

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church; it's great to have you with us. This morning is going to be a little different in that we are going to take the last 15-20 minutes of our service to celebrate Pastor Keith's ordination. Keith has been hard at work over the past couple of years, and the process he's been involved in has now been completed.

There will be more to say on that in a little while, but I am going to take a few minutes this morning to open the scriptures with you and share something I have been thinking about over the past couple of months.

illus: allow me to begin by way of a question: have any of you been following what's been happening in the sporting news this week? Specifically, have you been followed the saga of Lance Armstrong's confession?

The man who beat cancer, the man who won an unprecedented 7 Tour de France titles, the man who founded Livestrong--an agency that has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for cancer...Armstrong finally came clean and admitted that he used performance enhancing drugs to win every major title he has ever held.

Lance has been hounded for the better part of the last decade, under suspicion that he was doping, but until Monday, he has denied every accusation. And more than just denying the accusations, he has hunted down his accusers, ruining many of them. Armstrong and his team of lawyers destroyed people's reputations, their careers, their

credibility. Lance knew he was a cheater, but he didn't want anyone else to know--he liked winning too much, he liked the money and fame too much--if people needed to be stepped on along the way in order to keep his cheating a secret, that was a price he was willing for them to pay.

But now Armstrong is having to pay, and he doesn't like it nearly as much. On Monday he sat down with Oprah to share his confession with the world. Armstrong didn't share anything that we didn't already know--there are hundreds of pages of evidence (both scientific and testimonial) that have made his cheating undeniable.

But what was exposed in this interview with Oprah, is some of the inner workings of Armstrong's mind; we got a window into how he thinks. "The mind," writes Gordon Smith, "is our most private space."¹ And with Armstrong's private space becoming public, we begin to get a sense of how he did what he did.

Oprah asked Armstrong, "**At the time it did not feel wrong?**" "No," Armstrong replied. "*Scary.*" "**Did you feel bad about it?**" she pressed him. "No," he said. "*Even scarier.*" "**Did you feel in any way that you were cheating?**" "No," Armstrong paused. "*Scariest.*" Many would disagree as to whether or not this is the scariest. Scarier still is that even in the middle of his confession there doesn't appear to be any contrition.

It seems to me that he feels badly about being caught. He feels badly that his kids have been dragged into it. He feels badly about losing

¹ Gordon T. Smith, *On The Way: A Guide To Christian Spirituality*, 35.

his sponsors and the \$75 million dollar paycheque that went with it. And he feels especially bad about his life time ban from competition.

The mind is our most private space, in some respects it is the great unknown. Except for this, what we think will come out eventually--what we think shows up in our living. Recently, I've been thinking about what I think about. Throughout 2000 years of Church History, wise Christian thinkers have pointed to the power of our thoughts to shape our being.

Armstrong fixed his mind on winning at all costs--those thoughts went viral, leading to decisions to take performance-enhancing-drugs, to habitual lying, and to destroying whoever sought to expose him. What we think determines who we become.

Consider the person consumed with anxious thoughts--do they not become an anxious person? Or consider the person who is always thinking of themselves--how great, how skilled, how beautiful they are--they cannot help but become self-absorbed and narcissistic. If our minds are consumed with thoughts about money--how much we love it, and how we want more of it--will this not shape what we value and ultimately how we live?

If what we think about determines who we become, it becomes very important to think about what we are thinking about--our thinking determines our being.

At this point I'd like to invite you to open your Bible to Romans 12:1-2; that's page 1763 in the Blue Bibles in front of you.

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **2** Do not conform 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.”*

Paul begins by making an all-encompassing statement: *true and proper worship involves offering all that we are to God*. Jesus laid down His life for us, He held nothing back--our true and proper worship is to offer the same in return. When Paul talks about offering our *bodies* as living sacrifices, he's got more in mind than material flesh and blood--this is his way of saying, surrender all that you are and have...you belong to God now.

Many of us have been taught to surrender our hearts to Jesus, in other words, to lay our desires before Him, but I suspect that few of us have been taught to surrender our minds. We know that is what Paul has in mind because he follows up his *living-sacrifice-talk* with a call to renew our minds. And the mind is where the battle is won and lost--as our thinking goes, so goes our living.

