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What's On Your Mind?

*Jean-Luc Lézeau, Associate Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

Taking a close look at our world today we ask: "What occupies the mind of man?" Unfortunately high on the list of troubled emotions we find two sweeping sentiments—hatred and vengeance. Has the world gone mad? We are apprehensive that the worst is still to come. It is unquestionably another sign that His promise is near (Mt 24: 6, 7).

Sadly, God's name is used to justify the abominable. History is full of accounts of soldiers on both sides of battles being blessed by bishops and priests—each side convinced that it is the group fighting evil.

In all of this distress there is one Deceiver who is reveling in the total destruction of humanity. He rejoices at the murderous thoughts, the mourning, and the hatred he has managed to instill in the human mind and heart. How can we be protected from this evil influence? There is one thing that neither God nor Satan can control without our consent—our minds (*Desire of Ages*, 125, 258). We face the most awesome challenge of our lives. Each of us must decide what kingdom we desire.

We are continuously confronted with the Manichaeism or dual philosophy that declares: If we don't serve God, then it must be Satan that we follow (Mt 6:24). There is no alternative. Caleb's experience should tell us something (Nb 14:24). He demonstrated a unique spirit because he followed God with all of his heart, and this is what God desires for us. The fantastic news is that once we have decided to follow Him, He will change our hearts (Ez 36: 26). We will be enabled to live by His Spirit (Ez 37:14).

All of the training and effort we exert to change our minds and characters is in vain. He alone inspires the will and the action. And when we allow God this influence, our minds will begin to comprehend Him. We will then be endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong (Ibid, 458).

Therefore ... I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for His acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart. Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect (Rm 12:1, 2).

Mind: Your Own Business!

Dr. Gaspar F. Colon
Associate Professor of
Pastoral Ministry
Columbia Union College

Group study

Discuss with your group what it takes for them to change their minds? What does the Bible say about making changes in behavior?

Spiritual principles of behavior change

Using the following statements as a resource, have the group share what they believe the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy mean.

1 What did the apostle Paul mean when he wrote: *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will*" (Ro 12:2).

2 Ellen White brings out the fact that, when God wants to transform the mind, he is really making changes in the brain: *The brain nerves which communicate with the entire system are the only medium through which heaven can communicate to man and affect his inmost life. Whatever disturbs the circulation of the electric currents of the nervous system lessens the strength of the vital powers, and the result is a deadening of the sensibilities of the mind* (2T 347).

3 *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus* (Php 2:5 KJV).

Brain mechanisms for behavior change

In His infinite wisdom, God created human beings with a multiplicity of brain mechanisms that facilitate changes in life. These sub-systems of the brain, while still at the cutting edge of scientific discovery, continually confirm that God created human beings with all the versatility that we need for our lives to be transformed under His guidance.

1 *Attention vs. arousal*—mediated by the reticular formation at the base of the brain. Fast-paced media has our society hooked on arousal. No sooner has an image or an idea been tossed at us, but then a slew of others follow. Before we realize it, our senses are overwhelmed and our knees become weak from the onslaught. Mental health professionals and educators realize that, for true lasting change to take place, there must be a focus which blocks out the extraneous and fixes the mind on the objective. In our walk with God we must take the time to go beyond mere exposure to concepts. We need to absorb, contextualize, nurture, and savor in order to internalize the word of God. Note the following passages: Pr 8:15; Ex 33:32; Zec 7:11; Mt 7:26; 13:19; Lu 8:15; Jm 1:23-24.

2 *Conditional readiness*—mediated by the limbic system of the brain. God created each of us with internal mechanisms in our brain which allow us to rehearse ideas, beliefs, concepts, and situations. Early childhood is characterized by incessant questions which help the individual to get a feel for what to expect when the need comes to respond to a particular situation. Teenagers learn best through activities that require them to role-play situations before they actually have to face the serious life issues. It is essential that we create an environment where it is safe to rehearse the values and behaviors that will equip us to face life as authentic representatives of Christ. Note the following passages: Dt 6:4-9; Php 2:5-11; 4:8-9; 1Th 5:17; Eph 6:18.



Children of Faith and the Land of Gnoo



Reviewed by the staff of
Dynamic Steward

by Sheila Walsh
WaterBrook Press
Colorado Springs,
Colorado, 2001
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3 *Temporal integration*—mediated by the prefrontal cortex. What is it that keeps hope alive? After you have been promised something, how long does it take for you to give up? How do you keep hope alive? Believe it or not, the Bible is full of hints on this subject. One of the great signs of a mature Christian is his or her ability to keep the brain in a state of a) gratefulness for what God is doing, and, b) eager anticipation of what God has promised to do next. Hope is kept alive by certain behaviors which keep it from deteriorating over time.

Examples of these behaviors include: prayer, focused Bible study, rehearsed feelings of thankfulness, caring for the needs of others (ask the class to think of others), et cetera. Even preparation for and anticipation of the Sabbath can be a weekly rehearsal for the joy of anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus. Note the following passages: Php 3:12-14; Ro 4:18; 8:24; 15:4; 1P 3:15; 1J 3:3.

In His infinite wisdom, God built into us all that we need to take hold of what He offers. We are stewards of these mechanisms and He expects us to be accountable to Him for their proper use under His guidance. Remember, the nurture of your *mind* is your *business*!

