

Mind renewal is an ongoing process for every believer. Meditations of the Heart offers a fresh approach to the process by breaking the "culture of silence" through the transparency of the testimony supported by the Word of God.

**Meditations of the Heart, Life Lessons for Renewing the Mind:
Volume 1**

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Meditations of the Heart

Life Lessons for Renewing the Mind:
VOLUME I



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"Feed My Sheep." John 21:17

If we begin at verse 15 of the book of John, chapter 21, we will find that Jesus is asking Peter if he loves Him more than the others. Peter responds in the affirmative. Jesus then tells Peter to feed His lambs. In the sixteenth verse, Jesus asks Peter the same question again to which he, for the second time, responds in the affirmative. Once again, Jesus tells Peter to tend or shepherd His sheep. In the seventeenth verse, the same question is asked of Peter for the third time. Jesus asks:

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Simon, son of John, do you love Me [with a deep, instinctive, personal affection for Me, as a close friend]? Peter was grieved (was saddened and hurt) that He should ask him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord you know everything, You know that I love You [that I have a deep, instinctive, personal affection for You, as a close friend]. Jesus said to him feed My sheep. (John 21:17)

Life Lesson

I love to run, not only to stay in shape, but also to clear my mind. I think the Lord has given me both the desire and the motivation to run because it is one of the few times in my life when my mouth is completely closed, and my ears are completely open. It is a little difficult to inhale and talk at the same time, and I believe the Lord uses this time to get a word in edgewise. Can I get a witness? By nature, I am a talker, but that's another book. Running gives me the opportunity to improve my listening skills. Not only can I hear others talking, but I tend to hear God more

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clearly. Imagine hearing God more clearly. What a thought!

One particular day, I was out on the track running. As I was rounding the curve, I heard the Lord ask me if I loved Him. I had been meditating on John 21:17, and I remembered how Peter responded. I said, "Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You," and I meant it. He said, "Then get up. I have need of you!" I felt a little like Peter in that the Lord knows all things. Why couldn't He just search my heart and see that it was full of love for Him? He knew I had a willing and obedient heart. I had made up my mind I was going to serve Him long before He asked me that question. Since My Father knows all things, He knew

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what my answer would be in advance; but alas, He always has the bigger picture in mind. He always has a plan and a purpose.

One of the things I have discovered about God is that oftentimes when He brings something to our attention, it is not for His sake but for ours and/or someone else's sake. Of course, He already knew I loved Him, but there were some things I still had not understood about my love for Him. He desired that I begin to examine just how much and in what ways I loved Him. He was asking me to go beyond the words in loving Him and in loving others. He was helping me to understand that the love of God should have manifestation and be more than just "lip service." It

should not be, at any time, relegated to empty rhetoric that is devoid of power and purpose.

As children who have been fashioned in the image of their Father, it is imperative that we make it a point to discover who we are in Christ and what we have been birthed to do individually and collectively. It takes some of us a while to understand and accept the fact that our purpose for existing on planet earth doesn't even come close to just "taking up space" and going through the daily exercise of inhaling and exhaling.

As members of the Body of Christ, it is critical to our ability to be effective for the Kingdom of God that we realize at some point, our new life in Him

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should go beyond the wearing of the title of "Christian" on our foreheads because of the free gift of salvation, or faithfully attending a Sunday morning church service, or wearing a Jesus pin, or even having just the right Christian response on our lips ("Praise the Lord," "Hallelujah" etc.). I am not saying any of these things are wrong. I do all of them. What I am saying is that there is so much more to living the Christian life. There has to be more depth to you and me than just the "appearance" of spiritual fruit. Where there are leaves, there should be fruit.

The kinds of things I mentioned in the paragraph above only scratch the surface of a sincere and deeper walk with God. Allow me to reiterate that they

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are all "good" things, but God has called each of us to a deeper place in Him that will only come as we draw nearer to Him. In return, He has promised to draw nearer to us (James 4:8).

