

7. Taming the Passions

Overcome your habits, attachments to your likes and dislikes and learn to practice the virtues.

Passions

- ✦ With Faith and humility our biggest task is to **tame our passions.** - purification
- ✦ We begin by **giving our best effort** to live the **commandments,**
- ✦ We try, sometimes succeed & sometimes fail, we repent and try to change. Endurance & patience.
- ✦ With repentance we draw **closer** to God. God's grace is hidden in His commandments and freely given we follow with love.
- ✦ Remember "*I believe*" means "*I follow*".

Passions - πάθος

*Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its **passions and desires**.* Gal 5:24

What are Passions?

- * **Emotions** that control us.
Sexual desire, anger, envy, desire for material goods, rejection, fear, love...
- * **Desires** that cannot be satisfied.
Material goodies, recognition, food, sex...
- * **Express our egoism** or self-centeredness.
- * **Attempts to satisfy spiritual longing** by this world means.

Passions

- ✿ What is nature of uprooting our passions?
 - ✿ Takes great effort.
- ✿ Recall how Paul expressed this difficulty?

How Paul Struggles

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

But *I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.* (Rom 7:18 -23)

Passions

- * Why is it that we find it so difficult to do what God commands us to do?
- * Why are our intentions so often **not** carried out?

Passions

- * Passions are caused by turning the various faculties of the soul and body **away from God** and directing them toward sensible reality to **seek pleasure** in them.
- * Instead to seeking our joy from our union with God we try and find it through seeking pleasures from sensual things of this world.
- * What is the nature of joy gained from sensible things?
- * What is nature of joy gained from relationship with God?

Passions

* St. Isaac the Syrian writes, *“The soul is naturally impassible... We believe that God has made man in His image; impassible... So when [the soul] allows itself to enter into passionate movements, it is, as all agree, outside its nature.*

(Ascetical Homilies 82)

* Soul in its natural state directs its life upwards.

Passions

- * Passions are the product of man's own inventions following the ancestral sin.
- * St. Macarius teaches: *“Through the first man's disobedience, we have received in ourselves an element alien to our nature: the malice of the passions, which having passed into habit and inveterate disposition has become our nature.”* (Homilies (Coll. II) IV.8)
- * Passions are result of **improper** use of our free will.
- * Turning away from God and virtues man introduces passion into himself.

Passions

* Saint Basil the Great Writes:

“We have received from God the natural tendency to do what He commands...

* *By using these powers in a **fitting and loyal manner**, we live in virtue in a holy manner;*

* *by turning them away from their goal, we are led away on the contrary to evil.*

* *Such is the definition of **vice**: the **misuse**, contrary to the Lord’s commandments, of the faculties that God has given us for good.*

