blessings and His shalom in every area of your life.

Turn with me to Psalm 19:14. Let's all read this verse together and then let me close in prayer.

Psalm 19:14 – Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Pray (Pray that just as I have meditated on John 8:32 and other Scripture and know the power, that they will have grace to meditate on the truth and power of God as well)