Are you starting to get the picture? There is a responsibility associated with being a member of the Body of Christ, and we are supposed to take it seriously. I have often heard it said that God doesn't save us just for ourselves. At the most elementary level, He saves us to help others. I believe this to be the "true" essence of salvation. In other words, it's not about you or me. It's about building the Kingdom of God. How do we do that? We become trained and/or equipped by way of the doma gifts, also called

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the fivefold ministry gifts, to do the work of the ministry (to and for others). According to Ephesians 4:11, those gifts include the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and the teachers.

The Lord was asking me if I loved Him enough to do what He was telling me to do: love Him and love others. This is the work of the ministry of Jesus. He has commanded:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (intellect). This is the great (most important, principal) and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself. (Matthew 22:37-38)

Two simple commandments..... How hard can they be? How often do we, as believers, become so

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satisfied and so complacent in our own Christianity that we fail to go beyond our own salvation? Often, especially when we are young and inexperienced in the Lord, "loving the Lord" doesn't go beyond our heads or our hearts, which can be stifling to our ability to mature in the things of God and to reach out to others. Additionally, many Christians may feel the job or the responsibility of "feeding the sheep" belongs to the local pastor. It does, but it is also the responsibility of every believer. The Bible tells us:

And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach and publish openly the good news (the Gospel) to every creature [of the whole human race]. (Mark 16:15)

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God has not changed His mind about His commandments. He is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore (Hebrews 13:8). The same commandments He gave to Jesus Christ, His Son, He has also given to every believer. If you will read the opening scripture once again, you will notice it doesn't contain any fine print that states it is applicable to pastors only. Every believer or Christian, that's you and me, has his or her own pulpit. That pulpit may not be in the local church, but each one of us has our own circle of influence where there are people who look to us for leadership and/or guidance. They are God's sheep, and sheep must be fed in order to live. For example, if you have children, you know that they will

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look to you for leadership and guidance as they grow and mature. They are also God's sheep, and again, sheep have to be tended and fed to live.

I find it extremely interesting that Jesus tells Peter to feed His lambs in one instance, and in another, He says to feed His sheep. Did you notice that? Go back and read it again. Lambs are young sheep. Some people with whom we come into contact, will be very young and tender in the Lord while others will have some level of spiritual maturity. Regardless of individual levels, we have all been called to minister to the sheep, and sheep beget sheep.

Can you begin to see the importance of meditating on God's Word in an effort to renew your mind? You

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can't share with others that which you do not know. You can "do better" only when you "know better," and God has made several provisions to assist His children in this area. I mentioned the doma gifts earlier; one of which is the gift of the local pastor. One of his or her jobs is to train up the sheep to go out and minister to other sheep. I will say it again. Sheep beget sheep. That's doing the work of the ministry. That's doing the work of Jesus' ministry. All of a sudden, the big picture isn't about you or me. Then again, it never was. It's about the will of the Father for our lives individually and collectively that has to be executed because someone is waiting for what you

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and I have to give. That was a sobering revelation for me.

When I began to understand this revelation, I had to seriously examine my love for the Lord. How could I say I loved Him if I wasn't willing to love others enough to feed them? Jesus tells us the person who loves Him will keep His two most important commandments. He says in John 14:21:

The person who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who [really] loves Me; and whoever [really] loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I [too] will love him and will show (reveal, manifest) Myself to him. [I will let Myself be clearly seen by him and make Myself real to him].

Knowing and understanding that you and I have been commanded to love others is part of the process

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of renewing the mind. I can guarantee you God will inevitably bring people across your path who will challenge your ability to love them; in which case, you and I have to be ready to respond to that person or persons in a way that glorifies God. New behaviors start with new thoughts that line up with the Word of God. When we have meditated consistently and purposefully on that Word, day and night, our subconscious mind will automatically kick in to assist us in the kind of higher, more excellent responses that say, "Yes Lord, I love You, and I will love my neighbor as I love myself."

I don't want to give you the impression that loving people is easy in any way, shape, or form. It isn't. As a

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matter of fact, I can guarantee you that loving unlovely people is quite challenging. Learning to love them will stretch and mature you if you cooperate with God. "If" is the operative word here because it involves a personal choice to allow God to have His way.

I once thought I could pick and choose who I would love. Not! I found out later that if I was planning to operate successfully in the Kingdom of God system, being selective when it comes to loving others was not an option. It was, and still is, a command.