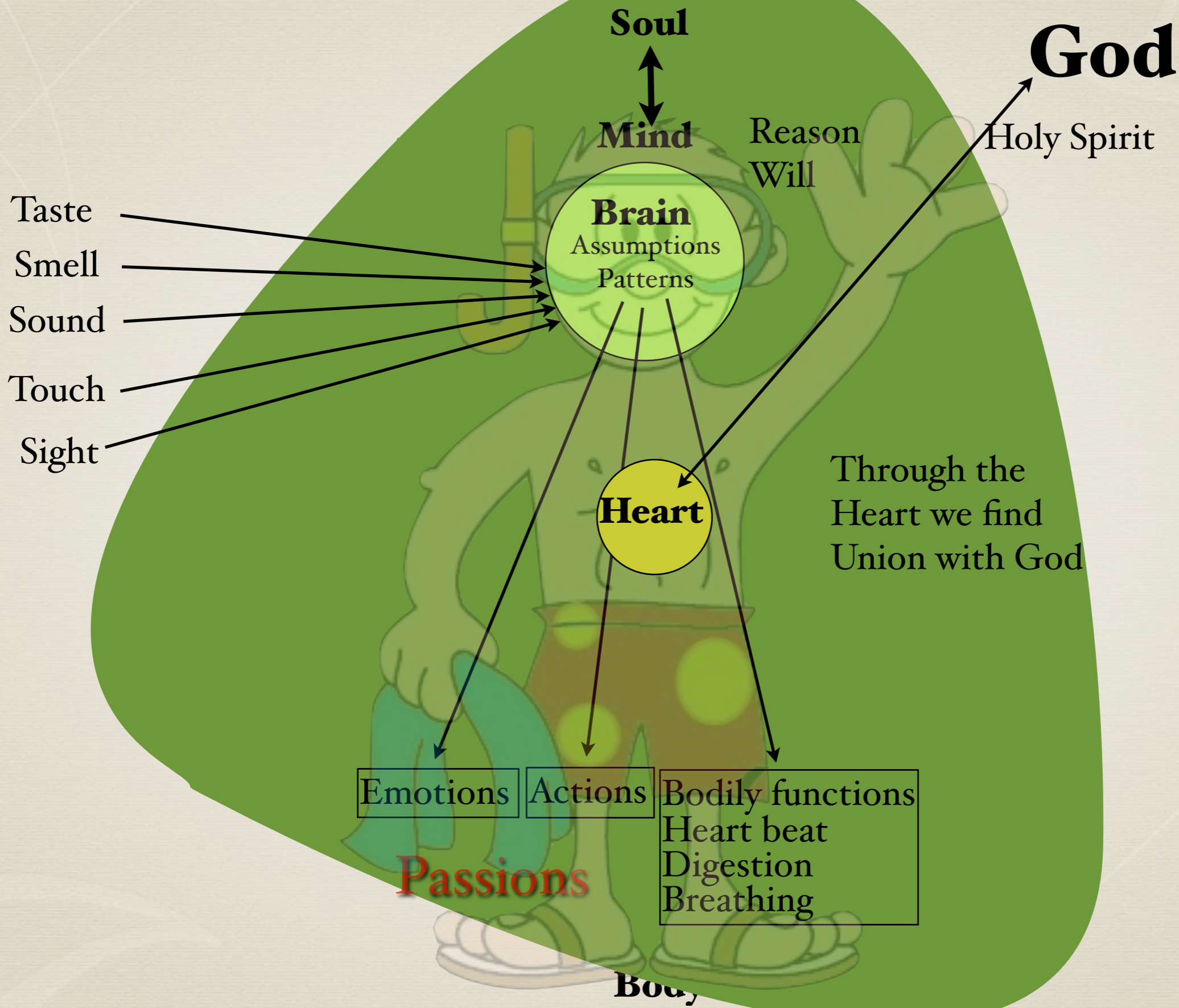
* *As a result, the definition of **virtue** is such that God demands of us the **conscientious use** of these faculties according to the Lord’s direction.*

Passions

* Principle Passions:

