

TRAIN YOUR MIND **Philippians 4:8**

INTRODUCTION:

We have had some very special elements added to our service this morning. And I am glad we have. Having just gone through a sea-change bruising mid-term election, it is good that we stand during the national Anthem out of respect for our flag and for the one nation under God for which it stands. Please pray that we will become indivisible: indivisible by terrorist threats, indivisible by partisan politics, indivisible by ideological differences. Please pray for the United States of America to be one nation under God, indivisible and a nation that offers liberty and justice for all. FOR ALL!

I am also glad that we took the time to honor the veterans of our armed forces who literally laid their lives on the line for the sake of the rest of us. One day a year is not enough to honor such sacrifice. Every day is the right day to respect a vet!

And, of course, I am pleased that we were able to have a representative of Oblong Children's Christian Home to be with us today. It is always good to have contact with and to receive an update from the missions we support. But for some reason I feel a special kinship to Oblong. I don't know why but for some reason, I feel an attachment to their representative this morning.

I'm glad we could add all of these elements to our service today. It makes the service special. But I am glad for this special time in every service when we can turn to the Word of God and try to learn what God is teaching us today.

Michael O'Shea, in his article *Set Your Mind For Fitness* has written, "If an athlete hits a slump or a team needs a boost, coaches turn to sports psychologists for help. You can benefit from their tips, too."

Vic Braden, a longtime sports psychologist says, "What we think profoundly affects our bodies and performance."

Changes in the way we think can make changes in the way we live. If we want to be "Fit For Life" we have to train our minds. In the old King James translation of the Bible, Proverbs 23:7 read, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." The newer translations phrase that very differently but I still believe it is true that our thinking determines our living.

So, this morning, we are going to consider how to think better thoughts so we can be Fit For Life.

T – Talk to God about your need to train your mind

As a starting point, if we want to change our way of thinking to healthier thoughts, we have to talk to God about it. Nothing significant is ever accomplished for the Lord apart from prayer.

Begin by confessing to the Lord that you have been guilty of some stinkin' thinkin'. For some, that may involve admitting to God that you have a problem with thinking too highly of yourself: you think you are a little better than those around you...a little smarter...a little more important, perhaps. You may need to acknowledge that you sometimes think that the rules do not apply to you. Let me tell you, as we stand before God, the one righteous Judge of all men, we will find that we are all the same. You are no better than anybody else. In Romans 3, Paul wrote: "*There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*" You are not so special. You are just a sinner in need of a savior like all the rest of us.

But there are others who ought to admit that they beat themselves up too much. They are too hard on themselves. They think they are not worthy of love, worthy of recognition. Perhaps you don't even think you are worth God's salvation. Let me tell you, God thought so much of you that He gave His only begotten son so that you need not perish but might have eternal life.

To train your mind and change the way you think, talk to God about it.

H – Hold yourself accountable for your thoughts

Then, hold yourself accountable for your thoughts. We often hear people say, "I couldn't help it. The thought just jumped into my head." And there is an element of truth to that. But when we begin to think thoughts unworthy of a Christian, we must change what we are thinking about. In II Corinthians 10:5, Paul wrote about taking every thought captive.

You may not be able to prevent a thought from popping into your mind but you can prevent yourself from dwelling on it. The great Reformer, Martin Luther, once said, "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." We choose that upon which we will dwell. In Philippians 4:8, Paul wrote: "*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.*" You can decide what you will think about and if you find yourself thinking about things you should not be dwelling on, hold yourself accountable for your thoughts.

I – Imagine the best self you would like to be

Next, imagine the best self you would like to be. Instead of defining yourself by your mistakes, your faults and your failures, identify yourself by the person you wish to be.

When you look at yourself in the mirror, picture yourself as the pure child of God that He wants you to be and that you want to be. It is an axiom of golf that where you imagine the ball going is where it is likely to go. If I address the ball and focus on the water-hazard I want to avoid, I'll probably end up in the water...because that was my focus. If I look at the tree, I am apt to hit the tree. But if I can visualize the ball going into the cup, I have a much better chance of putting the ball in the cup.

The same holds true spiritually: imagine yourself as the "you" you want to be.

N – Nurture the positive thoughts

Then, nurture positive thoughts. Especially about others. When you are thinking about someone who hurt you or who disappointed you, don't try to go back through the past and dredge up every other time the person has done something like that before. No, instead, think back to all the times he fulfilled your expectations or exceeded them. Think of all the kindnesses he has shown. Concentrate on his strengths instead of his weaknesses. As you nurture the positive thoughts, the negative thoughts recede from mind until you may not remember them at all.

What is the downside of this? Really, there is none. And you never know, you might just lose an enemy and gain a friend.

K – Keep on keeping on.

No one trains his mind in a moment or a day. It takes a lifetime of discipline. Brian Alman, an expert in sports psychology has noted, "Most athletes don't perform up to their ability not because their bodies fail but because their minds buckle." He goes on to say, "It's normal to have moments when you want to give up. But don't get stuck being critical of occasional relapses. When they happen, think one step forward, two steps inward."

If it is normal for athletes to have slumps, we ought to be fair enough with ourselves to admit that we may have them, too. When that happens, get up off the mat, dust yourself off and get back in the game. The old saying was that quitters never win and winners never quit. If you really want to harness your mind and train it for good, you will have to keep at it.

CONCLUSION:

St. Louis Cardinal first baseman Albert Pujols is well-known for his all-around ability as a player to hit for both average and power, plus his base-running and fielding excellence. His consistency over his ten years in the Major Leagues has earned him the reputation as one of the best players in the game today and, according to a poll of all 30 Major League Baseball managers in 2008, the most feared hitter in baseball. Since his MLB debut in 2001, Pujols has been selected as an All-Star nine times, has won the National League Most Valuable Player Award three times, and won a World Series title in 2006.

But even the legendary Albert Pujols has occasional slumps. After the All-Star game in 2009, he went into a slump that lasted several weeks. Pujols' slump was not because of some major physical problem. He had changed the way he thought about hitting. Pujols normally batted for hits and did not try to swing for the fences. His homeruns were almost incidental to being a great hitter. But during the homerun-hitting-contest as a part of the 2009 All-Star festivities, Pujols tried to hit the ball out of the park. And that little change in the way he thought at the plate, turned into a major change in the way he performed at the plate.

As in sports, so in the game of life, we must train our minds so we can be winners. We must train our minds so we can be fit for life. We must come to the point where Jesus is lord of all of our conflicts and all of our thoughts, all of our longings and all of our dreams. We must make Jesus lord of our minds. Will you?

INVITATION: #599 – *“Jesus Is Lord of All”*