

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
June 3 & 4, 2017
John Crosby
Wired for Learning
Luke 18:11**

It is Pentecost—that celebration that comes 50 days after the resurrection experience of Easter, and Pentecost brings life to the church. Here in the northern hemisphere it's a wonderful thing that Pentecost also comes at the end of about a fifteen-month winter. You have survived and now there is in store for you three wonderful days of summer. We're going to have a great, refreshing season. We would like to have that fresh, newness of life come to each of us in a different way again. And I say that "in a different way" because each of you refreshes differently than the person next to you. If you are ground down, if you're bored, weary, tired, and you want to have a great afternoon or a great refreshing time, what will it look like? It might be some of the options that are up on the screen. Maybe you want to go to the woods or the beach, or maybe for you it's a concert, or spending time alone, or playing games, or just reading or shopping, either alone or with somebody. Maybe it's getting together with a friend, or visiting a museum, going fishing, or just taking a nap. All of us like each of those, but some of us really have preferences. What I would like you to do is turn to the person nearest you and say *when I am at the end of my rope, what I like to do to refresh myself is...* Just turn to the other person and tell them what refreshes you most.

Now I know the temptation is to say you like all of those things, but that's really not that true. You like some of them much more than others. A way that you can tell that is when you don't have this...when you're not just nose to the grindstone day in, day out with work or school or just the regular grind of life. What are you like when you don't get that time? Are you angry or quiet? Are you judgmental or impatient? Do you walk away from people or do you talk all the time? What is your style? Turn to the person next to you and have them tell you what you are like...no, don't do that! But let's realize from the start that God wants this fresh newness, and from the start let's realize it is going to look as different for you as there are different people in the room. I think that's in part because too often we confuse this idea of being refreshed with *Oh, I'll pray better*. I don't know about that—maybe that would help, but I don't think that's what God is about at all.

There was a quote that I heard one time that stuck with me. It said, "God's not

interested in your spiritual life, God is interested in your whole life. All of it.” God wants you to be filled with love, and love for Him that makes you love others better. So, it isn’t just *I’m going to read more, pray more, give more, study more, go to church more—do all the religious stuff*. It’s going to be different for each one of us and it’s going to relate back to what is the most important thing.

So, once again, what is the most important thing? People asked Jesus that in different ways. Matthew’s gospel records the question, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” And Jesus’ response was, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the great commandment; this is number one. And the second one is like it, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” So, if you are getting refreshed and renewed, it will result in your ability to sense God’s presence more, feel like God loves you and you love God, and for your relationships to flourish, to love other people. And again, it will look different for every single one of us in this room.

The people who talk about spiritual formation and how we come to God say that there are roughly seven different pathways to connect to God. We’re going to take on five of those this summer and say that we believe most of you have a default setting. When you get refreshed by God it is usually through this pathway, but you can get it from any of the others. You have the default and you have another one that is pretty strong too. So, we’re going to suggest that we are wired differently. Look at the different lights on the stage. They each shed light but they are wired uniquely. We believe that God has wired you uniquely. The five that we want to look at this summer are: the life of the mind, being refreshed in worship, discovering that when we serve others we sense God, just being out in the beauty that God has created, or finding that relationships actually help draw us closer to that fresh newness of life. Most of you will have a major and a minor. I think it’s important to figure out what that is. To help with that, as you leave today you can pick up...we are doing CPC Life a little differently this summer. We are going to do three of them, all small, and this one is called “A Field Guide”. It talks about these different pathways—how you are wired—and then on the inside among the articles, it has a little inventory. Answer the questions quickly and you will probably get more clarity on what is your default and what is your strongest other pathway. It will make this coming summer be more than just an academic exercise for you.

