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Presentation Transcript
Mind Over Matter
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The title of this presentation is *Mind Over Matter*.

I have a relative who had all of his teeth removed and replaced with implants. The rub, however, was that his system does not respond to pain medication. So, he endured the entire procedure without any pain management. Just the thought of it – pulling all his teeth and drilling into his jaw to place the implant posts, etcetera – it gives me the creeps to this day to think about it.

So, one day he was showing me his new teeth – very pleased with it – and I asked him how he could stand it? He said, in all seriousness, “Mind over matter.” He wasn’t kidding. That’s how he did it. He controlled his mind. He was his own pain management that day. He told me he set his mind on something else.

But what does that have to do with the Bible, Christian life, or serving God? Well, the phrase *mind over matter* is only a stand-in for something every Christian needs to learn to do. Let’s read about it in Romans 8:5.

Romans 8:5 – *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*

The title of this presentation is *Mind Over Matter*, and since the way we do mind over matter is by setting our mind on something other than matter, let’s see what the Bible has to say about setting our minds. Let’s look at Romans 8:3 – I’m sorry, 8:4.

Romans 8:4-5 – *...in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*

So, what can we learn from this set of verses. Well, first of all, there are two words there – *walk* and *live*. They're interchangeable. When the Bible tells us to walk the walk, it's telling us to live or walk the way Jesus walked, or live the way Jesus lived His life. And the way we walk, or live, a certain way, is to set our mind on that way. So, being a Christian is an intentional effort then. If we just let it go, we're going to drop down to our lower nature – or what's called the *sarx* – not really our nature. It overrides everything. And so, to overcome that we have to intentionally make an effort to do something else. So, mind over matter.

So, let's understand the biblical explanation of what a human is and how a human operates. First of all, there is a human spirit. A part of every human is a spirit. And the human spirit is the part of us that enables and manages thinking, emotions, behavior, motives, goals, desires, conscience, heart, and probably, even personality. That term is not in the Bible, but I think we can say it does.

2 Timothy 4:22, it says:

2 Timothy 4:22 – *The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.* So, this is something else we can learn. We can learn that we *have* a spirit from this scripture and we can learn that when God connects with us, it's our spirit that He's connecting *with*.

Paul explains to us that God has written in the heart – which is a part of the spirit of every human – His law. And that we have a conscience – somewhat educated by the law of God in us. Here's how we know that: it's in Romans 2:14 and 15.

Romans 2:14-15 – *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)* For example, in every major religion, it's wrong to murder, lie or steal – three of the commandments. So, the human spirit has elements of godliness written into it. Otherwise, we would have killed ourselves off way before now.

The second part of a human – possible part – is the Holy Spirit. A majority of all Christian groups believe that the Holy Spirit is a third member of the God family. God is a trinity, they say. Paul tells us that it is by the Holy Spirit that the Father and the Son live in us. The way Paul uses the term, the Spirit is the power of God. This is hard for humans to picture. Since we know nothing about the spirit realm, apart from what God tells and shows us, we're subject to kind of conjecturing about it. We know that God and Jesus also live in a heavenly realm, and that realm functions by a set of rules and laws that create an order – a way of life. And when God and Jesus come and live in us, they bring the complete set of those laws and principles with them. And they give us access to them in a way that humans don't have, unless they've committed to Christ.

So, when Jesus came to earth, He lived by that order, showing us how it works and how to do it. And that's why walking according to the Spirit, and walking like Jesus walked, are one and the same thing. And they are also the way we walk with God. You could say, setting your mind on the Spirit, or the things of God – and that can be kind of a sort of a loosie-goosy generalized term, but it's not – it's to walk, and act, and live the way Jesus did on the earth. He explained how He was going to do that when He gave the Sermon on the Mount.

Okay, now there's another part that the Bible talks about. Paul used another term to explain what those goes on inside humans. And that term is the *flesh*. The word for that in Greek is not the same as *soma*. It's not talking about our body. It's talking about the *sarx*. That's the Greek word for it.

