

Master Mind: Thinking Like God

A Study Guide

By

Dwight J. Olney
www.mindrenovation.com

Copyright © 2009 Dwight J. Olney
All rights reserved.

Greetings!

Welcome friends.

You are about to begin a massive reconstruction project. You are also about to embark on a journey into the mind of God. In our natural state, there exists a great chasm between human and divine thinking. But our Creator-Savior wants to fix that problem. He wants to transform our minds so that our lives can become the living and holy sacrifices they were intended to be. God truly does want to transform us into new people by changing the way we think.

I trust that the following questions in this study guide will lead you into a place where minds can be renovated, where weak and faulty human thinking can be ripped out and replaced with supernatural ideas in line with God's thinking. This is only the beginning of a great and challenging project, a necessary undertaking for everyone who is serious about their Christian faith.

We cannot be content with our tiny human thinking—it is so deceptive and destructive because it is based on a satanically inspired worldly system. Worldly reasoning can appear harmless, even quite intelligent at times. But an honest appraisal of natural human wisdom finds it to be completely wanting. Human thinking will continually disappoint us and frustrate our attempts to find true meaning in life. It is time to tear out those destructive thought patterns and reconstruct our minds with God's truth as revealed in his Word.

Proceed with caution! You are now entering a work zone.

Dwight Olney

Fellow renovator

www.mindrenovation.com

Chapter 1 – “Don’t make me prove I exist.”

Discussion Questions

1. When atheists attempt to persuade someone that God does not exist, what typical arguments do they put forward?
2. In your opinion, or according to your own personal experience, what are some of the most powerful proofs for God’s existence?
3. Have you ever had a discussion with someone where you tried to prove God’s existence to them? What was the outcome of that experience?
4. Is there any evidence in the Bible that God ever made a concerted effort to prove his existence to mankind?
5. What happened to people in the Bible who challenged God to prove his existence?
6. What is the role of apologetics in the Christian experience?
7. When is it appropriate to call on God for a special sign as a confirmation of his existence and/or presence in our midst?
8. Ultimately, why do people believe or not believe in God?

Chapter 2 – “Fear me, or fear everything else.”
Discussion Questions

1. What is your greatest fear right now?
2. What impact does fear have on the human heart and mind?
3. Does God want you truly to be afraid of him in the most primal level of fear, or does the biblical phrase “fear of the Lord” simply mean reverence? Explain.
4. How can the fear of the Lord in your own personal experience progress from terror to reverence to love?
5. What is the primary evidence in someone’s life that they fear God?
6. How does fearing God help you to not fear everything else?
7. What do you think is meant by, “The fear of the Lord is a lot lighter than the fear of everything else?” (p. 12)
8. Can it really be that simple – “Fear God, or fear everything else?” Explain.

Chapter 3 - "It's going to take a little effort on your part to find me."

Discussion Questions

1. Is it possible to *know God* at various different levels? Explain.
2. Why are we impatient with the process of getting to know God intimately?
3. Why do we have some distorted perceptions of God?
4. Is it possible to seek God and not find him? Explain.
5. Have you ever felt like you have worked hard to seek the Lord? What did you do? What was the outcome of that endeavor?
6. At what time(s) in your life have you felt most closely connected to God?
7. What do you think is meant by, "To find and know God intimately, we cannot approach him like tourists?" (p. 20)
8. What are the key concepts involved in seeking God successfully?

Chapter 4 – “I’m good with broken stuff.”
Discussion Questions

1. From a human standpoint, what connotation is usually associated with the term “broken”?
2. From a biblical perspective, what is meant by the term “brokenness”?
3. What are some of the things we need breaking of?
4. What are some specific examples of ways God may choose to break his children?
5. Why is the story of Gideon (Judges 6-8) a good example of how God uses a broken vessel to accomplish his purposes?
6. Have you ever experienced the breaking hand of God on your life? Explain.
7. What was the outcome of that experience of brokenness? (#6)
8. How can God use our brokenness to fulfill his purposes?

Chapter 5 – “Forgiveness is my favorite part.”
Discussion Questions

1. What are the psychological and physiological benefits of forgiveness?
2. What is the ultimate reason why we should forgive those who sin against us?
3. How does the story of the Prodigal Son help us understand what God thinks about forgiveness?
4. What do you think is meant by, “While God loves to forgive, humans do it grudgingly, dutifully, and responsibly?” (p. 34)
5. Do you agree with, “We get far too much satisfaction out of rehearsing our pain and suffering and then nursing our wounds?” (p. 34) Explain.
6. How would you counsel a Christian who tells you that she cannot forgive someone of a particular sin against her or a loved one?
7. How might the concept of spiritual warfare be related to the topic of forgiveness?
8. Does true forgiveness imply a duty to fully embrace the offender?