I understood that about myself in the mid-seventies. I had graduated from college and went out to Colorado to work on a political campaign—to work for a candidate—and it was a terrible experience. Good guy, terrible candidate. I ended up voting for the other guy. It was just not good, and part of it was that I really admired this person’s faith but

detested their politics over time. But, it was a great learning experience for me, and one of the things was he never worked on Sunday morning, so I didn't have to either. I was a new Christian and I knew that I was supposed to go to church, but I didn't like church. Church was boring, and so I only did it because the candidate would say, "Where did you go to church today?" I ended up at the First Presbyterian Church of Boulder—Boulder, Colorado. It's a unique place folks, Boulder is, but...First Presbyterian Church of Boulder. I got there early, and I'm sitting in the sanctuary, probably about this size, and it's dark, and there is a woman in the back who sits down and starts to play on a cello. And the place is dead silent. I didn't know Bach from Boz Scaggs, but it was beautiful and it sucked me in. And then—it was one of those churches with organs and choirs—we got halfway through the service and the choir sings the song "Morning Has Broken" and I think *Yeah! This is great! This is just terrific...Cat Stevens...my man!* And then the choir director says, "For those of you who are Cat Stevens fans, this is a fourth century hymn that Cat found." And I was like, *oh yeah...I knew that. Yeah.* Not! And then the preacher got up and started to preach—he was a PhD from Princeton—and he references in the same paragraph the Rolling Stones and the philosopher Heidegger, who I just had a love affair with in college. Then he went on to knit things together with scripture in ways that I didn't think could happen. And I was drawn in; my mind felt like it was awake. He closed by saying, "If you want to explore things further, there's a new author I've just discovered—an Oxford guy named Tolkien who's written a book you might like. It's called The Lord of the Rings. Now, he's a Catholic, but you can learn a lot from Catholics." And...I was home. I was home because I felt like in the course of an hour I had been challenged in my heart, in my soul, and with my mind.

And so, David asked me to start the "Wired" series out by saying that some of you are like me; the primary way that you get connected to God, or that your relationship to God gets refreshed, is through your mind. Through what we might call the intellectual or analytical path. Not all of you, but if you are not that person, you know that person. But you don't understand that person. So, what I want to do is talk about how that path can be refreshed. See if it's you. If this is you, you draw closer to God as you are able to learn more about Him. Learning makes you feel closer to God. As you study, whether it's scripture, theology...it not only comes naturally, but you enjoy it more than most. For you, the most dangerous place in town is the bookstore. During worship, you sometimes find yourself marking time until the sermon. *Are we still singing? I'm tired of standing. Really? Is that prayer still going on? Really?* And you evaluate whether worship has been good or not based on: did the sermon enrich your mind? This might be your primary path, if when you face problems or challenges, or someone you love faces problems or challenges, you tend to go into the problem-solving mode. My wife will come to me with a problem, and I will fix the problem because I am wired that way.

That's not what my wife wants; she wants me to listen to the problem. What good is that? You're a thinker. You occasionally will experience an emotion, but if you lie down it usually goes away. I'm over sketching that, but we all know those people; some of you are those people. Some of you have sore ribs because that person sits next to you.

When you look at the Bible, your hero of the Bible is the apostle Paul. Peter gets all the credit. He's the founder of the church, he's wild, he's impetuous...that's not the apostle Paul. Paul is a man of the mind. He is a student of Gamaliel—that's like getting into Harvard. And he comes out of that experience and when he comes to Christ, he goes back into the synagogues and opens the scriptures to people to wake their minds up. When he goes into Athens in Greece, he goes into the lecture hall and begins to argue with the perspective of their philosophers, of Greek philosophy. And probably the high water mark of the whole Bible intellectually is the letter that the apostle Paul writes to the Church of Rome. It is how a person who loves the mind would try to talk to somebody else about how beings that are separated from God can be brought back to Him. And so, if you think *Oh, I love Paul* your default mode is probably that thinking path. That doesn't mean that you're the smartest kid in the room. It doesn't even mean that you're an intellectual, but you tend to be an analytical. And as I sat in that church in Boulder, Dr. Bob taught me what it meant to love the Lord your God with all of your mind. Loving God with your mind means that you learn how to reason, and reasoning means that you logically connect the dots. The book of Isaiah talks about this. The prophet says, "Come, let's reason together says the Lord." To understand, to form judgments logically, to enjoy strategic thinking and order, to discuss or debate, is inspirational to some of you. Let's reason together. In the same way he said loving God with your mind means growing in knowledge of God. From Hebrews 10:

This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord.
I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.
[Hebrews 10:16]

To love God with our mind involves taking time to fill our mind with God's work, and not just agree with it, but to grow so that His truth changes us. We reason and we learn, so we have knowledge. I think people don't usually believe that loving God with your whole mind means you use memory as well. You are one of the people who say *but, you remember honey, you remember when Sheila went through the same experience, what she discovered in the second month was...* and you pull those dots together. The Psalmist says,