In the introduction to the first book in her series, *In Search of the Great White Tiger: A Story About Following God*, Sheila Walsh tells a touching story. An elderly woman who attended her presentation at a Women of Faith conference approached her and declared, ... *this is the first time I have truly understood that God loves me!* From this encounter Walsh began a journey motivated by her desire to help children discover what it took this woman so long to realize.

The outcome of her experience is a growing series of allegorical books for children which Walsh likens to a *Pilgrim's Progress* for little ones. In the first volume we are introduced to the animal characters of the land of Gnoo. The image of God is portrayed by the Great White Tiger and the enemy is the evil dragon, Reptillion. The first volume introduces Big Billy the panda and his friends who journey to find the Great White Tiger, while Reptillion is in hot pursuit. The second in the series, *Chattaboonga's Chilling Choice: A Story About Trusting God*, tells of a young tomboy chimp's straying from the counsel of the Great White Tiger and finding herself in great peril.

Each colorfully illustrated volume motivates the reader to continue the journey to discover answers to unanswered questions! My only criticisms are that as I read, I felt the need for a clearer focus with fewer digressions and fewer overused phrases. Having said that, I believe that Sheila Walsh's pilgrimage to help children experience the love of God is more than vital. I look forward to the upcoming volumes and to *finding the better key!*

As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.—Proverbs 23:7

Great thoughts always come from the heart.—French Proverb

Our life is what our thoughts make it.—Marcus Aurelius

The greatest revolution in our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.—William James

The more accurately we search into the human mind, the stronger traces we find everywhere of the wisdom of Him who made it.—Edmund Burke

A mind enlightened is like heaven; a mind in darkness is like hell.—Chinese Proverb

There is nothing more potent than thought. Deed follows word and word follows thought. And where the thought is mighty and pure, the result is mighty and pure.—Gandhi

Great men are they who see that the spiritual is stronger than any material force; that thoughts rule the world.—Ralph Waldo Emerson

quotes

Renewing Our Minds

*Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference
Stewardship Department*

God gave us an incredible gift at Creation—minds with the capacity to grow throughout eternity. Because of our minds, we can be creative. We can choose. We can learn. And we can know God. We were created for relationship with God. As Adam opened his eyes for the first time, he must have seen the face of his Creator lifting from the intimacy of the kiss of life. That burgeoning relationship with God would have been the first information to register on the human mind.

Our minds control our lives. It is in the mind that we develop habits, and it is in the mind that a relationship with God takes place. God asks us to love Him with our minds (Mt 22:37). He calls us to a living sacrifice and a transformed mind (Ro 12:1-2). We can have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), and be trans-formed into His glory (2 Cor 3:18). Our attitudes are influenced by our relationship with God (Php 2:5; Ep 4:23). God promises to put His law in our minds (Jr 31:33). He invites us to pray with our minds (1 Cor 14:15). He calls us to focus our minds on true and heavenly things, and the peace of God will guard our minds (Col 3:1-2; Php 4:4-9).

You and I are involved in a battle for our minds, and part of that battle takes place in the mind (Ro 8:5-8). Because of sin, our minds have a natural bent to evil. The influences of a sinful world further damage our minds. Repeated actions develop actual physiological structures—pathways in the mind. These neurological pathways

are the habits and memories that control much of our lives. We face the power of sin when we consider the combination of our sinful natures and habit pathways. Even if we could develop completely new habits, we have no ability to free ourselves from sin's power. We are naturally slaves to sin (Ro 6:16).

So we need to be freed from the control of sin. Our natures will not be transformed until the Second Coming (1 Cor 15:51-54). However, Jesus has solved our problem. When we accept Him as our Savior, He frees us from the dominating power of sin (Ro 6:1-7; 11-14; 8). We have the freedom to choose a new Master. While Christ provides us with a new life and transforming power, He does not force them on us. We have a part to play. We must choose this new life and cooperate with Him in the renewal of our minds. As we do, a new character becomes a present reality. Let's explore some steps we can take to cooperate with God and enjoy a new life:

Step 1: Prayerfully face your sinful reality.

We naturally resist admitting our sinfulness and want to think that we are not as bad as others. Yet we are all equally sinful. In fact, as we compare ourselves with Jesus, we discover a different perspective—we cannot compare ourselves with others, for we see ourselves as Paul did—as *chief of sinners* (1 Tm 1:15). Until we accept our pervading sinfulness, we will not desire a transformed heart and re-newed life.

Step 2: Gratefully accept your reality in Christ.

As Christians we have confessed our sin and have accepted Jesus as our personal Savior (Ro 5:6-8; Ep 2:4-9). We have entered into the reality of eternal life (1J 5:11-13). Yet because of our sinful natures and the ongoing battle with sin (Ro 7:18-19), it is easy to give up. Through a choice of the will, we can accept the reality of who we are in God. We are forgiven (1J 1:9). We are created anew (2 Cor 5:17). We have all the power we need to live with God (Php 4:13; 2P 1:3-4). We are seated with God on His throne (Rv 3:21; Ep 2:6). We begin life each day in this new reality.

Step 3: Focus your mind on Christ and the things above.

God does not coerce our hearts or minds. We must choose that on which we feed and focus. God invites us to fix our eyes upon Him (Col 3:2; Hb 12:1-3). As we look to Him, new pathways and memories begin to develop in our minds. *When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us (Desire of Ages, 668).*

Step 4: Be willing to live with the mystery of God.

