



## Session 5 – Substance Not Success

# Could Your Mental Diet Be Killing Your Soul?

It is written: “Man does not live on bread alone,  
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”<sup>1</sup>

—*Jesus of Nazareth*

I was recently talking with a friend about a documentary he just watched with his children. Someone decided to test the quality of food in one of America’s most famous fast-food restaurants. The thirty-day plan was to eat nothing but fast food morning, noon, and evening. Tests were done prior to the experiment and would be done after the experiment to evaluate levels of fat, triglycerides, weight gain, and overall health.

Unfortunately the experiment did not last thirty days. After twenty or so days of a steady diet of only fast food, the -man’s body began to shut down. The high-sugar, high-fat, fried, and processed food began to build up toxins to such a degree that he had to be hospitalized. Ironically the food tasted great; tragically it almost killed him.

## Tastes Great but It Might Kill You

Sometimes what tastes great isn't very good for us. And what researchers tell us is that we acquire a taste for certain foods (like sugars and sweets) that can actually become addicting. It may look good, smell good, and taste good, but that doesn't mean it is good. All those foods promise pleasure, enjoyment, and fun (and an occasional burger never hurt anyone), but a steady diet of foods high in calories, high in fat, and low in nutrition will literally kill you. As someone has wisely said, "We are what we eat!"

What most Christians don't realize is that the same is true spiritually. If we fill our minds with the world's value system (like we discussed in chapter eight—the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life), we will die. We will experience death or separation in our relationship with God, ourselves, and others. Like fast food, it tastes good, looks good, and promises a wonderful time only to deliver death. In order for us to enjoy and get the very best from God, it requires a change in our diet. In the last two chapters we talked about the negative command in Romans 12:2—"Do not be conformed to this world." In this chapter we will look at the positive command—"*be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*"

God's solution for genuine transformation is not rules. It's not simply an emphasis on all the things we are not to do. God's solution is not trying hard to be more moral or to keep -one's spiritual nose clean through self-effort. In fact, God's solution is not primarily about religious activities or programs. Although they have their place and benefits when properly understood, church attendance and church programs are unable in and of themselves to produce lasting life change.

No, supernatural transformation is rooted in our spiritual diet. The battleground (as we learned in the last chapter) for your soul is in your mind. Satan uses the world system to seduce your flesh primarily through the use of lies and deception about what will satisfy and fulfill the deepest longings of your heart. That gate to your heart is your mind. The most important decision you make every day is what you allow to go into your mind! If you think I'm exaggerating, take a closer look at the positive command in Romans 12: 2: "Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The verb *transformed* comes from the Greek word *metamorphosis*. The prefix *meta* means "with" and *morphosis* means "to change."

## Metamorphosis: Results of a Spiritual Diet That Really Works

Metamorphosis is that process of transformation that happens from the inside out. The beautiful butterfly we all enjoy with its bright colors and distinctive markings was once a small green worm crawling up a branch. Then the transformation process begins shortly after it enters into a brand-new environment called a cocoon. The green worm is transformed over time from the inside out into a beautiful butterfly. This is what science calls “metamorphosis.” This unusual word is also used in Mark 9, where it says, “Jesus was transfigured before them.”

Jesus had taken His three closest followers up on a mountain, where they met Moses and Elijah and heard God’s voice authenticating Jesus as the Son of God. In the midst of that experience, the text says, He was “metamorphosised” before them. This passage does not teach that a bright light from heaven was shining on Jesus; but a light far brighter than the sun was shining “out of Him” as He unveiled His glory and deity to Peter, John, and James. The primary point I want to make is that life change—genuine spiritual maturity—is not the result of external self-effort, but a supernatural process that flows from the inside out. To better understand how this process works in our lives we need to carefully examine the grammar of verse 2.

*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.*

—Romans 12:2 NIV

***Positive Command:*** “. . . but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

“Be transformed”

- Passive voice
- Imperative
- Present tense

This verb—“transformed” (metamorphosis) is in the passive voice—indicating God is the one who does this in our lives. It is also an imperative—a command so we have a real responsibility

in collaborating with God in this transformation process. And finally this verb is in the present tense—it is a continuing ongoing process. The following expanded translation will give you a sense of what the grammar indicates:

*Expanded Translation:* “But allow God to completely change your *inward thinking* and *outward behavior* by cooperating wholeheartedly moment by moment with the Spirit’s renewing process.”

