

Harnessing the Mind

Unlike animals, humans have the ability to make moral judgments in their lives. But making right choices first requires a mind that is in tune with God's guidance.

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you” (Psa. 32:9).



One of the great inventions in the history of technology is the *harness*, a contraption placed on an animal's head that enables its owner to guide and direct the animal. With the advent of the harness, wild and untamed animals have become domesticated partners in the development of civilization.

Humans are animals, too, but with one important difference: We can reason abstractly about our purpose in life, and make ethical choices based on that reasoning. This awareness of right and wrong, good and evil, forces us to struggle with temptations that do not concern the lower animals. Passions such as lust, envy, pride, greed, hate, laziness, and so on, scream to be unleashed in our lives. Let these passions run loose, and humans can be just as wild as any animal—and far more destructive.

We need restraints on our behavior. But where do those restraints come from? At one level, that's the role of society. Little children, for example, must be restricted by their parents from

behaviors that will harm themselves. Adult sociopaths must be confined behind prison bars to limit the damage they can inflict upon the rest of us. When people live like animals, they will be treated like animals. Without these shackles, we all suffer.

But there is another, more ennobling restraint. The very thing that makes us different from the animals also provides an alternative to external chains. The “harness” that best serves humanity is the one we impose upon ourselves: *self-restraint*. Control imposed from within frees us from bondage to our base instincts and enables us to achieve the best for ourselves and for others.

But where does self-discipline originate? In this Psalm, God points to its origin: “I will instruct and teach you in the way you should go.” Unlike the animals, who must be trained by a crude system of rewards, punishments, and/or physical restraints, human behavior can be shaped by *instructing the mind*. The same mental apparatus that allows us to *reason* abstractly can be *taught* abstractly. To state the matter simply, human behavior is tamed by harnessing the mind that controls it. And God, speaking through His word, is the ideal source of that instruction.

Ah, but why should we listen to God? The world offers a plethora of competing philosophies, ideologies, theories and dogmas to fill this mental vacuum. Why not choose one of these alternatives that is more to my liking? Because much of this intellectual material is worthless, even harmful—in some cases, even promoting lawless behavior that can harm ourselves and others. Of course, we won't learn of these harmful consequences until after we've drunk the Kool-Aid. Only then will we discover that we built our mental framework on a foundation of quicksand.

So, we are caught in a circular loop. Our minds are deeply influenced by our intellectual surroundings; but those surroundings are dictated by the choices we make—the worldview we adopt, the friends we hang out with, the media we watch and listen to, the books we read, the educational institutions we immerse ourselves in, and so forth. Amid this cacophony of noise, God calls out to us, desiring to instruct, teach, and guide us in the way we should go. But we must decide that we want His guidance and make a conscious effort to embrace His instruction in our hearts.

Or, we can be treated like a stubborn mule. Choose wisely.

— David King