We can know enough about God to walk with Him, but we will never be able to understand Him completely. He is transcendent—far beyond us. How can our finite minds understand a Creator who has been present through all eternity? How can we understand One who speaks and causes worlds to appear? How can we comprehend a God who would become human (Jn 1:14) and die on a cross? If we over-analyze and dissect our knowledge of God, we may destroy our walk with Him.

Being aware that Jesus is with us, we resist anything that would break the harmony of our heart with His.

Step 5: Practice devotional skills.

The spiritual disciplines are the tools of discipleship for nurturing intimacy with God. Through regular Bible reading, prayer, meditation, memorization, journaling, and other such avenues, we immerse ourselves in Scripture and saturate our minds with God and His reality. Thus, new structures are built in the brain, new pathways which can become stronger than the old sinful habits. These physiological structures will even help us to resist old habit patterns. As we seek to know and walk with God, our minds become the setting for companionship with our Creator and Redeemer—our human minds touch the mind of God.

Step 6: Practice the presence of God.

Jesus promised to be with us (Mt 28:18-20). Paul declares that through the Holy Spirit, Christ fills our hearts (Ep 3:15-19). By faith, we can accept His presence. We can focus our minds on this reality throughout the day and slowly we will develop an awareness of His presence. As we become accustomed to and focused upon His presence, we will find our lives transformed. Being aware that Jesus is with us, we resist anything that would break the harmony of our hearts with His.

Step 7: Actively resist sin.

Christ has freed us from the controlling power of sin (Ro 6), but this does not mean there is no struggle. Our natures are still sinful. The enemy still prowls like a roaring lion—seeking to destroy us (1P 5:8). In the strength of Christ we can resist him, and the power that conquered Calvary will gain the victory again. As we submit to God, we have power to resist (Jm 4:7-8).

The sequence is clear. We submit to God. We resist the devil. We come close to God. By faith we claim His presence, and in His power we resist the temptation. But we must do it at the level of our desires—our minds (Jm 1:14-15). Jesus teaches us that sin really takes place in the mind (Mt 5:21-22, 27-28). And the battle is won or lost there. As we resist sin, accepting His victory as ours, we move forward in faith, claiming His power and His new life.

When Jesus comes, our sinful natures will be transformed. One day, every sinful habit will be gone. But while we wait for Him, we may grow in Him. We can experience His transforming grace renewing our minds. We can take part in His divine nature (2P 1:4). We can look to Him and be transformed into His likeness.

stewardship window more from the director's desk ...



A welcome to Judy Holbrook

With this issue we welcome Judy Holbrook as our new Editorial Assistant. Judy has spent the last 10 years working at the General Conference. During this time she has worked in the White Estate and with Leo Ranzolin and Armando Miranda in Presidential. She brings a rich background of experience in mission service, where she and her husband spent a number of years in the South American countries of Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil.

Judy's husband, Bob, is an associate director for GC Youth Ministries. She is a certified chaplain's assistant and enjoys singing with her church choir. We look forward to Judy's capable contributions to our department.

A special tribute to Mel Rees

Ben Maxson recently had the privilege of spending a few hours with Mel Rees, now 94 years old and still passionate about stewardship. Mel reflected on how God led him into stewardship almost fifty years ago and how this crucial ministry developed.

We employ this issue to pay special tribute to this man who did so much to shape our understanding of biblical stewardship. Our prayers continue with Mel in praise to God and gratitude for a life committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Finding Peace

Ken W. Smith

President and Founder

Christian Stewardship Ministries

contact Ken at: www.csm.in.org

Peace in intimacy

Many of us have grown up hearing that phrase as part of our church culture, but we never stop to ponder what it means. The words are found in Philippians 4:7: *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

Even after we have professed our faith in Christ and asked Him to make Himself real to us, there is no guarantee that we will have that peace all the time. In fact, most of us do not have it most of the time. The peace that passes understanding is a state of contentment that flows from knowing all is well even when we don't necessarily feel that all is well. Some Christians have that peace, that contentment, all the time. All Christians should experience it at least some of the time. In John 14:27, Jesus says, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.* In Isaiah 26:3 the psalmist acknowledges, *Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee.*

What's the secret?

Paul learned the secret of having this peace, this contentment, at all times. He says in Philippians 4:11-13 *...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

Do you want more peace and contentment? Deepen the intimacy of your relationship with God. The greater the intimacy, the greater the peace. The more consistent the intimacy, the more consistent the peace. And the longer lasting the intimacy, the longer lasting the peace.

Do you experience anxiety? Do you worry about things that are beyond your control to influence or solve? Do you get depressed when things are going badly? If so, you probably have not yet achieved that level of peace that God wants you to have.

Would you like to worry less? Would you like to be anxiety-free? Would you like to be less subject to depression? Would you like to be happy, joyful, and peaceful most of the time? Determine how much time God wants you to spend with Him on a regular basis and then faithfully devote that time to developing intimacy with Him.

More is better

Strange as it may sound, the quantity of time is much more important in the beginning than the quality. If you will spend the quantity of time with God that He wants you to spend, He will see to it that the quality is ultimately there, too. However, it is very difficult to have quality without sufficient quantity.