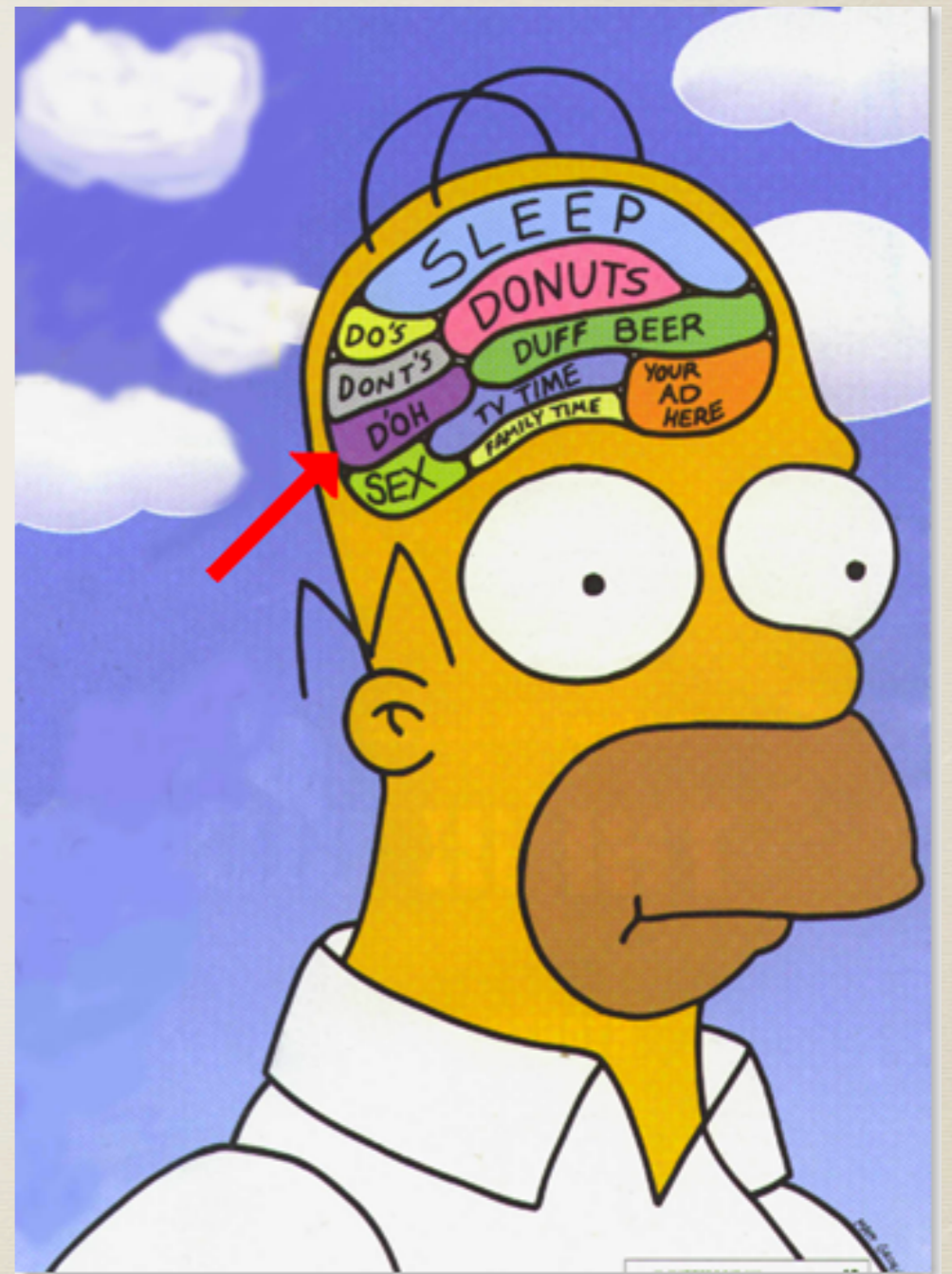
- * **gluttony** - craving for foods
- * **lust** - desiring sexual pleasure
- * **love of money** - Seeking material things
- * **sorrow** - self-pity
- * **anger** - Can't have your way
- * **Spiritual sloth or apathy** - Seeing prayer, reading Bible, attending Church as not important.
- * **vainglory** - want to be well know & recognized
- * **pride** - Confidence in self-will instead of God's. I know best.

* Principle source is egotistical love of self



Brain

- * What locks us into this undesirable behavior?
- * Mental programming
- * Our brain has etched in it patterns of behavior which can become our strength or weakness.
- * Where our sinful tendencies are engraved so they will be repeated often.
- * The devil knows our weakness and continually tempts us.



