

Friends

Happy New Year to you all! I hope that it has been a good Christmas period for you and I expect that you and I both are settling down to that period of time in the New Year where the holidays have passed, but we are still occasionally caught out and end up writing 2025 when we meant 2026.

Over the Christmas holiday, I have been re-reading a book called “Thinking, Fast and Slow” by Daniel Kahneman and I have been particularly interested in what he calls “brain priming”. This works on the idea that our brains work differently depending on our starting point. So for example, if I ask you if you prefer a bath or a shower and then show you the letters “S O – P” you are more likely to think that the missing letter is “A”, whereas if I talk to you about lunch preferences, you are more likely to think that it is “U”. It’s the same phenomenon that means if you ask someone to spell “toast” three times and then ask them what you put in the toaster, they will usually say “toast” whereas the answer is “bread” or if you ask them to spell “milk” three times and then ask them what cows drink, they will answer “milk” whereas the answer is “water”. Brain priming has been understood as mediated through jokes/brain teasers like these for years, but perhaps only now has it been scientifically observed and analysed.

What it means for us as Christians is, I think, quite significant. If we start the day with prayer and Bible reading, and the week with worship and listening to a thought-provoking sermon, we prime our brain to be open to the activity of God. If spelling “milk” three times makes us more likely to assert that “milk” is what cows drink, think how more keyed in to the presence of God we are likely to be if we have started our day and week with thinking about him. The more we pray, the more we are opening our minds to both ask and answer the question: “Where was God in that?”

I don’t think that it is helpful for us to suddenly embark on a two hours a day prayer and Bible Study habit if we are used to the occasional prayer time and some quick arrow prayers in times of need, but I do think that the concept of “brain priming” does help us understand one of the reasons why regular prayer, Bible Study and Church attendance is good for us.

God bless, Vicci