Chapter 6 – “I’m really quite interested in radicals.”

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be a radical?
2. Explain how Jesus could be seen as a radical?
3. What do you consider to be the most radical aspects of Christianity?
4. Why do many unbelievers deem Christians to be lunatics or whackos?
5. How can you live a radical Christian life without coming across as unnecessarily irritating, judgmental, or arrogant?
6. “Paul’s life illustrates an important point: he was a radical, but he didn’t look like an idiot?” (p. 43) Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
7. Give an example of something radical that you could do in the next week that would please God?
8. What do you think of the statement, “A radical commitment to Christ is the only on that counts?” (p. 45)

Chapter 7 – “Here’s what I mean by faith.”
Discussion Questions

1. How do humans typically define the concept of faith?
2. How does God define faith?
3. Do you have an example in your life, or the life of your family, where your faith in God specifically altered your circumstances for your good? Explain.
4. Do you have an example in your life where your faith in God did not change your circumstances for your good? Explain.
5. How have you responded when God has not fixed a major problem in your life, even though you prayed and believed earnestly regarding the request?
6. How does faith “always result in ultimate victory?” (p. 52)
7. How can Jesus’ words to an imprisoned John the Baptist help us understand what it means to have faith in God? (pp. 52-54)
8. How has Jesus helped you in your walk of faith?

Chapter 8 – “Sooner or later, human pride will be humiliated.”

Discussion Questions

1. Why are we so enamored with professional athletes, rock stars, and successful Hollywood celebrities?
2. What do you find to be the most offensive aspect of human pride?
3. How can a Christian work hard to be successful in their particular field of expertise without being consumed with pride?
4. Is there a difference between pride and a joyful sense of accomplishment when we have done something well? Explain.
5. Can you give an example of someone who has experienced a huge fall in their life because of pride?
6. What does the story of Nebuchadnezzar teach us about human pride? (pp. 57-60)
7. What does the story of Belshazzar teach us about human pride? (pp. 60-61)
8. In what prideful area of your life might God be arousing conviction?

Chapter 9 – “Sin is sneakier than you think, but it can be mastered.”

Discussion Questions

1. Give an example of how “sin is the root of every human problem.” (p. 64)
2. What would you say to someone who is offended by the notion that even little babies have a sinful nature?
3. Explain how sin leads to various forms of death.
4. Give an example of someone rationalizing or justifying their sinful behavior?
5. What is the basic difference between sinful compulsion within a believer and within an unbeliever?
6. Is it true that “a Christian is capable of committing any of the same sins as a non-Christian?” (p. 68) Defend your answer.
7. What is wrong with the notion of living “*your* Christian life to the best of *your* ability?” (p. 68)
8. What does Galatians 2:20 teach us about living our Christian lives?

Chapter 10 – “Integrity is everything.”
Discussion Questions

1. How do you define the concept of integrity?
2. Give several examples of behavior that would be practiced by a person demonstrating integrity in a marriage.
3. Do you believe that the average Christian lives in integrity? Elaborate.
4. What happens to the character of a Christian who regularly fails to demonstrate integrity?
5. Can a person have no integrity and still be a Christian? Explain.
6. What does the Bible promise for people who walk in integrity? (Proverbs 10:9; Psalm 119:1-3; Proverbs 20:7)
7. How does a person’s integrity affect their ability to remain faithful to God during hard times?
8. Besides the obvious fact that it pleases God, what are some simple practical benefits of living a life of integrity?

Chapter 11 – “It’s dangerous in the dark.”

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been hurt in the dark or hindered by darkness? Explain.
2. What does it mean when the Bible says that “God is light”? (I John 5:5)
3. What does it mean for a person to “love darkness instead of light”? (John 3:19)
4. Why is it hard to expose our inner lives to the light of God?
5. Give an example of a poor decision someone might make because they are walking in spiritual darkness.
6. What do you know about the spiritual forces of darkness that are active in the unseen world around us?
7. Describe the average person’s common conception of hell? Is it biblical?
8. What does mean for a Christian to “live in the light”?

Chapter 12 – “Stop flying below the radar.”
Discussion Questions

1. “Christian practice is not a stealth mission.” (p. 88) How important is it for a believer to share their Christian faith publicly?
2. What do you think it means for a Christian to “fly below the radar”?
3. Why are so many Christians tempted to fly below the radar?
4. Why do 2nd and 3rd generation Christians slip below the radar, even though they know better?
5. “I am a firm believer that Christians should be the best and brightest...at everything.” (p. 89) Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
6. How have Christians, either in the past or the present, prepared themselves “to be beautifully equipped for a world that does not exist?” (p.90)
7. What advice would you give a Christian friend who is timid about expressing his faith openly?
8. What creative and bold act of faith could impact a part of your world?