Eugene Peterson translates Romans 12:2 in the following way, *“Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God.”*² Paul affirms what should be apparent to us all: culture is not a neutral reality--it exerts pressure, it is a shaping force. In this case, the post-modern assumption echoes the Biblical assumption: *we are not self-determining; all of us are being shaped by someone or something.*

² Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, Romans 12:2a.

Let me offer an analogy: we are like a block of marble that is being worked upon by outside forces--with hammer and chisel we are being shaped. But the major difference between marble and the mind is that to a large degree we can choose which forces will shape our thinking. Gordon Smith writes, "The mind can only think in terms of what we feed into it...Part of personal discipline is determining what will and what will not enter our minds."³

The million dollar question is: *what should, or, shouldn't we feed our minds?*

Some of you can remember back 4-5 decades, when preachers were preaching against the twin evils of Rock and Roll, and Movie Theatres. There were preachers who scared congregants by asking, "*what would happen if Jesus came back and found you in a movie theatre??*" The implication of course was that if Jesus came back, anyone found in a movie theatre wasn't worth saving--they were too sinful--they'd have to be left behind.

Things have sure changed haven't they? You wouldn't hear me preaching like that today, but, sadly, the pendulum has swung wildly to the opposite extreme. For many Christians there has almost been an almost total embrace of the entertainment world: music, music videos, movies, even pornography--anything goes, *after all it's just entertainment!*

So which extreme is it? Is it all bad or is it all good? This is what we call binary thinking--we end up getting trapped in an either/or thinking that is too simple for the complexity of our lives. Now

sometimes binary thinking is appropriate, for example: Jesus is Lord and no one else is. But in so many other arenas of life, either/or thinking is too simplistic. For example, *is our culture good or bad?* I suppose it depends-- are we talking about providing health care for people irrespective of their age, race, or gender? On this matter I'd say that Canadian culture is good. But if we're talking about the culture of materialism and consumerism that is rampant in Canada, I would answer very differently.

Let me ask another question, *is t.v. good or bad?* Again, binary thinking isn't helpful here, but I will say that we are fools if we cannot see that t.v./movies/video games are perhaps the greatest shaper of Canadian minds, Christian and non-Christian alike.

illus: as I said earlier, I've been thinking a lot about what I've been thinking about, and it has increased my sensitivity around t.v. watching--it's more than merely "*entertainment,*" what I'm watching is seeking to shape the way I think, the way I see the world.

A few weeks ago I watching a show, and after the program ended a movie was slated to begin. But just before the movie started, a brief disclaimer came up on the the screen. And along with the screen shot, came a voice saying, "*The following movie is rated "M" for mature and may contain strong language, nudity, and violence-- viewer discretion is advised.*"

I sat there for a moment, thinking. The following movie has been reserved for the "mature," because it contains strong language, nudity, and violence,-- *wouldn't someone who was mature have the*

³ Smith, 46-47.

sense to turn the channel? And so I did. It's laughable when you think about it--are the mature among us those who consider gratuitous sex, violence, and filthy language as "entertainment," or are the mature those who turn it off and walk away? We're deluding ourselves if we call this kind of thing "entertainment."

Illus: A couple weeks ago, my 10 year old son and I were reading Phil 4:8. It says, "*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.*"

Why these things? To borrow Gordon's words once more, because "The mind is the steering wheel of the person."⁴ As our thinking goes, so goes our desiring, so goes our living. That's not to say that watching violence on t.v. will make you a killer, but it does something to the mind-- it dulls our compassion, it dulls our sense of what is good, noble, and lovely...when our minds are filled with in the virtual world, we are more likely to stand by and watch violence take place in real life, then we are to stand up and do something about it.

