



Bottom Line: We are what we give our attention to

Scripture References: Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 11:34-36; Hebrews 12:2

Intro:

[TEACHER NOTE: If you have the capabilities, show a picture of the forest or a path in the woods to illustrate this section.]

Imagine you're walking on a path through the forest. The path has been used multiple times. It is well-worn and well-kept. As you walk, you see the rays of the sun break through the canopy above. You hear the birds singing and you see the occasional squirrel, crazy climbing up and down the trees.

As you walk, you notice a creek off in the distance, but you don't see any paths to get there. As you focus your attention, you can hear the sounds of the creek, and it's as if it's inviting you to come closer and explore. You can stay on the path, or you can create your own. You break off the path and move in the direction of the creek.

Once you reach the creek, you realize that it's more captivating than you expected. The water is so clear you can see to the bottom, with fish swimming in the current. The sound of water rolling over rocks is enchanting, and you begin to lose track of time. A sound in the distance snaps you back to reality. It's time to go back. You retrace your steps and then mark the place on the original path to find it again.

You revisit the path again and again, and little by little the way you walk to the creek begins to clear with each journey. Eventually, a clear path has developed. It's easy to find and easy to walk. You barely realize it, but you've blazed a new trail.

Can you imagine it? Some of you have literally done it. All of us have experienced it.

Not in the woods, but in our brains.

Today we start a message series about how our brains are wired and how our faith shapes our brains.

The illustration of the walk in the woods is what takes place in our brains. Our brains are fascinating and complex organs that affect every aspect of our lives. Emotion, memory, movement, creativity, reactions, and decision-making are all wired to the brain. Not only do our brains affect our lives, but our lives affect our brains.

Here's a quick science lesson. We're going to move from the path in the forest to a construction site.

[TEACHER NOTE: Show a picture of a construction site to illustrate this section.]

From the womb, your brain undergoes an intense construction phase. Looking back, it doesn't seem like much is going on, but your brain is processing, interpreting, and organizing all the input you receive from your senses. What you see, smell, taste, touch, hear, and experience provides information to the brain that shapes how the brain develops and understands the world around you.

This brain construction phase takes place from conception to around the age of 10 (the exact timing is different for everyone). If you think about it, it's amazing all that our brains are able to do in such a short amount of time. We learn to walk, talk, eat, sing, dance, design, and imagine in a few short years. This construction phase is unique to the first decade of our lives.

Sometime between 10, 11, or 12, our brain enters another significant development stage. Instead of construction, it begins a process of reconstruction and renovation.

[TEACHER NOTE: Show a picture of a house or building being remodeled to illustrate this section.]

This reconstruction can last into the mid to late twenties. There are two main parts of this reconstruction: neurogenesis and pruning.

Neurogenesis is the intense formation of brain cells called neurons. During this time frame, your brain makes four to five times more neurons than

2. Find Adventure

Life is an adventure worth living. We're drawn to risk and excitement, but I want to challenge you to find an adventure that benefits the lives of others. Jesus tells us in *Matthew 28:19 to go into all the world and make disciples.*

There are some incredible adventures awaiting you in life, but following Jesus and serving others is the greatest adventure you can pursue.

3. Build Relationships

We were made to be in relationship with one another. Relationships are probably one of the top three most important aspects of your life. We want to be where our friends are. This is how God wired us. Based on the verse we looked at early in Matthew 22:37-39, we were made to love God and love people.

Don't just be a passive friend, build into the lives of those you have relationships with. Have fun, and share memories, but be there for each other and make each other better in the process.

4. Understand Emotions

Emotions can be an overwhelming part of life right now. We feel the highs and lows of life. God gave us emotions to feel life. It can be happiness or heartbreak, but the better we understand our emotions the better we can make sense of what we're experiencing. Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) tells us *to guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

Be aware of your emotions. Are they dictating or dominating your life, decisions, and relationships? If life feels out of control or too overwhelming to handle, that's one reason we're here and we'd be happy to talk with you.

Your brains really care about creativity, adventure, relationships, and emotions. All four of these areas impact our lives.

What we give our attention to will affect our lives. Above all, set your attention on your Creator and your Savior. In Hebrews 12:2, we find:

We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

Fix your eyes—give your attention—on Jesus and He will transform your life. How you think, talk, act, and live.

What are you giving your attention to and how is it impacting your life?

Let's pray.



Bottom Line: Loneliness should lead you to Jesus.

Scripture References: Matthew 1:20-23; Matthew 27:46; Hebrews 13:5

No one likes to feel lonely, but everyone does at some point. Loneliness makes us feel isolated, abandoned, and forgotten. Our faith in Jesus has a lot to say about those feelings. Even though loneliness is real, when we follow Jesus, we are never really alone. Jesus promises to never leave us or forsake us. One reason we have small groups is to be reminded of these truths, as well as provide a place for people to be known, included, and loved. ***Create meaningful conversation. Adjust questions as needed, and don't feel like you need to answer all of them.***

1. Share your highs and lows from the week.
2. What stuck out to you from the message tonight?
3. What do you think causes loneliness?
4. What do you do when you're lonely?
5. How can loneliness lead to laziness or foolishness?
6. How does the Christmas story from the Bible remind us that we're never alone?
7. Why are small groups important when it comes to loneliness?
8. What should we do if we feel lonely?
9. How do we help others who feel lonely?

Prayer: Finish your time praying for your group to remember that Jesus is with them whenever they feel lonely.

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