

Many years ago, we used to subscribe to the newspaper. When I had a chance, I tried to solve the daily crossword puzzles. I noticed something interesting back then about the crosswords. Some days I would almost complete a puzzle, but one or two clues were just too hard, so I would give up and go about my day. But if I came back to the same puzzle later that night or the next day, as soon as I saw the clue again, I would often know the answer. The clue that stumped me at first, was easy 24 hours later. I called this “The Crossword Phenomenon.”

This happened so many times that I developed a theory to account for the phenomenon. My brain, I supposed, was subconsciously continuing to work on the clue, even though I was consciously doing other things. But, like many other theories I’ve made, this one was wrong.

Learning experts have found that many of our thoughts are based on cues or prompts. If you go to the movies, the smell of popcorn serves as a prompt, firing pleasant memories of buttered popcorn. Often these cues are subconscious. You don’t consciously sense them, but they still start a cascading sequence of thought that may seem to come out of the blue.



Here’s an example that correctly explains “The Crossword Phenomenon.”

One afternoon when Bob was at the table working on a crossword puzzle, he could not figure out the last clue: a four-letter famous book name that ended with an “S”. Bob’s kids were playing a noisy game with blocks on the floor and the blender his wife was using was making a racket. It wasn’t easy to concentrate, so Bob finally gave up and put the puzzle aside.

The next morning, in his usual routine, Bob did his daily Bible reading. While reading about the day of Pentecost, he glanced over at the newspaper and his eyes fell on the unsolved clue. Bob picked up the paper and quickly wrote “ACTS” in the last blank space in the puzzle.

Bob’s mind had made an association based on what he was doing that morning. The story of the day of Pentecost is in the book of Acts, and although unconscious, Bob’s brain picked up on the cue and made the connection: the four-letter title of a famous book is A-C-T-S.

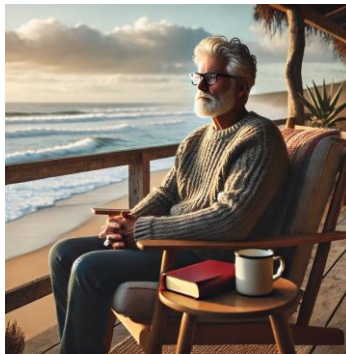
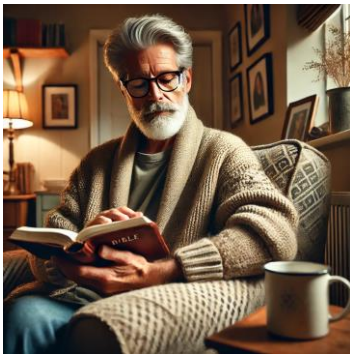
New unconscious cues that morning had informed Bob’s thinking. His context had changed from the previous day, and there were helpful cues in his current context that weren’t there before.

Our current context at any point in time includes the states of our age, our season of life, our current physical health and emotional state, our financial situation, our family and church relationships, our employment, and so much more. If one or more of these factors change, our context changes, along with the associated cues and prompts that may subconsciously influence our thoughts.

A purposeful change of context is a great technique for renewing our minds. For example, we may think we understand something about God or His Word, but when we look through the lens of a different context, we may see a deeper meaning or have a clearer understanding. Think about this verse from Psalms 118.24:

*This is the day which the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*

Let's see how changes in context might lead the same person to relate to this verse in different ways.



Here we see a man in three different contexts. In the first context on the left, the man is reading this verse during his morning devotions in his living room. He reminds himself that the rest of the day is a gift from God.

In the second context, a few weeks later, the same man is remembering this verse as he sits on the porch of his beach home. He thanks God for the beautiful day He has made.

In the third context, at his wife's funeral, the man again recites the verse and struggles to understand. But, in this dark time when rejoicing and gladness seem far away, the words now remind him that God is still in control, even in the darkest days of life.

Maybe we should call this "The Word Phenomenon." The same Word from God can speak in different ways to us, depending on our current context. A renewed mind carries God's Word into all the nooks and crannies and seasons of life and learns to seek the mind of God in every context. God's Word will be there in our current context with a fresh message if we take time to listen.