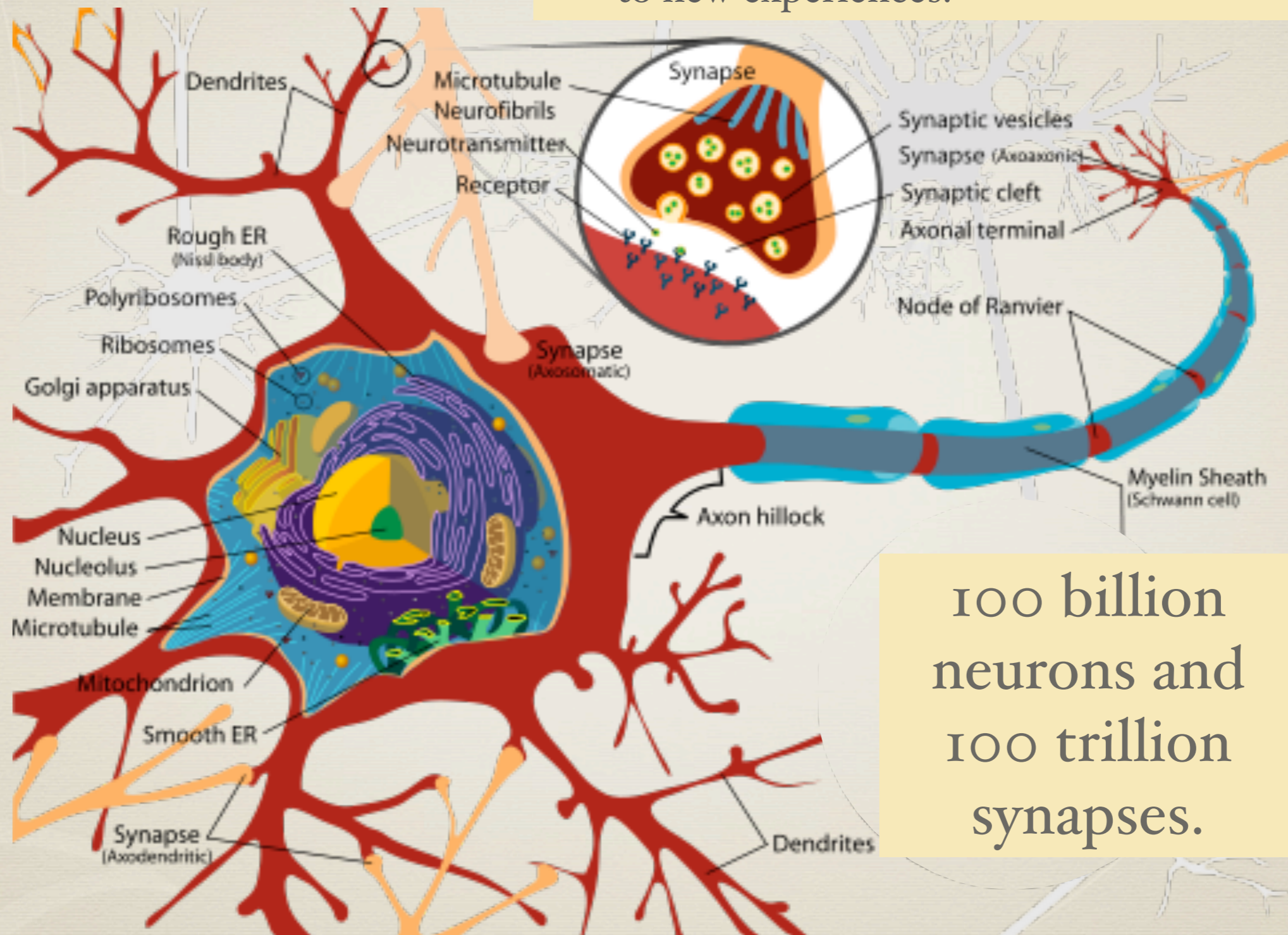


Brain

- * What is the the brain?
 - * A part of our **body** - Chemicals and living cells - physical.
 - * **Integrates soul** and **body** and the **external** world.
 - * Allows the body to **adapt and interact** with its environment.
 - * Takes input from all the senses and **creates an integrated view** of the **world**.
 - * Contains means for **regulation** all bodily functions.
 - * Its focus is on the **body** and its needs and desires (passions)
 - * Incredibly **complex** network of physical connections.

Neurons

Synapses are awash in hormones and neurotransmitters that modulate the transmission of signals, and they constantly form and dissolve, weaken and strengthen in response to new experiences.



100 billion neurons and 100 trillion synapses.



Passions

- * Passions are **forces** that enter into our soul, become **patterns** etched into our brains, **programmed** into our automatic responses, and need to be rooted out.
- * Some of this is probably also **hereditary**.
- * Overcoming sinfulness is a most **difficult** task.
- * Our work is called asceticism.



Passions

- * Two types: **Natural** and **Unnatural** Passions
- * What would a natural passion be?
 - * **Natural passions** depend on nature and not on the will.
Appetite for food,
Fear of being harmed,
Sexual attraction
 - * Necessary to preserve our nature.
The **animal** aspect of our being.
 - * Not a problem unless they go **beyond** the **need** for **self preservation**.