I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. [Psalm 77:11]

I will remember. One generation recalling the works of God for another; the power of memory. That's loving God with your mind. And maybe one that we don't think of—usually reason and memory and knowledge come to mind—I believe that we love God with our mind when God explodes our imaginations. The Psalmist says,

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place. [Psalm 8:3]

And the Psalmist continues with this poem. God designed us to have an imagination, to wonder, and to write that wonder down and share it with others. That's why we have C.S. Lewis's "Chronicles of Narnia" that brings faith alive. That's why the allegories of a genius like N.T. Wright bring faith into our lives. When a mind comes along and is imagining how it could be, you get Eugene Peterson retranslating the Bible into "The Message."

So, people who love God with their minds reason, acquire knowledge, keep memory alive, and use their imagination. If this is who you are, then the road to your heart usually leads through your head. And frankly, you are probably disproportionately a Presbyterian...and I'm not saying this is a good thing, that's just the way it is. Presbyterian is too big a word to even fit on a bumper sticker. We like to talk about stuff. We like to think we are the smart people in the room. Presbyterians are the ones who will talk about the learned and discuss it. Not at all to say the others don't, but that's a mark. You don't come here unless you expect to have a thoughtful, provoking sermon from God's word. If you go to an Assemblies of God church, the expectation is different. You will believe that you haven't really worshipped until your spirit comes alive, until you have a sense of the wonder and awe of God's presence. Presbyterians get very uncomfortable with that; that's not where we major. Methodists came out of a person who believed Christianity could only be experienced when small groups of people met weekly and shared their heart, studied the scriptures, and changed the world. Different paths come in different ways. Why is it important to know about that at all? Why are we starting this "Wired" series with asking you to understand a path that may not be your own? Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says,

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,²⁵ not giving up meeting together, keep meeting together, even though you are so different...as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
[Hebrews 10:24-25]

I believe that people who love God with their mind often encounter roadblocks and get on spiritual auto-pilot, or they become spiritually dull, or they wander away from the faith, or they get bored. And what they need very much is for you to not only honor their path, but encourage them. And frankly, I think the way you start to encourage them is to show them you understand, and caution them. What are some of the dangers of having somebody who loves the life of the mind most? The first one that struck me was that

you become all head and no heart. You were the scarecrow...*if I only had a brain*. You have a brain but where is your heart? The second caution is that people who love God with their minds tend to love to be right. That can be dangerous. They think about things deeply, they talk—not right away—but when they talk they really think that they're right and that can be dangerous. Dallas Willard says, "The hardest thing in the world is to be right, and not hurt anyone with your rightness."

I believe that people who love God with their mind often confuse being smart with being spiritually mature. They confuse Biblical knowledge with spiritual depth. I think the right gauge of spiritual health and maturity is not Bible verses, it's not winning arguments, it's not underlining things, it's loving. And that sometimes can be foreign territory for people who love God with their minds. I used the illustration, maybe even just a couple of weeks ago, of the two brightest Prime Ministers of the 19th century in Great Britain—Disraeli and Gladstone. A woman goes on a Tuesday and eats with Lord Gladstone who's the Prime Minister currently, and she is asked how it went. She said, "This is the smartest man in the empire. Probably the smartest man in the world. You ask him a question and all you have to do is sit back and listen; all you do is learn because he is so intelligent." Well, the next night she goes to Lord Disraeli's house, who has just been kicked out as the Prime Minister and will be Prime Minister again. And the next day, friends asked her what it was like with Lord Disraeli and she said, "I left Gladstone's house feeling like he was the smartest man in the empire. I left Disraeli's home feeling like I was the smartest woman in the empire because this man asked what I thought, and when he discussed something, he wanted to know what other people thought." Disraeli had obviously read the verse in the Bible that said,

"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." [1 Corinthians 8:1]

If you have the gift of the mind, do people around you feel better for being with you, or do they feel slightly less smart?

Let me leave one more caution because this is my pathway, but as I study the scriptures, it is pretty clear to me that the people who killed Jesus knew the scriptures the best. The ones who opposed Christ were the pastors of the churches—the ones with the seminary degrees. I believe that when we love God with our minds, unless we are corrected by the body of Christ, it tends to narrow us. It tends to make us think that our way is the only way. We need you people, very much.

