

St. Paul's Herald

July 2025

LETTER FROM PASTOR

Have you ever laid in bed with your head racing trying to fall asleep, but you can't, because of all the things crossing your mind? I wish I could say this is a rare occurrence for me, but that's not the truth. I am a task-oriented person and all too often thoughts about the day, upcoming responsibilities, family needs, and the like fill my head. Sometimes I wish I could just turn it off immediately so I can have peace and go right to sleep. Of course, the reality is, I can't just turn off my mind. There are things that I can do to refocus myself, some of which are effective. However, not all refocus methods are equal, some are far more beneficial than others. From both a practical as well as a spiritual perspective, my focus ought to be centered on what is most important: Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, that is a lot easier said than done.

Chances are you have found yourself in a position like I have before. Your mind is going a mile a minute thinking about everything but the task at hand (like sleep). When this happens, Jesus is far less likely to be your focus. It's easy to become even more frustrated as a Christian when this happens because, like Paul, we "do not do what [we] want, but do the very thing [we] hate (Rom. 7:15b)". While this may be a default response, it does not need to be, nor should we feel guilty if it is. As sinners, our mind is bound to stray from Christ. When it does, it is important to remember that "there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1) We need not condemn ourselves because Christ does not condemn us. Instead, he wants to "transform us by the renewing of [our] mind" (Rom 12:2).

How does one go about this 'mind renewal' especially when things are frazzled in your head? How does one stay Christ-oriented rather than task-oriented? This is where spiritual disciplines can be so important for us, as Christians, to practice. There are a variety of disciplines that can refocus us on what is most important. One helpful discipline, I found works well, is reminding myself of my baptism. A baptized person is a forgiven Child of God no matter, what he (or she) does, says, or even thinks and nothing can separate them from that reality! Other things like praying the Psalms, reading scripture, using a devotional book like Portals of Prayer, or listening to and meditating on a particular hymn (like "Be Still my Soul; the Lord is on your side" LSB 752) can focus us on Christ and allow the Spirit to renew our minds. The key is practice. Just like with any good habit, practice is essential for making it part of your daily routine. The more you "set your mind on things above" (Col. 3:2), through spiritual disciplines, the easier it will become to stay focused on Christ as well as allowing the Spirit to renew your mind and shape your thoughts. You might even get more sleep when you do. Blessings as you seek to stay Christ-oriented!

By the grace of Jesus,

Pastor Josh

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Romans 8:6

CONNECTING TO GRACE

It's that time of year again. Summer is here, the weather is warm, and our country celebrates its Independence Day. Independence Day falls on the 4th of July each year in commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence by the Second Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. With the stroke of the pen, the Founding Fathers of the United States declared the 13 colonies independent of British rule and taxation. No longer were these American territories, who would go on to form their own federal government with its own Constitution, under the control of the British crown. Independence was declared, but it would take years before that independence to be fully realized. It was not until the Treaty of Paris in 1783 that the United States was fully recognized as an independent nation by other nations, including Great Britain. Independence took a lot of work to achieve and for that we should be grateful.

It is by no means wrong to remember and celebrate Independence Day even as Christians. We all live in this country and share the freedom and independence that those who came before us fought for. Independence especially was beneficial for allowing the free exercise of religious belief without the state telling us what we can and cannot do. (Many a nation and people today would love to have the protections of the 1st Amendment like we do here in the United States.) There however is a problem for us as Christians when it comes to the idea of independence in all things. Such independence, as well as the desire for independence, is what led Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden which plunged all creation into sin. Adam and Eve's sin was that they wanted to be independent from God and make all of their own choices even when it came to good and evil. Since then, nothing has changed within human nature - we all in one way or another want to be independent of God. That is not however God's plan for creation.

God designed us, from the very beginning of creation, to be dependent on Him. As sinners, who "fall short of the glory of God" (see Rom. 3:23), our dependence on God is even more necessary. In fact, it is only by God's grace given to us in Jesus Christ that we have any chance. Though our sinful nature likes independence and the supposed freedom that comes with it, what we really need is to be dependent on God's grace for our lives.

When we try to do things independently from God, just like Adam and Eve, we only end up making a mess as well as potentially hurting ourselves and others. Even when we pray, "we do not know what to pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) because we have decided in our own mind what we 'think' we need. God however knows what we really need, and He knew "what [we] need[ed] before [we] ask[ed]" (Mt. 6:8). What did we need? Grace - that is forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through Jesus Christ. This is why "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

The fact of the matter is without God's grace there would be nothing to celebrate, even on a day like Independence Day. We as Christians can however celebrate. Sure, we can join in the holiday celebration of our nation's founding, but more importantly we can celebrate God's grace to us through Christ Jesus on which we are dependent. Praise God for Christ on whom we depend!



The day of your baptism is your *Independence Day* as a Christian. On that day you were set free from the curse of the law, bondage to sin, and the power of the devil!