

STUDY 44 – REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT

One of the purposes of these studies is to help you see the necessity of what I want to refer to as “**spiritual repetition**”. Stated another way, it is learning and developing habits, responses, behaviors, routines, patterns, and life choices that will make you spiritually successful. This is very intentional and deliberate and is not something that just happens. It is something that you have to work on every day of your life. I.e., will I choose what God wants me to do or will I choose to do what I want to do. It always gets down to the simple, daily, ongoing choices that you will make every day. It involves your attitudes, your words, your actions, your thinking process, and the disciplines and habits that you develop over time – everything about your life.

BRAIN FACT:

1. There is a very interesting neurological term called “**automaticity**” that speaks of this spiritual repetition. It is the ability that you have developed to do things without thinking about what you are doing – such as riding a bike, tying your shoe lace, or driving a car.¹ You were not born with any of these kinds of abilities, so they are specific abilities that you must learn.

You have repeated these activities for so long that they have become automatic to you. It is almost as if you are unconscious when you are performing them. Walking would be one good example of this. You have done it for so long that you do not really think about what you are doing. You can call it a conditioned reflex or an ingrained habit. The neat part about this is that you become unconsciously competent in what you are doing. It is when you are doing things without really thinking about it, but at a safe level. I can drive my ZTR lawnmower without even thinking about what I am doing. This happens when a behavior becomes “over-learned”. It is those simple tasks that you do over and over day after day, and you can do so with little to no real conscious thought at all. When you sit down to start your car, I doubt that there is much thinking going on as to all of the specific things that you have to do to start your car. When you walk, you are not consciously thinking about putting one foot in front of the next foot. The term that we use is that we say all of these activities are just “second nature” to us.² Typing is the same way. I just sit down and start typing. I can do it automatically, almost without thinking. Well, that is exactly what we are trying to do spiritually when it comes to thinking the way that God thinks. We want thinking like God thinks to simply become second nature to us. Just as one example,

Psalm 119:11 says,

Ps 119:11 (NKJV) **Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!**

What this verse is clearly saying is that if you do not want to sin against God, then you have to repeatedly be placing the Word of God into your heart and mind. So, you must see the connection between the Word of God in your life and sin in your life.

¹ Groeschel, *Winning*, 104.

² Cherry, *Risks*, ep.

The less of the Word of God you invest into your life, the greater amount of sin you will commit against God. The more of the Word of God you invest into your life, the less sin you will commit against God.

It is always a choice that you have to make – how much time will I give to the Word of God. We live in a very fast paced culture. We are driven by our jobs, by family responsibilities, by church responsibilities, by recreational activities and hobbies, by making more money, and who knows whatever else. The result is that spending meaningful time in the Word of God is what gets eliminated from our schedules. So, if you never store the Word of God in your heart and mind, then chances are highly probable that you will find yourself sinning against God more than you would ever expect.

KEY PRINCIPLE 151: YOU CANNOT REMOVE THE WORD OF GOD FROM THE PROCESS OF LIVING AND THINKING AND BE SPIRITUALLY SUCCESSFUL.

Most everyone that you know who has no meaningful commitment to reading, meditating, and studying the Word of God also has no meaningful relationship with God. The result is that they lack spiritual insight, wisdom, and understanding in their life to help sustain them through the difficult and trying moments of their life.

So, back to this idea of “automaticity”. If you think about this for a moment, what this means is that the more automatic that certain pathways of thinking become to you, the more you are able to do things quickly and efficiently in your daily life. The following are three simple examples:

1. I always take a shower exactly the same way – every day, every time. I wash my hair first, my body second -left to right and top to bottom, scrub my finger nails third, shave fourth, then finally thoroughly rinse off.
2. I just reach down and tie my shoes with no real thought as to what I am doing.
3. When you go to the grocery store, you know exactly what to do and how the entire system works. You grab a buggy, look at your list of groceries that you want to buy and head off to the aisle where they are located. You know where the produce is, where the milk is, where the coffee is, and where the dog food is. Once you finish shopping, you casually make your way back to the cash register, unload the buggy, and get your credit card out to swipe. All of this is normal and natural and you do this with little to no thinking effort.

The effort is simple – **you learn an action, you repeat that action**. We speak of “muscle memory”, but we can just as correctly say that we have “brain memory”. Unfortunately, the negative side of being automatic in what you do can also be very debilitating. One obvious example would be the person who is an alcoholic. They have been drinking for so long that their brain has built a neural pathway to fully support and reinforce their habit. They were never really willing to think like God thinks on the issue, so their brain kept responding to their wrong thinking, and now what was just mental at first has become a physical addiction and a spiritual stronghold in their life. They get hurt; others get hurt.