What most of us do not realize is that we are being transformed in our thinking all the time—either by the world’s value system or by the truth of God’s Word. The world’s values bombard us daily with thousands of messages on billboards, in movies, songs, video games, and television programs that all reinforce a worldview that tells me life is about “me.” Life is about what I can get, what I can achieve, who I can impress, what I can possess, where I live, what I drive, how much education I have, how much money I make, who knows my name, and how successful I am . . . and the list goes on.

By contrast, God uses His Spirit, His Word, nature, great books, and the authentic community of fellow believers to remind us that life is about “Him.” And life in Christ is all about what I can give, who I can love, how God can use me, how significant and accepted I am regardless of what I make, where I live, what I drive, or who knows my name.

## Renewal: The Power Food for Spiritual Transformation

You and I are living in a constant tug-of-war for our hearts and minds. Our God-given needs for significance, security, and belonging are constantly being pulled to seek fulfillment via the world or via the way of the Word. The most succinct explanation of why most Christians live lives of duplicity and inconsistency is primarily found in their spiritual diet. If my diet consists of a steady dose of prime-time television, movies, magazines, self-help books, and romance novels, I will believe that the world is “about me” and I will seek to achieve, perform, and work to make my life “work” for me. I can genuinely be born again, go to church, verbally express my love for God (and mean it), and have sincere intentions and desires to be “a good Christian” and yet live a life that bears little resemblance to that of Jesus Christ. Why? Because the transformation of a genuine child of God

has everything to do with how we are “renewing our minds.” So, let’s take a closer look at what that means.

- *Renewing my mind is a continual refocus of a Romans 12:1 perspective.* My intake of -God’s Word, my reflections on nature, my times of worship and prayer, and interactions with fellow believers all serve to remind me that He is Lord and CEO of the universe. Each day I awaken to the reality that I have indeed surrendered to Him at a point in time; but today I offer my life afresh, surrendered to Him in order to fulfill His purposes and accomplish His will—not my own.
- *Renewing my mind will always involve a battle.* This world system, its architect Satan, and my flesh all conspire together to deceive me with regard to who I am, where I belong, and why I’m here. Renewing my mind will require that I do spiritual battle and work at “taking every thought captive in obedience to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).
- *Renewing my mind is a supernatural work of the Spirit of God.* I have a responsibility to set my mind on the things that are above (Colossians 3:1–4), but the actual transformation of my thinking is a work of the Spirit God—“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). We must be careful not to fall into the faulty thinking that simply filling our heads with Bible verses or isolating ourselves from the evils of the world will necessarily produce the life of Christ in us.
- *Renewing my mind is always with a focus on love and relationship. At the heart of all renewing of the mind is the desire to know and enjoy Jesus.* Spirituality is never fundamentally about our external behavior but about our internal relationship that flows out into our external behavior. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day demonstrated a stunning ability to be intellectually saturated with the Word of God, but completely missed a relationship with God. I think the Apostle Paul captures the relationship between renewing our minds and knowing Jesus best when he writes,

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

—2 Corinthians 3:18 NASB

You see, the whole point of reading and studying -God’s Word and sharing life in community with other believers is to “behold Jesus for who He is”; to know Him, to enjoy Him, to love Him, and to be loved by Him. It is in this process of actually seeing and encountering Jesus that we are transformed. One of Jesus’ closest disciples would later write:

*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know*

*that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*

—1 John 3:2 NASB

So often Christians are told that reading the Bible is important, but I'm convinced most don't know why. Bible reading for many has become little more than fulfilling a duty, relieving some guilt, and hoping like a magic bullet it will bring good luck. So how do we interact with God's Word in a way that is relationally focused? How do we balance limiting the world's messages and seductions, but not become isolated, out of touch, religious weirdos?

Well, let's get practical. What does your mental diet look like? What are you putting in your mind? What do you think is the ratio between the amount of time you spend in God's Word or listening to the truth and the amount of time you take in messages from the world via TV, movies, and your computer?