Chapter 13 – “The hard way is probably the right way.”

Discussion Questions

1. More people will end up in heaven than hell. Agree or disagree and defend your answer.
2. Why do humans typically take the easier of two paths in life?
3. Is every hard situation in life a spiritual challenge from the hand of God? Explain.
4. Give an example of “the hard way being the right way” for a businessman.
5. What does it mean for a Christian to “die to self?”
6. How does the Old Testament example of Jonathan demonstrate a life of “no rights”? (p. 101)
7. If we are truly going to walk the hard and proper path with God, what are some of the “rights” we will have to give up?
8. What tempting impulse or practice are you denying yourself today because you are a follower of Jesus Christ?

Chapter 14 – “Sex is one of my best gifts: Handle with care.”

Discussion Questions

1. Should sex and sexuality be discussed more frequently in church? Explain.
2. What were God’s intentions when he created sex?
3. How can God-honoring sexuality enhance a healthy marriage?
4. How can abuse of God’s standards regarding sexuality harm us?
5. “The number one sex organ in our body is our conscience.” (p. 111) Agree or disagree. Defend your choice.
6. How are our sexuality and spirituality connected?
7. What are some of the metaphoric images in the Bible that communicate God’s high regard for appropriate human sexual behavior?
8. How does a Christian fully appreciate this gift from God (sex) without becoming overly consumed by its pleasures?

Chapter 15 – “I really don’t mind body modification.”
Discussion Questions

1. What are some good examples of creative self-expression as a Christian?”
2. What is the difference between good and bad conformity as a Christian?
3. Why could much of today’s “self-expression” be seen as more conformist than creative?
4. Why have many churches and Christian schools in the past taken a strong stand against the practice of body modification among their members?
5. What would you say to your teenage daughter who just came home with a new facial piercing and a tattoo of a snake on her forearm?
6. Why might King Solomon be referred to as “the ultimate self-expression guy?” (p. 119) What was the outcome of his zealous life-long efforts?
7. How might the life of the Apostle Peter exemplify a good balance between conformity and individualistic self-expression? (pp. 120-123)
8. What is the most important matter to consider when evaluating acts of conformity and/or individualistic self-expression?

Chapter 16 – “Some thanks would be nice.”
Discussion Questions

1. Why do we as humans often struggle with ingratitude?
2. What does the first chapter of the book of Romans teach us about the dangers of unthankfulness? (pp. 126-127)
3. Criticize or defend the statement that “much of our gratitude is ritualistic.” (p. 127)
4. How may unthankfulness lead to other sinful behaviors?
5. How do both grateful and ungrateful people impact those around them?
6. It’s hard enough to be thankful *in* all things. (1 Thessalonians 5:18) How can we be thankful *for* all things? (Ephesians 5:20) Does this include the really horrible stuff? How can we ever get to that place of surrender?
7. For what are you most thankful today?
8. What are the benefits of displaying an attitude of gratitude throughout your life?

Chapter 17 – “My favorite worship is holy obedience.”
Discussion Questions

1. How would you define appropriate worship of God?
2. Are some forms of worship more important than others? Explain.
3. Even though we do not intend this, why might much of our worship actually be more of an attempted pay-off to God instead of genuine worship?
4. What did the biblical writer mean by “to obey is better than sacrifice?”
(1 Samuel 15:22)
5. How might inappropriate attitudes in worship lead to a demanding spirit before God?
6. When do our dutiful acts of worship cross the line and become acts of sin?
7. What portion of our worship is financial giving, and how much of our income should we tithe?
8. How has the church throughout history occasionally missed the point regarding pure and undefiled worship of God?

Chapter 18 – “Invest your life, don’t just spend it.”

Discussion Questions

1. Do you really believe your life is but a vapor, as the scriptures say? What evidence in your behavior would substantiate that claim?
2. What is the difference between investing and spending?
3. How do we know that God expects a good return on the resources he has deposited into our lives?
4. What does it mean practically to “make every day count?” (p. 144)
5. How does 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 help us understand the difference between investing and saving our lives? (p. 143-144)
6. What do you see as your own personal greatest potential contribution that can be invested into the kingdom of God?
7. Are you confident that you are investing your life, and not just spending it? Why or why not?
8. What role does attitude play in spending vs. investing our lives?

Chapter 19 – “You need help; I never intended for you to do it alone.”