What is the *sarx*? Well, Paul says the *sarx* wars against the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. And the *sarx* is the belief system – a way of thinking – accepted first by Adam and Eve, and then passed on to the next generation. So, how did it get in them? Well, they were told a lie, and they believed it, then acted on it. It was a learned concept. The attitude – or constellation of attitudes – has been so thoroughly accepted by every human that it seems as though it's a real part of us. To walk by the *sarx*, we don't have to be intentional. That's the natural way of human beings now. It's not really natural. It's something that they accepted into themselves, and we have all followed suit ever since – our nature, pretty much, like Adam and Eve's.

So, we all follow our own brand of the *sarx* without thinking about it – and that means, according what read earlier in Romans. If we don't stop following that way of thinking, emoting and behaving, we will all die forever, except for God's grace by Jesus Christ. So, important topic today.

So, what God counsels us to do is to set our minds on the things of the Spirit – the Holy Spirit – which is the power by which Jesus, our Brother, and God, our Father, come and take up residence within us – their way of thinking, feeling and behaving – right there in our minds – available at all times. All we have to do is set our minds on them.

Now, I think we also need to know what they are, so...nobody's ever plumbed the depths of the law of God and all its applications, because there's an application for every thought that we have. So, difficult. We might say, then, too that sanctification is an issue of mind over matter. Sanctification is the supernatural process by which God changes us. And it also references...that word is used in relationship to the resurrection from the dead, when our sanctification is completed. But it's also an ongoing process within all of us.

If you want biblical proof of how it all started – mind over matter and the *sarx*, and believing God instead of the devil's lies – there's a stand-alone presentation I can refer you to. To find them, just go to our Website, liferesource.org, and use the search tool to find *Human Nature* –

How We Got It, and you'll come up with that presentation. From there, you can listen to it, download it to listen to it, read it, or download it to read. It's in either written or oral form.

So, when we look within, we see that the way we naturally operate contains an element of good that was written into us – into our heart – and if we have the Holy Spirit, then the whole package is available to us – and also an element of evil. So, it's easy to believe we were born with bad part as well as the good, but let's think about this.

Let's say that your neighbor has a dog with a litter of pups. As the pups get older, you can hear them wailing and crying and screaming, and you realize that your neighbor is torturing these helpless puppies. What would you do? Would you confront him? Would you punch him in the nose? Would you report him? Most of us, converted or not, would try to do something. Why? Well, because God has written the law into our hearts. It's not good to hurt animals. There is a lot of information in the Bible about animals' care. So, the law has been written in our hearts – not the letter of the law that He gave to Moses that ran a nation – but the spirit of the law that shows a human how to live that came before and after Moses. It's a part of all of us.

Now, some people would do something, and others would do nothing. They would not take any action, because they were afraid. But, in their hearts, they would know it was wrong and would feel guilty about it. *To him who knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin.* Right? So, there *is* what seems to be another part of us in operation. And that's what Paul called the *sarx* – the bad part of human nature.

Where does it come from? Well, it feels like part of us, but think with me for a minute. How did he get there? Have you ever run into someone who was extremely arrogant – thinks they know better than everyone else? It seems like it's built into them. In fact, there is a whole category of areas in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, called *Personality Disorders*. And that's when – and narcissism fits into that category – that's when the person feels like it's a part of them – who they are. That causes them to believe that there's no need to change who they are. So, they just remain that way. So, it isn't, however, built in. It's learned. There's been a lot of study done on narcissism. And we have learned that there are two ways to cause narcissism in children. One is put them up on a pedestal from earliest memory, favor them over their siblings and others, and teach them that they're better than other people. The other way is to abuse and intimidate them. The only way to be safe, from their perspective – from that kind of abuse and intimidation – ever again is to become an aggressive, narcissistic person who believes he *is* better than others, and therefore, he can do whatever he wants to be safe. It's sort of an act that they put on. So, there are two different opposite ways of becoming narcissistic.

I want you to think with me about Adolf Hitler. Adolf Hitler, like all the rest of us, was born an innocent baby. He wasn't born a demon seed or something like that. That's Hollywood. But, when he was still a child, he observed his father savagely beating their dogs – repeatedly. And, as he observed this over and over, it probably seemed much safer to side in with his father than the

dogs. He probably went along with it – maybe even abused them himself. In psychology, they call that identifying with the perpetrator rather than the victim. There are some people that don't. They say, "I'm never going to treat anybody the way my dad treated me." They side in with the victim rather than the perpetrator. So, Adolf Hitler was *not* born a psychopath. He *became* one. And his *sarx* was overriding the law of God written in his heart. His conscience was seared with a hot iron, Paul said. It went quiet on him and it began to feel natural to him to just do whatever he wanted, no matter how cruel to other people.