Please don't gloss over the last few questions. I am not down on you and neither is God. These questions are not designed to make you feel guilty, but to help you get an accurate assessment of your mental diet. You are what you eat! As I've counseled with numerous people over the years, I have yet to meet a man or woman who does not experience radical and amazing life change over time when they change their mental diet.

## How I “Jump-Started” My Mental Diet

I shared my struggle with lust. I was a prisoner and no amount of self-effort delivered me. No matter how many times I pleaded with God, asked for forgiveness, and made promises about my future behavior, I continually experienced defeat until I changed my mental diet. I did not understand the spiritual principles of transformation that I'm sharing with you today. I discovered them quite by accident.

My roommate at the time was preparing to go to a summer training program with a parachurch organization. One of the requirements to attend this summer training program was to memorize sixty verses from the Navigator's “Topical Memory System.” They were written on small cards and covered thirty categories of the Christian life. There were two key verses for each category

and he was required to memorize the verses as well as the scriptural address (book and verse). Don't ask me why, but one day when he left the room, I decided to pull out his verses, write them on 3x5 cards, and memorize all of them before he did. Although my motives had nothing to do with improving my spiritual life and everything to do with competing with my roommate and winning, God used them for good.

Thanks to one extremely boring class I had in college, I found myself memorizing one verse every day and reviewing the verses I had memorized while sitting in the back of the classroom pretending to be listening. One of the requirements of the training program was that you review all the verses daily for sixty days so that you would retain 100 percent of what you memorized. I will never forget what happened on day 21. With twenty-one verses from the Bible in my heart, I was walking across campus when I ran into one particularly attractive girl on whom I had a crush. She was also the source of a significant amount of my personal guilt, as she was a very godly young woman and also the object of much of my lusting. I can't remember exactly what we talked about, but I remember vividly walking back to my dorm room in total shock. I didn't lust for her. My eyes were focused on her as a person and not as an object. None of the normal thoughts or struggles came into my mind while speaking with her or immediately afterward. I experienced victory! I had just won a battle that I normally lost 99 percent of the time. What happened? That was awesome! *It's possible!* I thought to myself, I really do not have to be controlled by lust.

It wasn't long before I made the connection between my newfound victory and memorizing Scripture. I learned that victory could be experienced not only in the area of lust, but with pleasing people, workaholism, pride, jealousy, worry, and a host of other issues. As time went on I began to get very serious about renewing my mind both by memorizing Scripture and studying it for myself. I began to look at specific areas of need in my life and find promises in God's Word that I could claim, memorize, meditate on, and then watch transformation occur.

Transformation is not only possible, it is commanded. And God never commands us to do anything for the fulfillment of which He doesn't provide the power and the resources. Do I ever lust, ever worry, ever exhibit pride or jealousy? Of course, these things still raise their ugly heads in my life on occasion, but they are the exception now and not the rule. I'm no longer a prisoner of those things and they no longer characterize my general lifestyle. We will never be perfect in this life, but we can progressively and consistently be transformed as we grow in holiness and love.

## IT'S YOUR MOVE—Become a Romans 12 Christian

So how does it work? Where do you begin? What do you read? What do you study? Should I memorize some verses before others? How do you keep this from becoming legalistic? How do you ever find time to renew your mind when your life is already overflowing with demands?

**T**hink—What action is commanded in Romans 12:2 that results in transformation? How does this action differ from ways you have attempted to be more Christ-like?

**R**eflect—How would you characterize your mental and spiritual diet? What correlation might there be between areas where you “struggle” and what is going into your mind?

**U**nderstand—What is your biggest barrier in renewing your mind?

- Don't know where to begin?
- Don't have a plan?
- Don't have the discipline?

**S**urrender—Ask God to create an appetite in your heart for Him and His Word. Ask Him to show you where to read in the Bible.

**T**ake Action—Set your alarm clock back twenty minutes each day for two weeks and meet with God to start your day.

**M**otivation—Listen to “Peace and Power of a Prioritized Life,” which shows you a simple but powerful way to read and hear God's voice. **[LivingontheEdge.org/r12](http://LivingontheEdge.org/r12)**.

**E**ncourage Someone—Ask someone to make the two-week commitment with you to meet with God first daily. Text each other at noon in order to hold each other accountable!