Just catching God on the run is not really what He has in mind. He wants us to give Him a high enough priority that we have lots of uninterrupted time to spend with Him. God created us in His own image primarily to be His friends.

How can we be God's friends unless we take time to get to know Him? And how can we get to know Him if we do not spend significant quality time with Him? It is

SCRIPTURE:
Philippians 4:11-13

hard to imagine having that kind of time. We are so busy taking care of business; we have no time for ourselves, much less for God. So how do we find that time? The first step is to recognize that we are being disobedient to God if we do not find time to spend with Him. Then we can move toward finding that time.

God on your terms!

If you think you don't have time to spend with God, think of the relationship from His perspective. The Creator of the Universe is willing, in the midst of all He has to do, to make Himself available to spend all the time with you that you are willing to offer whenever you are willing to do it. Isn't that incredible? Not only does God want to spend time with you, but He will also do it on your terms!

Think of it this way. God has a perfect plan for your life. Within that perfect plan is time He has set aside to spend with you. He is there, waiting for you, whether you ever show up or not. And He will adjust His plans to accommodate yours! Now is that love or what? If you have no consistent time set aside for God, begin with 15 minutes. You can find that anywhere. Just decide not to read the paper until after your time with Him. Or watch 15 minutes less television. Or go to bed 15 minutes earlier so you can get up 15 minutes earlier. Move from 15 minutes to 30 and then aim for an hour. For anyone who is serious about becoming intimate with God, an hour will eventually become a minimum daily requirement. Most people find early morning works well. After you decide how long your time with God should be, figure out what your bedtime must be to allow you enough sleep so you can get up early enough to fit your time with God into your schedule. The key is your bedtime. If you can discipline yourself to go to bed when you decide you should, the rest should work. Without that discipline, it will be hard to maintain that block of priority time for God.

*What does it mean to experience the peace
that passes understanding?*

*The peace that passes understanding
is a state of contentment that flows
from knowing all is well
even when we don't necessarily
feel that all is well.*



Moving Through Each New Birth

Jean-Daniel Zuber
Stewardship Director
Euro-Africa Division

Introduction

Read: John 3:1-9

The theme of the narrative regarding Nicodemus in this passage is about being born again. It is about a complete change in one's way of thinking under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Looking at the passage, in Chapter 2 we discover those who say they believe in the name of Jesus and His ability to understand the minds of people. Chapter 3 begins with the word "now," announcing that a new situation and a new character are about to appear.

From this text we observe that the verb *to be born* is used eight times. Jesus uses birth—this genesis event of a person's life—to help Nicodemus reflect on who He is and what the kingdom of God is all about. This story is a dialogue between two characters: Nicodemus, a Pharisee and leader of the Jews, and Jesus, the unsurpassable Man of God who puzzles Nicodemus.

The scene takes place by night, no doubt for reasons which are right for Nicodemus but which Jesus will later exploit in an excellent illustration. Nicodemus dares to express his curiosity toward Jesus while showing his deep respect for God, for he himself is a man of God.

This passage brings out interesting concentric parallelisms and is structured as follows:

Verses 1 and 2: Introduction of Nicodemus

Verse 3: Jesus answers

Verse 4: Irony of Nicodemus, his astonishment

Verses 5 and 6: Baptism of water and Spirit

Verse 7: Jesus declares: *You ought not to be astonished*

Verse 8: *The wind blows where it wills*

Verse 9: Nicodemus's confusion

Verses 1 to 4 on the one hand, and verses 7 to 9 on the other hand, introduce the main message of the new birth of water and Spirit.

Let us understand. Jesus tries to make a doctor of the law acknowledge an essential element of spiritual life through an illustration drawn from an essential element of physical life—the birth of a human being.

Let's take a closer look at some of the components of this event: Enveloped in the amniotic liquid, the fetus is in darkness, in a night that prevents it from seeing its surroundings and discerning its present condition. It is covered by a membrane that protects it from shock, sound, and light. But one day this environment will become too small, and should the fetus remain where it is, it would cease to live!

One day something is going to trigger! It will seem to come from the child as well as the mother, but the exit signal will originate with the child, announcing that the time of separation has come! The infant expresses his need for something new: his birth. Suddenly, the baby faces light, drought, cold, and sound. Uttering his first cry, he faces air and breathes in oxygen. He has attained the breath of life!

The infant will have to physically separate from his mother so that during his youth, he will attain a growing independence of choice—a freedom that he could not have in his mother's womb. Henceforth, he is a new human being!

SCRIPTURE:
John 3:1-9

However, for this infant to live fully and completely, his birth should be followed by many others *births*! Indeed, the process that took place and led him to life could be compared to all of life's conquests he must undertake to grow: From birth to walking, adapting to his surroundings, living in society, relating to brothers, sisters, and schoolmates, learning and growing in faith to and through adulthood.

Each time he must leave the water—a symbol of security and protection—to attain something unknown, new, greater, and more powerful. But, as with the fetus, if this watery state continues it becomes a symbol of limitation and death. The trigger or instrument of this change will be a fervor, a breath, and a Spirit that will allow him to overcome the obstacles of this adventure and the sufferings related to it so that he may achieve a new stage of development desired by the Creator.