Discussion Questions

1. Why are we so often tempted to “gravitate to island thinking”, trying to make it alone in life? (p. 151)
2. What does the New Testament teach us about God’s thoughts on living life in community?
3. How do we balance bearing our own load with depending on other people to get through life? Can we ever become too dependent on others?
4. When disillusioned believers leave the church, how is their spiritual vulnerability intensified?
5. How can other believers help us battle against spiritual warfare?
6. Even an MVP saint like the Apostle Paul relied on many other people to support him in his Christian walk? How do we know this to be true?
7. Who are the people you have in your life who hold you accountable and support you in your Christian walk?
8. How have you helped another believer in his or her spiritual walk?

Chapter 20 – “Get used to disappointment.”

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the ways this fallen world has disappointed you in life?
2. Why are we perpetually disappointed by life in this fallen world?
3. Can we ever be totally satisfied with our life here on earth, this side of heaven? Explain.
4. In contrast to the false claims and pretense of this world, how does God totally satisfy our every need?
5. Amidst the disappointments of this life, why might it be useful to think of our time on earth as more of a journey than a destination?
6. When we experience disappointment with God, who is most likely at fault – God or us? Explain.
7. How can disappointment in this life be seen as a valuable component of our spiritual growth and development?
8. How can we avoid the pitfall of bitterness in the face of compounding disappointments?

Chapter 21 – “I love a good paradox.”
Discussion Questions

1. How would you define a “paradox”?
2. What paradox within the Christian faith has caused you the most concern over the years? (e.g. good God allowing evil to flourish)
3. Why is it that we humans are obsessed with trying to understand every divine paradox?
4. What are some of the paradoxes in the life and teachings of Christ?
5. How has God “put himself at risk” through his salvation plan? (p. 166, 172)
6. What are some of the paradoxes presented within the writings of the Apostle Paul?
7. What would you say to a friend who is trying to logically resolve every paradox within the pages of Scripture?
8. How can paradoxes strengthen rather than diminish our faith?

Chapter 22 – “Trust me.”
Discussion Questions

1. Why do some people think modern western civilization represents some sort of earthly introduction into the kingdom of God?
2. Explain how we inadvertently trust in modern western civilization as opposed to trusting in God?
3. How do we typically hunt for peace and security outside of God?
4. Why is it hard for you to trust God? What is the greatest barrier hindering you from fully resting in him?
5. How might the practice of keeping a diary of past experiences bolster your ability to trust God more consistently?
6. Does trusting solely in God mean we do not trust in other people in our relationships? Explain.
7. This world regularly proclaims the message – “believe in yourself.” Is there any truth to this assertion or does trusting God preclude such a notion?
8. From your experience, how would you declare the trustworthiness of God?

Chapter 23 – “I like you more than you think.”
Discussion Questions

1. Generally, do you perceive God as being upset with you or fairly happy with you?
2. Is there a difference between God loving you and liking you?
3. Why is it difficult for some Christians to think of God as a loving father?
4. Is God a friend to all mankind?
5. What biblical examples could be used to illustrate this aspect of God relating to his children as a fondly affectionate close friend?
6. What did Jesus’ enemies derogatively call him when he partied with the seamier characters in his ministry? (p. 189) What does this title imply about Christ?
7. Is there anything else in the life of Jesus that would support this concept of God liking us more than we realize?
8. At what times in your life have you felt God’s pleasure the most?

Chapter 24 – “Will it matter in 100 years?”

Discussion Questions

1. Why is there value in asking this question – “Will it matter in 100 years?”
2. Identify a decision you have made recently that *will not* matter in 100 years.
3. Identify a decision you have made recently that *will* matter in 100 years.
4. What are some of the things you are worried about right now that will not matter in 100 years?
5. Can there be various options in your life that are all within God’s will?
6. Since your life will pass by so quickly in comparison to eternity, how much energy should you exert towards purely earthly endeavors (e.g. exercise)?
7. What does it mean to “finish the story?” (p. 200) How can this help you make the best possible decisions for your life?
8. Do you believe in heaven? Does your thought life and your decision-making track record agree with your answer? Explain.

Chapter 25 – “My day will come.”

Discussion Questions

1. According to the Bible, what are the main features involved in the day of the Lord?
2. Why do most people not believe in an imminent day of the Lord?
3. Does it appear that this event is a 24 hour *day* or a period of time? Why?
4. What are some of the various names given for this event by different New Testament authors? (p. 205-206)
5. What are some of the historical events in the Old Testament that have pre-figured the final day of the Lord that is still to come? (p. 206-207)
6. What sort of things will be revealed on this great day?
7. Why should God’s children not fear the day of the Lord?
8. What is your greatest personal anticipation surrounding the day of Lord?