I've asked David that each time people preach, to say: what is the good thing about this path, what are the dangers of this path, and how can you get further down this path? So, let me give you three ways you can get further down the path this summer. The first is pretty easy. It is that if this is about the life of the mind, you should feed your mind; you should engage with new material, and especially with material that you wouldn't ordinarily get. Let me give you an example. We have, for the last twenty years, been taking people to Chicago to the Global Leadership Summit. The last two years we have had a host site here and over 500 people have come. It's like a candy store for the

mind...world-class leaders, Christian and non-Christian, helping you to grow. I would urge you, if you are at all connected to this pathway, to dip your toe in this this year. We have construction going on...I don't know if anyone has noticed, but they have taken the trees down in the back and they are going to start cutting into the hill this next week, but because of construction we can't host it here. I went over to Father Kevin at Our Lady of Grace and asked if we could do this together, and this year they are hosting the Summit. We would love it if you would join us, maybe even just for part of it. It will feed your mind, just as books and podcasts and relationships do. Do some of that this summer. In the same way, I think people refresh themselves when they not only feed their mind, but when they stretch their mind—stretch their mind with other viewpoints. How many of you have seen or watched the show “Scorpion” or the show “The Big Bang Theory”? They are about people who have IQs of two hundred with an EQ of two. What that means, it seems to me, is that if your primary pathway is the mind, you need to be involved with people whose pathway is other. That would mean that this summer it would be a great thing for you to go to a worship service that doesn't have a sermon. It would be a good thing for you to volunteer to do something that has very little to do with the life of the mind, with people who don't care about that, and see what God does with you. Feed your mind, but stretch your mind.

And then the thing I guess I will finish with is that if you want to be refreshed come Labor Day, you need to not only feed and stretch your mind, you need to set your mind. People who love God through their mind tend to think that more is better—the more I know the better I grow. Setting your mind means that you have a choice whether your mind just grows or it grows in Christ. That it grows not toward facts but toward love. Probably the most profound verse for me these last ten years of my life is what Paul wrote to the Philippians. He said,

Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. [Philippians 4:8]

Chew on these things, and the God of peace will be with you. I've been trying to do that. That doesn't mean that I only listen to MPR and that I only go to the museum, it means that I try to look at my Twitter feed and say *I go through this a couple times a day...is this sucking me down or drawing me up?* Maybe you need to do that as well, because I believe that those who love God with their mind, if their mind is not set, often become very cynical and judgmental, and you need the childlike wonder again. You need to enjoy it. The key is not if you are smarter; the key is: are you more loving? Do you sense the love of God for you? The product of a mind awake is not knowledge. The product of a mind awake is wisdom. Wisdom is knowing what the right thing is and having the courage to do it. It's more about direction than it is about facts. It's more about character than it is about IQ.

I hope that in the weeks to come, those of you who are wired toward creation, and worship, and relationship, and service, will come back and join us that you might be

refreshed. I'd like to just leave you with an example of what a mind alive can look like. It is from the Middle Ages, from a French person named Blaise Pascal. He was a mathematician so brilliant that his mathematical proofs are still being discussed. He was a philosopher so strong that I had to read his stuff in Philosophy class six hundred years later. He was a strong Christian, but his mind was where everything happened and people didn't expect much of him relationally. When he died, he was buried, as people commonly were, in his very best clothes. They put on his best dress coat, and as they put his body into the coat, they felt some paper. They looked, and inside the coat, sewn into it right above his heart, was this. It's not very long, but it changed his life. It says:

The year of grace, 1654. Monday, 23 of November, the Feast of St. Clement. From about half past ten in the evening until half past midnight.

Two hours or so...then it says,

Fire! Fire!
God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,
Not of the philosophers and scholars.
Fire!
Certainty, certainty. Heartfelt joy, peace.
God of Jesus, let me never be cut off.
Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.
Everlasting submission to Jesus.
Total joy in return for one day's effort on earth.
Let me not forget the fire in thy word. Amen.

That's what I wish for you.

Lord Jesus, I thank you very much that I live among a group of people who know how to love people better than I do, who see things in nature that I do not see. People who sing and dance and pray in ways that I can only learn from. And I thank you for a world with other sisters and brothers who are learning to love You with all of their heart and soul and strength and mind. And I pray this summer that You will refresh our minds in the love of the Father, in the grace of the Son, and in the peace of the Spirit. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.