Hailed by His personality

According to the text, the Spirit is always impelling, inspiring and enlivening this movement. It is the same with the man who seeks God. Jesus wants Nicodemus to understand that he is in the same state as an unborn child. He needs to come, hailed by the personality and power of Jesus, as a baby ready to move outside to new life! But this cannot be done without abandoning the safeties that were once necessary. Safeties which have now become obsolete and restrictive sources of death!

Without any doubt, this movement cannot occur without suffering, painful heartbreak, and without taking risks. For Nicodemus, erroneous conceptions regarding the law, the social status of people and the Son of God, fill his mind and prevent the Holy Spirit from leading him toward the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus has to reconsider his traditional, formalistic thoughts to arrive at the profound source of God's kingdom—the assurance of the continual and unconditional love of the Father ... *and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* (Ep 4:13).

Today is much like Amos' time, a time of admonition to change our thinking and understanding. As in Christ's time, we are hailed by strong signs of God's love as well as by the dark madness of men! How will we react? Will we take refuge by protecting ourselves with a rigid reinforcement of all kinds of rules? By using delusive means of security through escape or money or superstition? Or by being fatalistic—eating and drinking because tomorrow the risk of death will be greater than today? Or will we lose our faith by making ourselves judge over everyone who does not think or live as we do?

After hearing these warnings, will we be ready to examine ourselves when we meet Jesus face to face? He calls us, just as He called Nicodemus! Will we be drawn to Christ's character and work as Nicodemus was? Will we question ourselves as the prodigal son did and consider our values, motives, and priorities? We need to conform our attitudes to the influence of the Holy Spirit, remaining faithful to the principles Jesus gave us. Under this influence we may give priority to God's love and our love for others in the very name of Love by which we ourselves are loved.

God loves us. He wants us to live fully the life He provides from His infinite resources. And to live this way means to forge ahead, to grow. It doesn't mean withdrawing into ourselves, into our positions, into our obligations, to the point that we are no longer able to hear what the Holy Spirit has to tell us. In order for us to continue our course through this life, we need to move courageously through each new birth which will lead us to the perfect stature of Christ.

For this to take place, we must learn to be born again. We must look at matters with new minds, with the loving look of Christ upon everything. We need to receive the Holy Spirit as Master of our thoughts from whence come our attitudes and actions.

It is time to be born again every

Jesus wants Nicodemus to understand that he is in the same state as an unborn child. He needs to come, hailed by the personality and power of Jesus, as a baby ready to move outside to new life!

day! May God help us. Listen carefully. Pay rapt attention. He has promised to be continually by our side. Let us walk into each new birth with courage and faith.



Conclusion

The Mind's Love for God

Dr. Wilber Alexander

*Clinical Professor of Family Medicine
Loma Linda University*

With all your mind

The marked weakness in present-day Christianity is that Christians do not actually know much about it, the leader of one of the world's largest Protestant denominations told a newspaper reporter.

He added: The shallow, pat, party-line, sentimental approaches to Christianity have become a stumbling block to the uncommitted intelligentsia in all the world. Christian life cannot be built on the foundations of superficial intellectual preparations. It must be grounded in a sturdier understanding of what Christianity stands for and why.

At this time in church history, Christians are in grave danger of becoming spiritually illiterate because we are not seriously, studiously investigating for ourselves the truth we profess. If we do not begin anew to know not only what we believe but why we believe it, great tragedy will ensue in the cause of Christianity and great disappointment to the God who gave us minds with the capacity to think His thoughts after Him.

In this light, I share with you our sermon text: *An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the law?' He replied. 'How do you read it?' He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself.'* 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied, 'Do this and you will live' (Lk 10:25-28).

The allness of love

The words of the lawyer are in part the words of Shema: *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God the Lord is one: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength* (Dt 6:4,5).

These parchment-recorded words opened the synagogue service and were repeated twice each day. They were worn on the phylacteries and inscribed on the doorposts of Jewish dwellings. The Shema, or Great Commandment, was not forgotten. The problem was that the words were not understood by the lawyer or by those around him.

The rabbis and lawyers calculated that their law contained 365 prohibitions and 248 positive commands. Jesus compressed these 613 declarations under the allness of love.

He answered, *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself.'* (Lk 10:27). This is the ultimate reach in religion.

God creates man with capacity for loving with his entire being, his whole moral nature, all of his emotional faculties, all of his energy, all of his intellect. Then ... He commands men everywhere to love because of privilege, not duty. Jesus is saying very personally that love is a force within that seeks full release, rather than a vacuum continually craving to be filled.

If your love is to be acceptable to God, if it is to be adequate in influencing your life, then in total response you must give heart, soul, strength, and mind to God. Partial devotion of any of your faculties will leave you with a divided life. It will leave you stricken with a spiritual schism which cripples your Christianity and robs the world of your influence.

The mind's love for God

We must recognize the biblical concept of the wholeness of man. At the same time there appear to be certain separate functions within this wholeness as shown in the words of the text: heart, soul, strength, and mind. It is the mind's love for God that is most puzzling. That the mind has affections which it must give to God is strange to us.

The great American preacher, Phillips Brooks, illustrates this point. Anyone who has walked in the fresh morning quietness of a garden can go away and remember with delight the beauty he has discovered with the seeing eyes, the hearing ear, the sense of smell. He can love that garden through his senses.