So, is that a choice he made? Well, I think, as he got older, it probably was. When he was an infant, he was too young to make choices. He was probably too young to know what his dad was doing to the puppies too.

So, do ever remember, as a child, a teacher, or a parent, or an older sibling, or somebody in the neighborhood that told you something that didn't seem true to you? Maybe you were skeptical about it? To believe it, you had to *choose* to believe it, or you chose *not* to. Even when we are young, taking something into our minds and believing it requires an element of choice. God gives us all free will from birth. As we get older, we learn to use it.

I met a man once who told me that his father, when he was five, called him a sorry little rat. And for years, he believed his father, and he acted like a little rat, fearful and furtive, ineffective at school in relationships, his place in the family. And he said to me, "I believed him for the longest time. But, as I got older, God found me and taught me that I was *not* a rat." And as I listened to him, I saw an old man, who had been married to one woman all his life, who had been gainfully employed, had raised four children, who were all contributing to society and themselves happily married. He confided in me about his birthday every year, and what delight it was to him that all of his siblings came together and celebrated with him. It was a happy occasion. His children clearly loved him. He was a Christian who had tried to live life to please God instead of self. And he, as Paul said, lived a life in which he crucified the *sarx*. He didn't allow himself to believe the way of human nature, or he believed what God told him. Because of that, he was well-respected by his fellow congregants. And his whole life was a monument to his work. So, he was told and accepted a lie about himself early on – a lie that the devil very much wanted him to believe – but later, chose to reject that lie and began to believe what God told him, and began to be used by God for a great purpose. So, what he had learned in childhood, he rejected and learned to believe God instead. He set his mind not on the things of the earth – the put-downs and all that he received as a child – but he set his mind on the ways of God.

Sometimes it feels like the things we believe about ourselves are a part of us, but they're not. We know *nothing* when we are born. And we learn and accept or reject what we are taught, especially about ourselves. And it feels like we were born that way, but we weren't. And the point of all this? Well, it's better for our deceitful hearts to believe it's not our fault. We choose to make of ourselves what we will. And that's a scary thought, isn't it? Our human nature, according to what God told Cain, sin lies crouching at the door and we must master it. So, we're

the ones to let in various aspects of that *sarx* into our minds. That's one of the main points of the recounting of what Adam and Eve chose to believe in the Garden, talking to the Spirit. That's the point of it. They made a decision, based on something that they learned, so it was a learned approach that they accepted. They believed the lie.

You know, social scientists, who amount to anything, are all in favor of early intervention when it comes to rescuing children from abuse and neglect. The problem is that the devil believes and practices that too. Through other people, he lies to us early, because we are more easily fooled when we are young. And that's because he is an unfair, deceitful, bullying, malevolent being who hates all humans. And while he gets to us early, we are still the only ones with the power to change what we think about ourselves, or about others, or about God.

But how do we do that? How do we change from someone tainted by our environment into a developing child of God? Well, once we understand how we got the way we are, then the instructions in the Bible about how to change make so much more sense.

Let's look at some of those instructions. Setting the mind – that's one of the main things we're supposed to do. Why am I making such a big deal about the fact that we were not born with a *sarx*? What does that mean? Well, Adam and Eve were not born with it. They were manipulated into accepting it. The biblical term there is *deceived*. And once they accepted that way of thinking, it took hold of them because they did not resist it. And that's why Paul tells us in Romans 8 – I'm sorry – that's what Paul tells us in Romans 8 is so important – Romans 8:1. He says:

Romans 8:1-8 – *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.* Notice that word *law*. Normally, that word refers to a set of laws or rules, like the Ten Commandments, in this case. But here, Paul seems to be using it to explain the two great pulls or urges that we all have within us – good from the Spirit of God and our human spirit and evil from the *sarx*. Louw & Nida says that “this use of the word poses problems for translation and interpretation.” So, we have to read the whole chapter to understand the context of which he uses it. *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.* So, by contrast, this use of the word *law* seems to be about the written law of God, doesn't it? He says humans weakened by the devil's influence are not able to keep the law of God. But, *by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh* – that is, born as a human being, but not accepting the *sarx* in His life – *and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* So, many benefits, even in this life, not just about later. *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