It's amazing how our favourite shows can dupe us into laughing at things that aren't funny, they can have us rooting for our favourite characters to do things Scripture condemns (like sleeping around, or getting revenge), or they can have us cheering for our favourite action hero to maim, devastate, and kill. *What are we thinking?*

Right about now I suspect a few of you might be feeling guilty about what you're watching, but I don't want you to feel guilt, I want you

to think--to think about what you're thinking about, to think about what you're feeding your mind--your mind is like a steering wheel... *are your thoughts steering you towards Jesus?*

This week I want to challenge you to get alone, to get quiet, and to think about these things--*is what you're feeding your mind renewing or polluting your thinking?*

Conclusion: In conclusion, let me offer two brief suggestions.

1. First, if you want your mind renewed, *make Jesus your first thought in the morning and your last thought in the evening.* When your alarm goes off in the morning, before you get out of bed and start your day, turn your thoughts to Jesus. Ask Him to direct your thoughts, to direct the way you see reality. Tell Jesus that you'll be looking for Him, listening for Him, throughout your day.

And as your day comes to close, don't make the evening news, or your favourite video game the last thought before you close your eyes. Thank Him for being with you, ask Him to cleanse your mind and renew your thoughts, submit to Him the cares of the day.

2. Second, *open the Scriptures.* The primary way we renew the mind is by engaging God's thoughts, ideas, and purpose. As we seek God's thoughts in the Scriptures, we seek to encounter Him.

Let me encourage you to read a little bit every day, to read slowly, thoughtfully, prayerfully. The goal is not to get through the Scriptures but to get the Scripture through you. As we engage God's thoughts

⁴ Smith, 32

by reading the Bible, the Holy Spirit begins to change the way we think and what we think about. And that's all repentance is--changing our minds, seeing things differently, and living accordingly.

Your mind has an amazing capacity to remember. If I were to sing a few lines from your favourite song, you could probably join in--if I were to say a line from your favourite movie, you could probably finish the quote. Let's fill our minds with something that will bring life, wisdom, and perspective. **Pray.**

Keith's Ordination

Keith, there are a few things that I have been wanting to say to you for a **long** time. I'm not going to mention your addiction to candy, or the way you get all of our meetings off track, or even how you suckered me and the rest of the congregation in to your little April Fool's Prank last year...I'm not going to mention any of that because it's beneath me.

Lawyers article and then write the B.A.R exam before they are admitted to the fellowship of lawyers. Doctors have residency followed by comprehensive exam. And pastors have ordination. Keith, the last few years you have written theological papers, you've submitted your sermons for review, you've studied, you've been examined and you've been affirmed. Ordination is the public confirmation and affirmation of your skills, gifts and calling to pastoral ministry.

That's what ordination is, but let me tell you what it means. It means that you have been set apart, by God, by our elders, and by me to be a shepherd in God's flock here at North Shore Alliance Church. It

means that you have a high and noble calling, to love, to nurture, to challenge, and to equip people that Jesus died to save. It means that God has sent you to be a gift to this community.

Keith, you and I have worked together for the past five years, and I've seen enough of you to know two things: (1) you have been called by God to pastoral ministry; and (2) I want you on my team.

Keith you have an incredible mind for Scripture and theology, and in the sight of God and these witnesses I charge you to use your mind for the glory of God and for the blessing of our people. Keith you also have a deep compassion for others, and in the sight of God and these witnesses, I charge you to love deeply from the heart and hold nothing back.

Keith, you will be tempted at times to think that the work of pastoral ministry is your gift to God--it is not so--pastoral ministry is God's gift to you. Pastoral ministry will keep you humble, dependent, and listening--to God and to others. You will discover again and again that you don't have all the answers, that you can't solve most of the problems, and you can't heal all the hurts.

Your lack will keep you connected to Jesus, it will keep you pointing others to Jesus instead of pointing to yourself. Jesus is the True Vine and you are a branch, and as you remain connected to Him, your life and your ministry will bear much fruit. Keith, pastoral ministry will put you on the front lines of brokenness, the place where people's sorrow and Christ's mercy meets. And that's where you want to be--that's where all the action is.

Keith, your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to lead courageously, to love authentically, to live humbly--to live not for yourself, but for others: for Gina, for Sophia, for Luka, for us, and above all, for Jesus. You already are, I know this because I have watched you, but I want to call you to go deeper--may your calling take you further up and further in.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”