If that same garden is familiar, crowded with memories from childhood, youth, and manhood, it is easy to love the garden and what it holds of past and present with all the heart—all that is emotional.

If we see God's creative hand at work and recognize that the garden is possible through One who loves us, that it symbolizes even richer spiritual benefits, it is easy to love the garden with the spiritual that is within.

If we are green-thumbed gardeners who love digging and planting in the soil, the garden might call forth our physical energies for enhancing its beauty.

Beyond these is yet an unclaimed part of us. In the garden are relationships between countless things which should set our curiosity astir: the sun above, the elements in the earth, the seed, the plant, the eye which observes, the feelings within.

Pressing past the senses and emotions to the intelligence, the great truths of the natural world are found in that garden—great questions and great answers. The curious mind responds enthusiastically, analytically to its mysteries and is not at rest until all that can be known is known.

Jesus tells us what God wants from His own: Tender emotions, thanksgiving for His mercies, worship in His creation and in His house, the expending of energies, the deeds performed are not enough. He wants the full measure of heart, soul, strength, and mind. He wants the enthusiastic use of our intellects intent on knowing all that is possible to know about Him and His ways.

Loving God with all the mind

It is a law of the mind that it will narrow or expand to the dimensions of the things with which it becomes familiar. The mental powers will surely be contracted, and will lose their ability to grasp the deep meanings of the word of God, unless they are put vigorously and persistently to the task of searching for truth. (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 127).

Love is robbed of its power when we push God into the periphery of our thought. Too often we give our minds to science, art, and music, when theology is the queen of all intellectual disciplines, basic to an understanding of all other knowledge.

We believe in the priesthood of every believer, yet we depend too much on spoon-feeding from other minds for our spirituality. We have tucked away in our minds the pat key texts and arguments given to us, and these have become final.

We keep trying to bring religion down to earth, to reduce it to peace-of-mind formulae, when its very nature demands that it be lifted higher and still higher in our thoughts. Think of the great themes of redemption, the mystery of godliness, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the life and teachings of Jesus. Deep calls unto deep. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind.*

The appeal in the great commandment is for a mind dedicated to the continual search for spiritual truth . . . The invitation is for a mind willing to patiently gather all information possible, willing to seek God rather than challenge Him, willing to spend hours seeing the relationship between spiritual ideas, concepts, and life. The entreaty is for a mind willing to pray for and to follow God's guidance, willing to be changed into harmony with His mind.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind. No life is long enough for entire obedience to this command. There is always more to know. As Paul says, *Now we see through a glass darkly* (I Cor 13:12).

... *And now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love* (I Cor 13:13). In these complex days when doubt and skepticism threaten to destroy man's feeble faith, we must hold fast in love to imperfect faith and study to perfect it as much as is humanly possible. God has given enough evidence on which to build a faith to live by if we will examine it carefully.

Love is robbed of its power when we push God into the periphery of our thought.

The Apostle Peter admonishes Christians to love God with all the mind when he says, *Prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed* (I P 1:13).

Here is a call, fellow Christians, to roll up the sleeves of the mind and go to work on the Bible, on the commentaries, on the great themes of the gospels, on the life and teachings of Jesus, on the doctrines of this church, and see what relevance they have for us today.

We should pray to God that He will not let us rest satisfied with an inherited Christianity which has never entered our minds beyond first examination and mental assent. We are in danger of perpetuating a dead orthodoxy, a dead Christianity, unless we really know what we believe and continue to study for more truth.

We know that God commands us to love with all the mind. We know by experience that our mental powers lose their ability to grasp truth unless they are constantly searching for truth. We know that we cannot witness intelligently for Christianity unless we are intelligent Christians, because we have not seen, we have not handled, we have not touched the thing we are trying to declare. We know the joy of experiencing something of the things of God for ourselves.

The great question remains: what difference will these thoughts make in your life after this hour of worship?

What You Think, You Are

Dr. Nelson L. Price
 Retired Pastor
 Roswell Street Baptist Church
 Marietta, Georgia

Find more sermons by Dr. Price at
www.SermonSearch.com

Your thoughts

What do you think of Christ? *As a man thinketh so he is* (Pr 23:7).

Have you ever taken comfort in such thought as: *I am thankful that no man knows my thoughts; at least, I can really be myself in the privacy of my mind?*

How would you react if in reality a person were to step up to you and instead of saying, *Smile, you are on Candid Camera*, they were to say, *Pardon me, we've been recording your thoughts for the last ten minutes, now would you care to explain?*

The electrical impulse from your brain that an encephalograph can now measure may someday be refined and decoded. Perhaps one day anyone with a small transistorized pocket receiver may be able to tune in on your thought life.

This would end lying abruptly. Hypocrisy would be impossible. There would be no withholding of the truth. Tact and politeness would be refined. Criminology would be revolutionized.

Man is on the brink of interpreting man's thoughts. This seems awesome. However, God has been in the business of knowing man's thoughts from the beginning. He is aware of our thoughts when they are scarcely formulated (Ps 139:2).

The Bible diagnoses our problem like this: *For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly* (Mk 7:21). The solution is Romans 12:2: *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* The way a man thinks affects everything about him.