KEY PRINCIPLE 152: IF YOU KEEP DOING THE WRONG THINGS, THEN YOU HAVE NO CONTROL OVER THE NEURAL PATHWAYS BEING CREATED IN YOUR BRAIN.

The neural pathway you are developing through resisting what is God's best for your life quickly becomes a stronghold that will not let go of you. It is physically growing in your brain and becomes entrenched in your mind and you just automatically do negative and harmful things in your life.

KEY PRINCIPLE 153: IF YOU THINK WRONG, YOU WILL DO WRONG.

1. You will say the wrong things.
2. You will act the wrong way.
3. You will think the wrong way.

This should be so intuitive to anyone who calls themselves a believer, but it rarely is for some strange reason. This is one reason why Paul encourages us in [Philippians 4:8 \(ESV\)](#) with these words,

Php 4:8 (ESV) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Paul fully understood the value of thinking like God thinks. You just ask yourself these questions about what you are thinking at any given moment. This is God's list and it is very important.

1. Is what I am thinking true and honest? Yes, or no?
2. Is what I am thinking honoring to God? Yes, or no?
3. Is what I am thinking just and right? Yes, or no?
4. Is what I am thinking pure? Yes, or no?
5. Is what I am thinking lovely, or gracious and acceptable? Yes, or no?
6. Is what I am thinking commendable? Yes, or no?
7. Is what I am thinking excellent? Yes, or no?
8. Is what I am thinking worthy of praise? Yes, or no?

This is a very strong list of words that God wants you to evaluate for everything that you are doing. However, if you do not make a verse like this a priority of your life, then you just keep making the same mistakes over and over and over. This is God's best for your life, and if you do not believe this simple reality, then you have believed a very destructive and damaging lie of the devil. This is a reality and it must be accepted as such. Then, to make it worse, and this is a very, very critical Key Principle.

KEY PRINCIPLE 154: YOU CAN BELIEVE THE DEVIL'S LIES FOR SO LONG THAT YOU BECOME UNABLE AND UNWILLING TO BELIEVE GOD'S TRUTH.

Someone shares the truth of God's Word with you, but it goes in one ear and out the other. You learn to resist and refuse the Word of God so much that it has no value for your life. You have developed a neural pathway of resisting the truth of God's Word for so long that you think that you can obey it if you want to, but your brain keeps telling you that you do not have to obey it – so you do not obey it.

Many Christians have so conditioned their mind that when they read a verse or passage in the Scriptures that is calling on them to change something in their life, they **simply ignore** what they have just read. I call this “**speed forgetting**”. They forget it as they are reading it. They read it, but they have literally

programmed their brain to simply and quickly ignore what they do not want to do. They have developed a neural pathway that refuses to listen to what God is saying to them. This is a real process with real consequences.

Research shows that people do this all the time when they come to church. Within the first three to five minutes of any message, most people have already decided if they are going to listen to anything else that is being taught or preached. As a pastor I see these two realities being worked out in people's lives all the time. (1) They read, but they do not retain. (2) They hear, but they do not listen. Without God's truth, you have no basis for overcoming anything and your life will continue to be driven by Satan's lies. You must see this. You must understand this reality. It is just as real as the sun rising and setting.

One of the problems that many people have is that they never seem to know how God is working in their life. Why is that? Well, it is because they are never in the Scriptures to learn how God thinks. So, they never see the hand of God in what is happening to them. It is almost as if they do not believe that God will both allow and use negative circumstances in their life. They almost think that to be un-Christian and unfair. All they have to do is read about the life of Paul or one of the other apostles and follow what God allowed to happen to them. If something negative happens that they do not like, then they develop a negative attitude about what has just happened to them. It is like being "spiritually dyslexic". They actually see something backwards from how God wants them to see it. Rather than their first response to be that of giving thanks to God, they begin to blame God and question God. In their mind, everything that God does in their life should be to get rid of negative circumstances, not allow them. So, if you are never able to see the outworking of God's hand in your challenging circumstances and give Him thanks for what is happening to you, trust me, but you will have a very difficult future. [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#) says,

1Th 5:18 (NKJV) in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

I like how the ESV translates this verse.

1Th 5:18 (ESV) give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

I.e., in every difficult and trying circumstance that you face in your life, just learn to give God thanks for what you are going through and thank Him for how He is going to use it in your life. [2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#) gives a picture of why you are to give God thanks in everything when it says,

2Co 1:3 (NKJV) Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

In any trying and difficult circumstance of your life, God has great comfort to give to you, but that comfort does not eliminate the difficult circumstance. It says "**who comforts us IN all our tribulation...**". You could just as well say "**who comforts us during all our struggles**", or "**who comforts through all of our trials**". Normally when something very demanding and problematic happens to you, it is because God wants to change something in you personally so that you can be a blessing to other people who may be going through exactly what you are going through in your life. Unfortunately, if you do not think like God thinks, then none of this even makes any sense or even matters. There is a reason that your brain thinks this way. It is because everyone has what neuroscientists

refer to as mental and thinking biases. These are ways of thinking that you have developed in your brain from years and decades of thinking a certain way based on so many different factors that it would be impossible to list them all here.