In the beginning, God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us (John 3:16). His love continues here and now. He expects it to come up and

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out of His children each day especially since it's been shed or poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5). First John 4 further emphasizes the point by stating, "Beloved, if God loved us so [very much], we also ought to love one another." I just love the fact that God, like any good teacher, has modeled the appropriate behavior. He has not asked us to do anything He has not been willing to do Himself. He leads us by example constantly. Additionally, He has removed the possibility of any confusion by plainly stating in His Word, more than once, what we have been commanded to do. If that isn't enough, He asks us how we can love

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Him whom we have never seen, yet not love our brother whom we see every day (1 John 4:20). Hmm.

You might say the word "commanded" sounds a little strong, and that may be, but have you ever stopped to give thought to the fact that the creator of a thing has the right to decide "how" the creation should operate? We are all, the saved and the unsaved, God's creation. With that in mind, it would seem that He knows what's best for us: the creation; however, He never forces His will upon us. He's always a gentleman. He wants us to make a quality decision to choose to live our lives according to His operation manual: the Bible.

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I loved God, or so I thought. The Bible tells us the person who does not love doesn't know God because God is love (1 John 4:8). At that time, you wouldn't have been able to convince me that I couldn't have known God just because I wasn't loving His people. I did love Him, but I still had a long way to go in my relationship with Him and with His people. The fruit of love needed major development in my life.

For example, in my ignorance about the command to love others, I would "cut people off at the knees" (not literally). What I mean is that I would allow a spirit of offense to keep me from interacting with you ever again. You were crossed off of my list, if you will.

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You were "X ed." I wasn't vindictive in the aftermath, but I wasn't going to love you either. Big mistake!

Then, I had a limited understanding of the love of God. Praise Him that He eventually brought me to a place where I was able to renew my mind on the subject of loving Him and others. At that point, I became responsible for what I had heard. God got right in my face and asked me if was I going to do things His way or my way. I chose to do things His way, the higher more excellent way. I could have chosen to go the other way, but I guarantee you my life would have been miserable. I do want to clarify that "loving others," especially those who have hurt you, does not mean that you have to reestablish a

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relationship with them, but you do have to love and forgive them. Besides, unforgiveness keeps you and I in bondage not the other person. Give yourself the gift of forgiveness by releasing those who have hurt you.

People are everywhere you go. Have you noticed that? You and I have to come into contact with them in the course of our everyday lives. There is no way a person can live in a bubble, no matter how hard s/he may try. Besides, who would want to live like that? Is that really existing? I don't think so.

Because I was saved, I would have still gone to heaven, but I would never have experienced the life, here on earth, that Jesus died to give me. His Word

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says He came so you and I can have and enjoy life in abundance to the full and until it overflows (John 10:10). You can't live an abundant life living in a bubble that separates you from people. There's no overflow in that because it's limited to just you. I think Barbara Streisand spoke profoundly as well as prophetically when she sang the song "People." I encourage you to research the words to the song. I did, and they really ministered to me in a way that gave them strong implications for my life and ministry.

Relationships are so vital and so precious. Don't take them for granted. We all have the need to interact with others; but sometimes, we go behind that veil of phoniness that protects our pride and

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separates us from others; in which case, you and I run the risk of holding others responsible for information about ourselves that we have neglected to openly and honestly share with them. It's unfair, and it's out of balance.

Did you know you and I have an inherent need to love each other? It might sound a little corny, but it's true. How do I know? Because we have been made in the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 1:26*), and God is love (*1 John 4:8*). God loves people. He says so throughout His Word. That's how I know.

If you think you have never experienced the love of God, I invite you to begin to take an inventory of your life. Think about all the times God has

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manifested His love for you through other people.

Think about all the times He protected you from hurt, harm, and danger. Think about all the times when you received preferential treatment over others, and you chalked it up to "a lucky day." That was God's favor working on your behalf. There is no such thing as luck, so begin to count your blessings.

If that's not enough to show you His love is steadfast and unchanging towards you, make it a goal of yours right now to get to know Him more intimately. Spend more time cultivating your relationship with Him through prayer, Bible study, reading His Word, and talking to Him just like you would any other person. God has always been there for

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you and for me, and He will continue to be there. I promise you He will show you just how amazing His love really is. It's steadfast. It's unchanging! It's faithful! It's awesome!