Your health

Dr. Nathan S. Kline, Director of Research of the Rockland State Hospital, said, *More human suffering has resulted from depression than from any other single disease. Competent pharmaceutical authorities admit that every night in the United States, 10 million pills are taken designed either to tranquilize from agitated mental states or to alleviate depressiveness.*

The drug industry sold 11 million pounds of aspirin in one year. Some statisticians say that represents 7 1/2 billion headaches. That's about 50 headaches per head per annum. Dr. Paul Tournier, a celebrated Swiss physician and psychiatrist says in his book, *The Healing of Persons: Most illnesses do not, as is generally thought, come like a bolt out of the blue. The ground is prepared for years, through faulty diet, intemperance, overwork, and moral conflicts, slowly eroding the subject's vitality ... Man does not die, he kills himself. Every act of physical, psychological, and moral disobedience of God's purpose is an act of wrong living and has its inevitable consequence.*

SCRIPTURE:
 Romans 12:2

The power of God can cast down imaginations ... and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

The remedy

Anxiety, depression, tension, pressure—how can I keep from suffering their adverse actions?

Isaiah 26:3 tells us: *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee...* This peace which passes all understanding is the world's greatest medicine. How should it be administered? First, sit quietly for a few seconds and dispel all thoughts of worry from your mind. Then read a passage of scripture. Fasten your thoughts on Christ. Focus on the mind of Christ. Sing a stanza from a hymn. Pray, thanking God for His love, mercy, and grace. By that time He will begin to establish your mind in perfect peace.

Your conduct

Many people are more concerned about having a clever mind than a clean mind, a keen mind than a clear mind. What one thinks today will be his conduct tomorrow. A person's attitudes soon surface in actions.

The person who thinks nobly, acts truly;

The person who thinks clearly, acts effectively;

The person who thinks cleanly, lives rightly.

As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is (Pr 23:7; Mk 7:21). The power of God can cast down imaginations . . . and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

Guard your thoughts, they can be heard in heaven. Eternity's question was phrased by Christ, What think ye of me? We need to pray: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my thoughts. Create in me a clean heart, O God; renew a right spirit within me* (Ps 139:23; 51:10).

*Whatsoever things are true,
 Whatsoever things are honest,
 Whatsoever things are just,
 Whatsoever things are pure,
 Whatsoever things are lovely,
 Whatsoever things are of good report;
 If there be any virtue, if there be any praise,
 Think on these things.*

Philippians 4:8



Turn My Mourning into Dancing

Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department

Author-lecturer Henri Nouwen has touched readers' hearts with such works as *The Wounded Healer*, *With Open Hands*, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* and *The Inner Voice of Love*. Nouwen was born in 1932 in the Netherlands. As a gifted priest and teacher, he taught in several universities worldwide. The last decade of his life was spent serving as pastor of the L'Arche Community of Daybreak in Toronto, Canada, part of an international movement of communities that welcome people with disabilities. While on Sabbatical in his homeland in 1996, Nouwen died as the result of a fatal heart attack.

It is a timely and wonderful gift that editor and compiler Timothy Jones has given us in this new book from Nouwen's unpublished works—*Turn My Mourning into Dancing: Finding Hope in Hard Times*. It has been a long time since I have read a volume that has been so meaningful and has made such an impact on my life.

Nouwen's thesis is not so much how we can get over pain, but how we can learn to walk through difficulties while discovering a deep intimacy of divine blessing and grace. It is anything but trite. Nouwen shares from his own personal experiences and from the lives of those in his own community. In five compelling chapters he shows us how difficult times can move us:

- *From our little selves to a larger world—*

Christ invites us to remain in touch with the many sufferings of every day and to taste the beginning of hope and new life right there, where we live amid our hurts and pains and brokenness. By observing his life, his followers discover that when all of the crowd's 'Hosannas' had fallen silent, when disciples and friends had left him, and after Jesus cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' then it was that the Son of Man rose from death. Then he broke through the chains of death and became Savior (pp 10, 11).

- *From holding tight to letting go—*

Our belief that we should grasp tightly what we need provides one of the great sources of our suffering. But letting go of possessions and plans and people allows us to enter, for all its risks, a life of new, unexpected freedom (p. 26).

- *From fatalism to hope—*

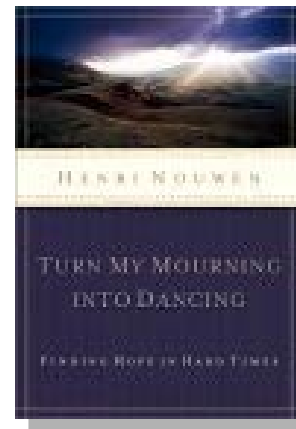
The paradox of expectation is that those who believe in tomorrow can better live today; those who expect joy to come out of sadness can discover the beginnings of a new life amid the old; those who look forward to the returning Lord can discover him already in their midst (p 62).

- *From manipulation to love—*

It is because Jesus was not dependent on people, but only on God, that he could be so close to people, so concerned, so confronting, so healing, so caring. He related to people for their own sake, not his own ... He paid attention without intention. His question was not 'How can I receive satisfaction?' but 'How can I respond to your real need?' (p 75).

- *From a fearful death to a joyous life—*

If we hold more lightly our lives and give ourselves away to God, we will live closer to God, we will find ourselves ever more grateful, but not likely more popular and successful. Dying is about giving.



by Henri Nouwen
W Publishing Group
Nashville, Tennessee
2001 US\$16.99

You'll notice that we have included our new website address in this redesigned issue of *Dynamic Steward*. Don't look for it today, but it will be coming soon!