Passions



* Saint Maximus

“The natural passions become good in those who struggle when, wisely unfastening them from the things of the flesh, use them to gain heavenly things.

- * *For example, they can change appetite into the movement of a spiritual longing for divine things;*
- * *pleasure into the pure joy for the cooperation of the mind with divine gifts;*
- * *fear into care to evade future misfortune due to sin; and sadness into corrective repentance for present evil.”* (St. Maximus Questions to Thalassios I, PG 90.269 - OS 9)



Passions

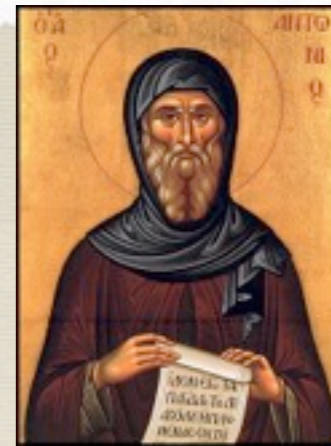
* **Unnatural Passions**

- * What do we all long for?
- * We mistakenly connect our **longing for spiritual wholeness** with natural passions
- * We **seek pleasure or happiness** only to find pain on the other end. Then seek more pleasure.
- * *When man isn't focused on distinguishing between what is spiritual and things of the senses he **disobeys** the divine command. He **errs** when the irrationality of **feeling is the only form of discernment**. He is captured by pleasure and avoidance of pain.*

(St. Maximos, Questions to Thalassios I, 43, PG90.412-13 - OS 87)

Passions

Saint Anthony



Things that are done according to nature aren't sins, but those done by choice;

it's not a sin to eat, so that the body will be properly maintained in life without any evil thought, but it is to eat without gratitude and improperly and without restraint;

neither is it a sin to look with chastity, but it is a sin to look with envy, pride and desire;

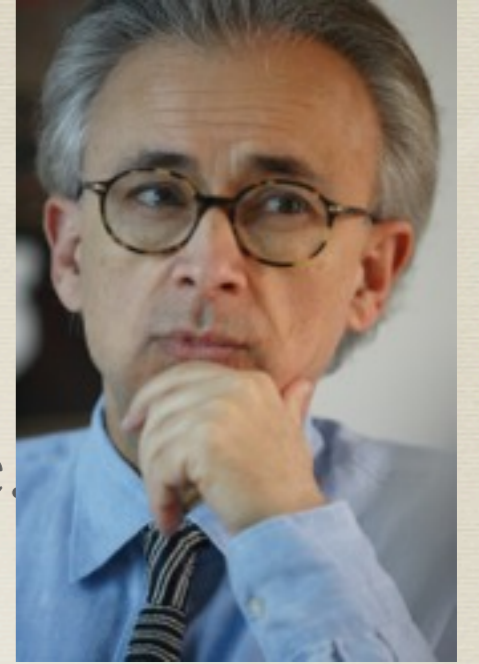
it is not a sin to listen quietly, but it is with anger.

It's not a sin to let the tongue be unrestrained in thanksgiving and prayer, but it is to speak evil; to not let your hands do acts of mercy, but to commit murder and theft.

So each of our members sins if it does evil instead of good, doing things its own way and not according to the will of God. (On the Character

of Men 60, GrPh 1, p 12; cf. Phi 1, p. 338 - OS 92)

How Emotions Work



Antonio Damasio - *The Feeling of What Happens*

- * Something from our senses **initiates** a response.
- * Brain sends **commands** to other regions of the brain and most everywhere in the body proper.
 1. **Bloodstream** - commands are sent in the form of chemical molecules that act on receptors in the cells of body tissues.
 2. **Neuron pathways** - commands take the form of electromechanical signals which act on other neurons or on muscular fibers or on organs which in turn can release chemicals of their own into the blood stream.
- * Results in **global change** in the state of the **organism**.
- * **Only then** do we become **aware** of a feeling.

How Emotions Work

- * What is the lesson here?
- * We **can't wait** for our **feelings** to develop to control our behavior. We need to interact at the **time of the stimulus** and work to **change** the **automatic response** of the emotional response.
- * Once the passion is engaged we are like the barking dog.

