

Live Strong: Transforming and Renewing Our Mind:  
a Word for Music and Worship and Arts Leaders  
by Brandon A. Boyd



I have often heard older people in the church say, “I thank God for keepin’ me in my right mind, with a reasonable portion of health and strength.” On a personal note, during the 2011 Christmas season, my grandmother came to visit for the holidays. She is now 84, and very thin. Her ability to walk is great, but she can no longer judge distances well. She is not always able to recognize where she is. The experience of being with her for five days helped me appreciate having full use of my mental capacities.

I realized that the mind is an incredible gift that we often take for granted. As Christians, we have to continuously infuse our minds with scripture, positive thinking, and positive environments. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. How do we live holy so that our relationship with God is healthy? Through the transformation of our thoughts.

The first step to transforming the mind toward holy living is to make a decision that where you are you no longer want to be, mentally or spiritually. Then, we have to understand that WE cannot transform our mind; only God can do that. But, we can accept responsibility for our thoughts and actions. This will place us in the right frame of mind for God to begin

transformational work. Spiritual and mental health is extremely important for holistic health. The things that we place in our minds and spirits are as important as what we place in our bodies.

In serving in the area of Sacred Music or Music Ministry, we are given the responsibility of encouraging and motivating the people of God through music and arts. In many instances, we are counselors, academicians, concert artists, confidants, comedians, and life coaches, on top of being music directors. Whether we recognize it or not, in wearing all of these hats, we will be ineffective and become totally drained, unless we recognize that we need to help people continuously open their minds to transformation by God and the Holy Spirit.

God has given those who lead Music Ministries special talents and gifts. We are to influence or impact the people of God through the ministry of music and worship arts. Music and arts can be very impactful. Have you ever heard a song that changed your mood, disposition, or countenance? For me, these days, that song is Walter Hawkins's "Thank You Lord for All You've Done for Me." I forget about every hardship or challenge that I may be facing when I hear that song. It "gives me life," as my good friend Nathaniel would say.

Music is an incredibly powerful tool. It can help people gain serenity, piece of mind, and comfort, in times of distress. There's a wonderful song entitled, "He's Been Keeping Me," written by Gale Jones Murphy. Gale served as my accompanist at Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church in Nashville, when I was Director of Music Ministries at Fifteenth Avenue. In a conversation with her concerning her motivation for writing this piece, she shared with me that it was her spiritual testimony. She reminded me that we have to remember to credit God for giving us good mental and physical health and gifts and talents. It is not that we were deserving—but because of God's mercy, we have been kept. Here are the lyrics to the song:

## He's Been Keeping Me

by Gale Jones Murphy

Some of you have a testimony: How you're not the same.

How He made you over, and how your life's been changed.

Some of you have a story: How He made you new, how He brought you over,

And all He took you through. But I have a different story about what the Lord has done,

All the battles He's fought, and the victories He's won;

He's been keeping me all the days of my life.

He directs me, protects, He abides with me, He guides me,

holds me, He molds me, and He never lets me go;

He's been keeping me all the days of my life.

This song helps us remember and reflect on our personal stories and testimonies through life's journey. God kept us and importantly, kept us sane. We did not lose our minds or our moral compass amidst all of our difficulties.

Marvin Sapp wrote, "Never Would've Made It," and more recently he wrote, "So Glad I Made It." Each song credits God for carrying him through trials and tribulations and encourages listeners to do the same. The songs are also testimonies by Sapp that he has overcome difficulties, including the loss of his wife to cancer. He is now a single father. Both songs by Sapp, can be heard by clicking the following YouTube links.

"Never Would've Made It" by Matthew Brownie and Marvin Sapp

YouTube button here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JXFg5KEoXg>

“So Glad I Made It” written by Aaron Lindsey and Marvin Sapp

YouTube button here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQwbK2M0r2c>

James Fortune’s song “I Believe” is another song of encouragement to God’s people. Fortune shares that at one point he was homeless, and celebrates that God kept him and his family and brought him through.