BRAIN FACT:

1. The technical term for these ongoing prejudices is called “*cognitive biases*”.³ The word “cognitive” refers to reasoning, what is mental and intellectual, what we call thinking. So, we all have thinking biases. We all have developed mental prejudices and biases that deeply effect our behavior and decision-making process. No one is exempt. Unfortunately, what your cognitive biases very often do is that they distort the way that God wants you to think. These biases influence your beliefs, and they have a great bearing on the decisions and judgments that you make each and every day. They will literally cause you to make very poor choices, or they will help you to make godly decisions.

In most cases, your primary bias is that you are always going to default to protecting yourself. If I were to ask you what would be a perfect example from the Scriptures of those who had a negative bias that created damaging impacts, I wonder what would be your answer? The answer that comes to my mind would be the Pharisees. These were men that could not accept what God was literally doing right in front of them, in their very presence. Their biases were so solidified in their minds and in their brains, that every time that Jesus performed a miracle, it made them even more angry and they would leave and plot as to how they could kill Him.

Let us assume that you have a really bad habit in your life that is constantly irritating people around you, but you simply are not willing to change that bad habit. You know that you are hurting people, but you are just a spiritually stubborn person. Listen to what Samuel said to Saul in [1 Samuel 15:23](#) about stubbornness,

1Sa 15:23 (NKJV) **For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from *being king*."**

The word “**stubbornness**” means to spurn, to refuse, to despise, and to simply reject what is godly.⁴ From God’s perspective, “**stubbornness**” is just another form of self-worship. In this passage, God simply calls it “**iniquity**” and “**idolatry**”. You are the person who always has to have your way and are never willing to change. Listen very carefully. If you are a stubborn person, what that means is that you have actually conditioned and programmed your mind to be stubborn. If that is the case, then godly change will be very difficult for you. Why? It is because you have developed a strong and negative neural pathway called “**stubbornness**”, and built into that “**stubbornness**” pathway is an unwillingness to change. The result is that you become a very difficult person to be around.

For example, maybe you are short with people, or maybe you have an ongoing propensity to be angry with people, or maybe you are always impatient, or maybe you have to always speak your mind. These generally are very conscious biases that you know are in your life, but you simply are not willing to

³ Groeschel, *Winning*, 117.

⁴ Strong, *maas*, #3988.

change. They are so strong in your life that you have become more than willing to continually disobey God's Word in these areas of your life and are comfortable in doing so. You have found a way to rationalize away your sinful bias, and your unwillingness to think like God thinks is a major neural pathway that is literally destroying your life. When someone confronts you, you think to yourself "*Brother, that is just the way that I am.*" In reality, that is probably a very accurate, but a very unfortunate statement. With that kind of thinking, what you are telling yourself is that at this point in your life that you have no intention of changing your ungodly behavior. You are going to live how you want to live, no matter how deeply it may hurt other people, and especially those who are the closest to you. Listen to how Jesus addressed this in [Luke 11:34-35](#).

Lk 11:34 (NKJV) The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness.³⁵ Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness.

Metaphorically, the "eye" represents that part of your spiritual make-up where you are able to perceive and understand God's truth.⁵ However, if you have not allowed God's Word to be the controlling factor in how you perceive and understand all that is happening to you, then your entire life will be "**full of darkness**". This term "**full of darkness**" is just one word in the Greek language and it implies that you as a believer are suppressing the truth in your life, and the corresponding result is that you become extremely self-deceived.⁶ This is a very bad place to be – both for yourself and others.

The goal is to develop strong, godly mental biases because they will deeply impact how you live. At some point in your Christian life, you have to yield your life to God and begin to trust Him and how He works. What that means in very simple terms is that you are going to have to readjust how you see life. If I know that I have multiple areas of my life that are out of alignment with God's Word, then it simply means that I have to realign and recalibrate how I think. I have to learn how to adapt my life to God's Word, how to adapt to obedience rather than disobedience, and how to recalibrate the negative patterns that I have developed in my brain through wrong thinking in my mind. I have to commit myself to learning how to think like God thinks. This is where and when the spiritual life of God will begin to saturate your life and where you will truly begin to glorify God in your life.

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⁵ Zodiates, *ophthalmos*, 1081.

⁶ Harris, *skoteinos*, #4507.

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