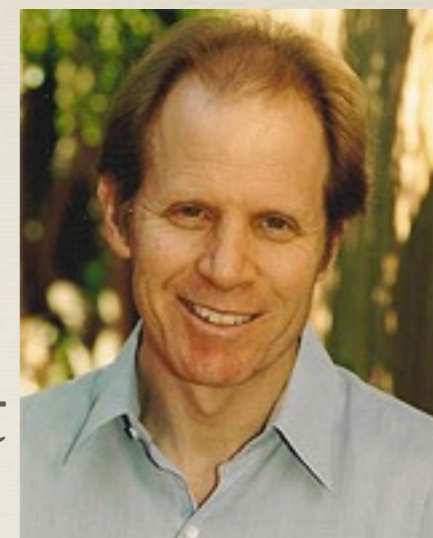
Passions

- * Two places we can interrupt the cycle
- * When we first receive the sensual stimulus
- * or when we notice the emotional feeling but before we automatically take an action.
- * Church Fathers advise us to learn to do both especially the first
Guarding the Heart or Watchfulness.

Attention and Watchfulness

Mindful Brain, Daniel J. Siegel

- * We can actually focus our minds in a way that **changes** the structures and function of the **brain** throughout our lives. (96)
- * Attentional processes, emotion regulation, and capacity to observe internally, to introspect and reflect, are all considered **trainable** skills. (Lutz and colleagues 204) (97)
- * This is how we can prepare for cooperation with God. We must **develop attentiveness** in our mind.



Attention and Watchfulness

- * Appreciate the limited nature of our understanding of what we sense.
- * Our senses, memories, and mental images only give us a symbolic representation of the world.
- * The brain identifies what it believes to be significant and ignores the rest.

Attention and Watchfulness

- * Brain imaging studies suggest **frontal lobe** is critical in directing our ability to **act freely** and make decisions and this can be interpreted that free will is conscious choice involving an introspective monitoring of the self. (158)
- * The **more you concentrate** on a moral idea, the **easier** it becomes to act on that belief.
- * Frontal lobes monitor our **ability to stay attentive** and alert, helping us to focus on a task.
- * Nuns in prayer showed greater activity in the frontal lobes.



Attention



Andrew Newberg

- * If you want to maintain a sense of well being you have to work at it **continually** reinforcing positive feeling and **beliefs**. This is one of the benefits of religious **ritual**.
- * The key to creating any reality is based on a concentrated **repetition** of ideas. (189)
- * The more we stay **focused** on our object of contemplation, the more real the thought becomes.
- * Be careful about what you pray for or meditate on because it may eventually become your personal truth. If you want to make spirituality central part of your life then by all means **focus** on **spiritual ideals** as often as you can. Andrew

Way of Life

- * Why Church places such emphasis on the ascetic practices like daily prayer, prostrations & fasting.
- * Especially the Jesus Prayer. Both a prayer and a discipline
- * It's a practice that can help you reprogram your brain to interact sooner and draw upon the Holy Spirit in critical moments.
- * Requires effort and practice.



Peter

- * *Gird up the loins of your mind... not conforming yourselves to the former lusts but ... you also be holy in all your conduct.* 1 Peter 1:13-15
- * *Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul... submit yourself to every ordinance...* 1 Peter 2:11, 13



Paul

- * ***Put to death** therefore **what is earthly** in you; unchastity, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and greed, which is idolatry...*
- * *But now **put them all away**: anger, wrath, malice, slander and foul talk from your mouth.*
- * *Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have **put off the old nature** with its practices and have **put on the new nature** which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Col 3: 5-10*

Orthodox Way of Life


- * Church shows us the **way** to deal with this difficult but most important challenge we face.
- * We cannot do it by our own effort but only through **grace** of the Holy Spirit.
- * This effort is called a **purification** of the Heart. Involves continual **repentance**.
- * It is a **difficult** path requiring attention, persistence and endurance. **Surrender!**



Passions

- * Know the commandments & consciously try to live them - the virtues.
- * Recognize your sinfulness caused by passions
- * Build discipline through the Ten Points especially prayer, worship, and fasting.
- * Surrender & become obedient to the teachings of the Church - Body of Christ on earth.
- * Work at it like your life depended on it. Remember that eternal life does.