When mental health assistance was not popular or accessible to the black community, we relied upon the African American Church to be our psychologist, life coach, motivational coach, and inspiration, through the toughest situations. After more than two centuries of physical enslavement in the United States, many black people still bear the vestiges of slavery and/or new shackles of cultural enslavement. However, in spite of past ills and present factors that can harm us, we escalate the harm that we suffer when we refuse to transform our minds toward holy living. We have to have a made up mind that we will stay committed to Christ and the ways of Christ. Donald Vails, through his song, “With a Made Up Mind,” makes this clear. Listen to the song by clicking the link below.

“With a Made Up Mind” by Donald Vails

YouTube button here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJr809qNgYY>

How do we change our mindsets? In Romans 12:2 it says, “and be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is good, and acceptable, and perfect, the will of God.” As worship leaders/music directors, our responsibility is to promote a healthy relationship with God in all that we do. Too often, we think that choosing

certain types of music or contracting the most talented musicians to serve on our teams, will bring people to Christ. Bringing believers to Christ and sustaining their intimacy with him are two different things. We have a responsibility to bring people into the presence of God AND help them learn how to live holy lifestyles that are pleasing to God. Such living ultimately leads to transformation of the mind through daily habits that make us more spiritually disciplined.

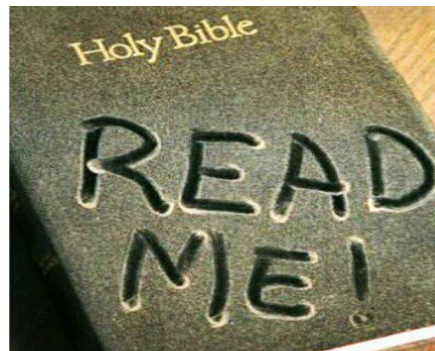
Holy lifestyles are birthed through the habits in which we engage. Habits shape our personalities and can enrich our lives, but when we become obsessive about them they can turn into harmful addictions. Addictions hurt us and the people whom we love. All addictions begin in the mind. By that, I mean they begin with our thoughts and the decisions we make because of those thoughts. In this same vein, the successful end of all addictions also begin with the mind. They begin with decisions to obtain help to restore our health and wellness. This is why it is imperative to keep our minds stayed on God. A mind focused on God can be moved toward holiness and healing.

In this installment of the Young Adult Liturgists' Corner, Charles Cotton wrote a call to action article about HIV/AIDS. Why is HIV/AIDS an uncontrollable epidemic in the African American community? The reason is that we are making choices that spread it and allow it continue to spread rampantly throughout our community. More than money, which is sorely needed—more than new drugs to fight the virus, which are also sorely needed—the HIV/AIDS epidemic is just one more deadly issue about which we need to change our minds and move toward education and eradication and holiness and healing.

The songwriters of today's gospel music can make millions by encouraging us and giving us inspiration and motivation, but until we choose to “give up the wrong for the right,” as my grandmother says, meaning changing our minds, we will be enslaved by our decisions.

We can transform our minds through a committed relationship with God. This relationship can occur when we:

- Strengthen our prayer life. Romans 12:12 tells us how to pray;
- Read our instruction manual (the Bible). This is where God reveals His will and himself to us and;
- Worship with the body of Christ. The Church builds us up as we encourage one another.



While writing this article, I took a mental break to peruse Facebook. As I perused the social network, I ran across a picture of my aunt on her daughter's Facebook profile in my newsfeed. My aunt was wearing a purple T-shirt that read, "I Am New! Roman 6:4-5." As I continued to look through the pictures, I saw her being submerged under water. Immediately and unashamedly, I began to worship God in my office chair that she had made a decision to serve God.

When we choose God, who has already chosen us, we are making a decision to become new creatures, similar to getting a makeover. A makeover is intended to give us a new, more attractive, and different physical appearance. When God makes us new creatures, he changes the essence of who we are inside, to make us more of a reflection of Him. Unlike a physical

makeover, a spiritual makeover makes us yearn to build a relationship with him, so that our minds will stay on the things that are pleasing to him. Focusing on God and His desires for us is key to having a healthy mind and a healthy relationship with God.