We were talking about hiding our needs. A "culture of silence" will keep our needs hidden unless we allow the Lord to help us, through the vehicle of His love, to reach out to others. Sometimes, the only way to break out of that kind of bondage is to become transparent, which means there is a risk involved, but He has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5) no matter what. I invite you to allow God to deliver you from all that's been "hidden." It's bondage. Allow Him to cleanse your heart so He can replace it

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with His heart: a heart that's full of love for Him and for His creation, a heart that is not being smothered by offense, hurt, and unforgiveness.

As you know, children tend to be immature in certain areas of their lives because they have not been taught the proper way to do things. Instruction, assistance, and guidance therefore are imperative in their formative years. This same scenario can be applied to you and me as children of God. We come into the world separated from Him by sin, but He has loved us enough to give us the free gift of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. Once we make a choice to receive Jesus, we become new babes, or should I say "lambs," in Christ? Just like children in the natural

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must be assisted in the maturation process, so too, must the Christian. You will notice I did not say "the baby" Christian because as long as we live on this earth and inhabit bodies made of flesh, you and I will continue to need and require, as a vital necessity, assistance, guidance, and instruction from our Heavenly Father.

The process of loving people cannot be limited to just the words. It involves so much more. I am not saying that the words, "I love you" are meaningless, but they become empty rhetoric when they are not accompanied by the appropriate godly behaviors to support them. We have all heard the saying, "Actions speak louder than words." Godly behaviors, like all

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other behaviors both good and bad, not only have to be learned, but they must be practiced. Yes, I said "practiced." The real test lies in whether or not we are willing to practice them on the unlovely.

Love can manifest itself in something as simple as a "hello" or a smile as you pass by another person. It might be a word of encouragement or a listening ear or even a genuine hug. It doesn't have to be a full blown sermon. God will use us anywhere and at any time, if we will make ourselves available and sensitive to the leading of His Holy Spirit. Remember that God and His Word are "user friendly" for whosoever will use it.

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OK, so have I been able to master the "loving others" commandment? Have I arrived? No, and I acknowledge that I will forever continue in the process, but I thank God I am not where I used to be in it. My intention is to keep moving forward in God. He is my only assurance of success.

I thank God that He has renewed my mind in the area of loving Him and others, but I have to tell you mind renewal has been neither a solo or single event. Yes, I understand the "need" to love others, but I also understand that I can't do that alone. Many times, my flesh wants to get into the driver's seat of my life and dictate my actions, but that's when I have to allow the Word of God, on which I have meditated, to rise

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within me to overtake and subdue my fleshly nature.

Am I always successful? No, which is why I have to acknowledge that I need the Lord. I depend upon Him as a vital necessity in my life. He is my Father, and I am His child; therefore, I can boldly go to His throne and ask for help during those times when I feel weak. There's no shame in that. Besides, He knows all things, so it's pointless for me to try to hide anything from Him.

You might ask, "Has the commission changed in light of my shortcomings?" No. I am still a child of the King. I am still the apple of His eye and the beat of His heart. He still loves me with the same love with which He has loved my Jesus. Guess what? These all

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apply to you too. How is that for stirring up your faith in the love of God? If you are ever in doubt of His love, I encourage you to repeat the sentences above to yourself to remind yourself. Say them out loud and with conviction as often as necessary. Don't allow anyone or anything to move you or change your mind.

God is still telling me, each and every day, to get out of myself and to get up because there are lambs and sheep that still need to be fed. One of the things He constantly brings back to my remembrance is a revelation He gave me quite some time ago, and I will share it with you. It's very simple but quite true. He said, "Just as your life depended upon Jesus' obedience (giving His life on the cross as a ransom for

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yours), someone else's life is dependent upon your obedience (doing what I have commanded you to do)."

How is that for a thought provoking revelation?

This revelation helped me to see that in the big scheme of things, it's not about me, and just like you, I have a commission to carry out in the earth. I am going to feed His lambs. I am going to feed His sheep because sheep beget sheep. How about you?

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