8. Putting others first




Free yourself from your selfishness and find joy in helping others.

Way of Life

- ✿ 8. Putting **others** first
- ✿ This becomes the **result** of the other practices.
- ✿ We must overcome our **ego**, our pride, our self-centeredness, and develop **humility** and **compassion** for others.
- ✿ All starts with our **love of God**. Closer we are to Him the more we will **love others**.
- ✿ This love grows through a life of repentance and humility.

9. Spiritual fellowship



*Spend time regularly with other Orthodox Christians
for support and inspiration.*

10. Read the Scriptures and Holy Fathers

Become inspired by the Scriptures, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and the lives of the Saints of the Church.

Reading Scripture

- * Scripture is **Inspired by God**. What do we mean by this?
- * God's authoritative witness of Himself putting the Word of God into human language through humans beings.
- * Bible makes up a **unity** - not simply a collection of books but a single story from Genesis to Revelation.
- * Read it with **obedient receptivity** waiting on the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts.

Reading Scripture

- * It is **humanly expressed**, with writings from differing times by differing persons. What does this imply?
- * Reflects **outlook of the age** and the **viewpoint of the author**.
Each author was inspired and contributes his own gifts.
- * In addition to divine there is a human aspect.

Reading Scripture

- * Evangelists have their own perspective.
- * **Matthew** is most ecclesiastical and most Jewish
- * **Mark** writes in less polished Greek more like daily life with vivid narratives
- * **Luke** emphasizes universality of God's love that extends equally to Jews and Gentiles
- * **John's** is more inward and mystical called by St. Clement of Alexandria a "*spiritual Gospel*."

Reading Scripture

- * We are to interpret it?
- * Through the Church. What does this imply?
- * The Bible was given to us by the Church. It tells us what is and what is not Scripture.
- * How did we get this collection of Books that make up One Bible?
 - * For three hundred years there was no canon .
 - * Books were chosen not because of a theory about its date and authorship, but because of its truths.

Reading Scripture

- * We rely on the Church tell us **what Scripture is** and **how it is to be understood.**
- * Remember the story of the Ethiopian and Philip?
- * As the Ethiopian rode up in his chariot Philip asked him *“Do you understand what you are reading? “How can I,”* answered the Ethiopian, *“unless someone guides me?”*
- * We are in the same situation.
Scripture is **not always self explanatory.**

Reading Scripture

- * We can make full use of our private understanding and full use of the biblical commentaries of scholars, but we **submit them to the judgment of the Church.**
- * We read it as members of a family, members of the Orthodox Church.
- * We read in communion with all other members
We understand through the “mind of the Church.”

Reading Scripture

- * How do we discover this mind of the Church?
- * One way is to see how Scripture is used in **worship**, how its used in the **various feasts**.
- * We consult the **writings of the Church Fathers** especially St. John Chrysostom, seeing how they analyze and apply Scripture.

Reading Scripture

- * Example: in Feast of **Annunciation** there are five readings
- * **Genesis** 28:10-17: Jacob's dream of a **ladder from earth to heaven**.
- * **Ezekiel** 43:27-44: prophet's vision of Jerusalem temple with **closed gate** through which none by the Prince must pass.
- * **Proverbs**: 9:1-11: A great wisdom passage beginning "*Wisdom has built her house*"
- * **Exodus** 3:1-8: Moses at the **Burning Bush**.
- * **Proverbs** 8:22-30: Another Wisdom text describing place of Wisdom in God's eternal providence: "*I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth.*"

Reading Scripture

- * These give us powerful images indicating the role of the Theotokos in God's plan of salvation.
- * She is **Jacob's ladder** that God comes down and enters our world.
- * She is ever virgin that even though Jesus is born of her she remains inviolate, the gate of her virginity ever sealed
- * She is to regarded as God's wisdom. She is the **burning bush** containing within her womb the **uncreated fire of God** yet is not consumed.
- * And **from all eternity** she was **forechosen** by God to be His Mother.