So, Adam and Eve did *not* set their minds on how much God loved them and had done for them. They were not thinking about how God was always available to them, always told them the truth. They started to ignore how great their lives were when they drew close to God and followed His instruction. Instead, they set their minds on what they could do by themselves. Probably sort of rush came from eating that fruit, don't you think? From just a tiny toe-hold, the devil was able to taint and pervert their entire inner structure – their spirit with the mind, the attitudes, the conscience, their habits, their belief system. But that *sarx* was not an inborn part of them. It was a way of looking at things – a paradigm shift away from God, and what appeared to be, to them, a shift toward self-expression and freedom. But, in reality, it was a shift into the devil's way of thinking. It was a way into slavery to sin. Instead of freedom, it was death.

Notice this – Paul says, about the end times – in 2 Timothy 3:1, Paul told Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:1-4 – *But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.* So, it's getting worse, he's saying.

And the obvious way to combat that in ourselves is to set our minds on the things of God instead. Apparently, we can only our minds on one outlook at a time, so we're either doing one or the other. We're talking about setting our minds on the things of Spirit, and that's where, if we decide to think about doing things God's way, we're suddenly free of the devil's lies and connected to God and Christ as they live in us. But, if we think the other way, the devil is our father. You remember Matthew 8. Jesus did say that. That's not just my idea.

So, we have to set our minds on the things of God intentionally – like my relative, who, while they were drilling holes in his jaw without pain meds, he was willfully thinking about something else. So, what would you do to keep your mind on the things of God? How would we go about that?

Well, I think we know the answer to those questions. But some of us don't do it so well. None of us do. But we can pray. We can meditate. David said he meditated on God's law. He wanted it to be on his mind day and night. We can take stalk at the end of the day to see how we did, and make notes where we need to change there – the mistakes we made during the day – or the good things that we did – not just the bad – but think about the things that we did that were good – where we *were* thinking God's way. Where did you do well? And where did you mess up? Be intentional about God's way in various situations, too. How will treat the auditor in the upcoming IRS audit? Or, if you have to call some company about overbilling you, how are you going to treat the person on the other end of the phone? Or, your child, when she spills her OJ? Well, I think we know some things to help with keeping focused. We could even have a Bible study and

brainstorm it.

But there's more. On another level, what else should we do to set our minds on God? Well, part of believing God is penetrating the deception of the devil. And in Matthew 8, Jesus tells some of the Jews – I mentioned this earlier – they'd become the devil's children instead of His Father's children. And they did the same thing Adam and Eve did. They chose to believe the devil instead of God. Every day is a chance to believe everything that God has ever said in the Bible to us and about us. And while God tells us – because of the devil's influence – our hearts are deceitful and sick, He also tells us we are all the apple of His eye. He shows us, in Genesis 3, that we were *not* born with evil, but we have accepted it into our hearts. So, there's no need to feel like a helpless victim forever.

Lies we believe and acted upon can be rejected and replaced with God's truth and true action. We can participate with God in the process of our own sanctification and redemption. In fact, we *must* do that. It doesn't work to sit back and ask God to rescue us when we have not chosen to resist sin, and to follow God, and aren't making an active effort to it with our own feeble strength.

So, the whole point of God's process is that we learn to resist sin *now*, so that we're changed, it won't ever be a part of our future. So, it gets down to, in the end, who's your *abba*? Who's your daddy? Is it the devil? Or, is it God? If we cry, "*Abba*, Father," and believe Him, we're walking in the Spirit.

Alright, that's a tiny taste of how to keep God's mind off of the matter of this world and on to God. And the importance of doing that is increased as we realize we got our human nature from the world around us by focusing on it instead of on God. So, I hope this helps you all fight the good fight.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.

I'll remind you that we are a youth advocacy ministry. And one of the reasons we made this presentation is to strengthen *you* in the faith, not just for yourself, but so you can help your congregation, including its children, who are vital part of your spiritual family. A strong congregation is made up of committed Christians. As an adult member of a congregation, you're responsible to help promote peace, safety and inclusiveness among your group. And, if you contribute to these efforts, then you'll be providing children of your congregation....