

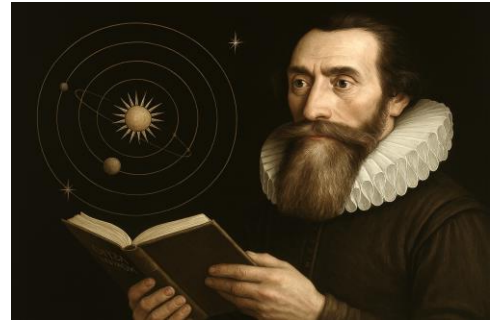
Challenge Yourself

RENEWING TECHNIQUE

Some people must have been born with a “lazy” gene because they always are looking for ways to avoid work. But everyone can get brain lazy and try to offload some of the brain’s work. Many of the features of our technology reduce our need to think or remember. AI, Bing and Google provide us with thoughts and knowledge. Text messages remind us of appointments. My car even tells me there may be ice on the road when it is cold outside.

Mental laziness predates modern technology, however. Watch people playing Scrabble for example. They look at their little tray of seven letters and then shuffle the tiles around. Then they reshuffle them... again and again. Our brains can mentally reorganize the letters to recognize valid word patterns, but it is mentally easier to let our fingers rearrange them.

Johannes Kepler was a Lutheran in the 1600’s and in training to be a pastor. But he had an inquisitive mind and exceptional mathematical abilities. After years of working with Tycho Brahe, the imminent astronomer in Europe at the time, Kepler discovered that the planets circled the Sun, not in circular orbits, but in elliptical paths. His three Laws of Planetary Motion are still in use today as the basis for orbital calculations in our solar system.



Kepler said that, because humans are made in God’s image, they can, “think God’s thoughts after Him.” In other words, understanding more about the universe is possible. King Solomon, whose wisdom and knowledge was legendary, said something similar. “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search out a matter.” (Proverbs 25:2)

And centuries before Solomon, Moses wrote: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deuteronomy 29:29)

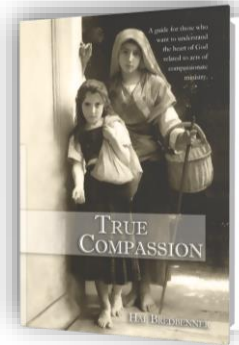
Kepler and Solomon and Moses found joy in mental pursuits. They probably would not have spent their free time watching Family Feud, playing Candy Crush or reading Facebook posts.

Don't be mentally lazy. Challenge yourself in your daily devotional activities. Don't just read the thoughts of someone else or a curated list of Scriptures. Engage your brain in some directed and challenging ways and think God's thoughts.

First, work hard at memorization. Hide all of His word in your heart. Memorize lists, like the fruit of the Spirit, the days of creation, the sequence of churches where Paul travelled. Can you cite the ten commandments in order? Most people can't. Its challenging mental work, but memorization of God's Word will renew your thinking in ways that honor God.

For a second challenge, spend a year to hear everything God says on a specific topic. Start by picking a topic to study. Then over the period of a year, read every word of the Bible, front to back, and keep a running list of every scripture that is related to your topic. At the end of the year, compile all those scriptures into a list. Some will seem like duplicate statements but list them all. Then look for any natural groupings that may appear.

I have used this technique to search out the thoughts of God on Compassion. By grouping the verses, I saw repeated patterns in God's concern for widows, the fatherless and the poor. There were specific instructions related to compassion for immigrants. I eventually documented all my research into a small book called *True Compassion*.



What topic will you choose? Make it a difficult one. We all have areas of weakness: Inordinate fear, faithlessness, insecurity, lust, envy. Choose your area of weakness and make that your topic. Tell God you are tired of dealing with that issue and commit to learn everything God says about that topic.

Third, challenge yourself to develop the relationships God made you for. Find a person in church who seems lonely and invite them for dinner. During an altar call after service, go forward and pray with someone. Volunteer to be a part of the ushering or greeting team. Commit to teach others the insights God has given you from His Word.

All of these suggestions are mentally challenging endeavors, but God will honor your effort by showing you things a lazy brain will never discover. If you are serious about growing in the Lord and renewing your mind, don't expect someone else to do it for you. God gave you a brain. Challenge yourself with it.