Reading Scripture

- * Can we see this by simply reading the OT?
- * In their original content of the Old Testament we cannot appreciate how they foreshadow the Savior's Incarnation.
- * By exploring how the Old Testament is used in the Church Lectionary we can discover layer upon layer of meanings that are far from obvious to the casual reader.
- * On Holy Saturday there are **15** Old Testament readings

Reading Scripture

- * How can we adhere to the mind of the Church in our Bible study circles?
- * One can be assigned the task of noting when a passage is used for a festival or Saint's day and can lead discussion about why it was included.
- * Others may research the Fathers giving priority to the homilies of St John Chrysostom.
- * Make use of the Orthodox Study Bible!

Reading Scripture

- * Above all make sure your reading is **Christ centered**. Christ is the unifying figure. *“In Him all things hold together”* (Col 1:17)
- * Cannot as many scholars do, break up our study and analysis into pieces. Micro-analyze.
- * There is a unity of the Scriptures that cannot be broken apart.
- * Need **synthetic approach** seeing Bible as an integrated whole with Christ as bond of union.

Reading Scripture

- * Seek out, “What does this mean for me?”
- * Saint Mark the Ascetic says,
“He who is humble in his thoughts and engaged in spiritual work, when he reads Holy Scripture, will apply everything to himself and not to his neighbor.”
- * Reading Scripture should be an intimate dialog between Christ and the reader.
- * All the narratives are part of our personal story.

Reading Scripture

- * Take the woman who emptied the flask of ointment over Christ's feet. (Luke 7:36-50) Can you see her mirrored in you?
- * Do you share her generosity? Do you show the spontaneity and loving impulsiveness?
 - * Christ said, "*Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.*"
- * Or, are you calculating, mean, timid, holding yourself back, never willing to commit yourself fully to anything, either good or bad?
- * Fathers say: "*Better someone who has sinned, if he knows he has sinned and repents, than a person who has not sinned and thinks of himself as righteous.*"

Reading Scripture

- * Bible not simply a work of literature or history.
- * Its a **sacred book** addressed to **believers**, to be read with **faith and love**.
- * Must first have **faith** and be in **love** with Christ.
- * We enter into its deep meaning when our heart responds to the **heart of God**.

Reading Scripture

- * Met Kalistos Ware says,
*“Reading Scripture in **obedience**,*
- * *as a **member** of the Church,*
- * *finding **Christ** everywhere,*
- * *and seeing everything as part of my own **personal** story –*
- * *we shall sense something of the **power** and **healing** to be found in the Bible.”*

Reading Scripture

- * What is the purpose of the Apostolic teaching recorded in the Bible?
- * 1. the enlightenment and instruction of the Faithful
- * 2. the Conversion of the world.
- * So quite different than Old Testament.

Reading Scripture

- * Scriptures reveals the **relationship between God and mankind.**
- * Shows us where we are going, our **destiny.**
- * In beginning God chose a people setting them apart. Now the **Church is Body of Christ** who become the set apart people

Reading Scripture

- * Jesus Christ through the Incarnation is the fullness of God's revelation, **climax** of His creation.
- * **Gospels** detail His **life** and **works** and **Acts** of the Apostles show us how the **Church began**.
- * The full Gospel cannot be grasped from observable facts alone. It is only know by **faith** through our **heart** - spiritual experience.
- * *“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* (John 4:24)

Reading Scripture

- * The Gospels are true narratives telling what really took place in time and space and place.
- * There is much more.
- * Can learn much more through faith than by our five senses. This is the **sixth sense** we have.

Reading Scripture

- * Resources for daily inspiration and study
 - * Orthodox Study Bible
 - * Daily email from Archdiocese: Scripture for the day, Saints honored with brief life
 - * Also app available
 - * Go to Goarch.org/chapel
- * Read a little each day.

Reading Scripture

* Questions?

10 Points for an Orthodox Life

- * 1. Praying Daily
- * 2. Worshiping and Participating in Sacraments
- * 3. Honoring the Liturgical Cycle of the Church
- * 4. Using the Jesus Prayer
- * 5. Slowing Down and Ordering Your Life
- * 6. Being Watchful
- * 7. Taming the Passions
- * 8. Putting Others First
- * 9. Spiritual Fellowship
- * 10. Reading the Scriptures and Holy Fathers