The Healing Power of a Christian Mind

Dr. Delmer W. Holbrook, retired President of Home Study International and former Director of General Conference Church Ministries, Silver Spring, Maryland

The author has written a powerful reminder of the amazing blessings that faith in God can bring us. He avoids preachy clichés, spells out a realistic, practical, doable program that is soundly biblical. He clearly separates Bible principles from current notions of New Age thought and Eastern religions.

Scientific medical research is providing increasing support for the biblical concepts that people's attitudes, beliefs, and *self-talk* can make them sick or well, can enhance life or bring on death. A healthy, happy life is not a do-it-yourself affair. Backus convincingly insists that we use all the tools available to us: a strong and growing faith, Bible study, Christian physicians and counselors, church attendance and support groups, prayer, meditation, joy and laughter, exercise, and good nutrition. He does not suggest that we practice addictive pill-popping.

This is a remarkable book that you will find difficult to put down and will probably use it as a study text to return to again and again.



by Dr. William Backus
Bethany House Publications
Minneapolis, Minnesota
1996 US\$10.99

Lord, Change My Attitude

*Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*



by James MacDonald
Moody Press
Chicago, Illinois
2001 US\$12.99

In this helpful volume James MacDonald uses the desert experience of Israel as a springboard for the important topic—changing a negative attitude for a positive attitude. Says MacDonald: *Life change can never begin until some circumstance brings you to the unalterable conclusion that your current course is taking you somewhere you don't want to go* (p 15).

The book is full of excellent illustrations and practical guidance. MacDonald also shares his own struggles in his *Up Close and Personal* sections. As a reader I appreciated the structure of the chapters. For instance, Chapter One is entitled *Replace a Complaining Attitude ...* and Chapter 2 follows ... *With a Thankful Attitude*. Other chapter topics deal with an attitude of covetousness verses contentment; a critical attitude verses a loving one; a doubting attitude verses an attitude of faith; and a rebellious attitude as compared to an attitude of submission. An important book for Christian growth and for a joyful journey.

James MacDonald is pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel and author of the popular book *I Really Want to Change ... So, Help Me God*. He also has a national daily radio broadcast entitled, *Walk in the Word*.

Leadership Bible CD ROM

Zondervan US\$34.95

Based on the best-selling *Leadership Bible*, *The Leadership Bible CD-ROM* offers 52 weeks of practical studies in contemporary leadership issues that will help you experience a quantum leap in your leadership effectiveness. In just 15 minutes a day, you'll discover how to improve your personal development, skills, and relationships by following biblical leadership principles. Each workweek, you'll cover a personal quality such as Courage, Humility, or Vision; or a practical skill like Conflict Management or Systems Thinking; or a relational concern—Healthy Alliances, Power and Influence, or Servant Leadership. Guided by 52 weekly Home Pages, these studies will help you attain your full potential as a leader.

The CD-ROM also includes the complete NIV version of the Bible with Internet access to 11 other translations as well as other languages, book introductions underscoring key leadership concepts, character profiles of over 70 different biblical leaders, and a topical index.

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Exploring partnership with God

12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA

voice: 301-680-6157

fax: 301-680-6155

e-mail: gcstewardship@compuserve.com

editor: evac@gc.adventist.org

url: www.Adventist-Stewardship.org

EDITOR:

Claire L. Eva

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS:

Johnetta Barmadia

Judy Holbrook

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

Carlyle Bayne

Arnaldo Enriquez

Paulraj Isaiah

Jairyong Lee

Jean-Luc Lézeau

Benjamin Maxson

Leonard Mbaza

Kigundu Ndwiga

Mario Nino

Ivan Ostrovsky

Erika Puni

G. Edward Reid

Bobby J. Sepang

Harold Wollan

Jean-Daniel Zuber

editorial

*Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

The funny thing is that I don't remember what my trouble was. But I do remember my anguish. It was one of those experiences that remains with you—a familiar scar that you occasionally scan, reminding you that once there was pain and the struggle left its mark.

It was nearly three in the morning when I slipped from our darkened bedroom and crept downstairs. Falling to my knees, I plead with God for relief. Was it too late for me? Had God given up on me while I dallied with vain attempts to resolve my impasse alone?

I flicked on a light in the living room. Instinctively I gravitated to a place that meant comfort to me and opened my Bible to the Pauline epistles. I read with unquenchable hope:

You were taught ... to put off your old self ... to be made new in the attitude of your minds. (Ep 4:22-23) ... Set your minds on things above ... For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God ... For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord ... (Col 3:2; Ep 5:8).

Be made new in the attitude of your mind. Yes! That was what I needed. What I longed for was a new attitude, a fresh beginning! It struck me that this was more than possible. In the reality of my faith, I was hidden with Christ in God. I was no longer darkness, but light in the Lord!

We live in an unpredictable world and have access to a very long list of fears we could adopt. Do you, like me, forget who you are and what you are in Him? You are light in the Lord. You are the beloved!

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power and that He had come from God and was returning to God (Jn 13: 3). His experience may be ours; His life is ours for the asking. Seeing life through His mind, our spiritual struggles, like the pangs of labor Jean-Daniel Zuber describes so well in his sermon, they will only remind us of the new life they bring.