

Exercising the Mind

Much of the Bible was written by intellectuals. Take, for example, the books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Moses was one of the best-educated men of his nation. Acts 7:22 says, “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.”

Daniel was another one of Israel’s best and brightest men. He was selected in a nation-wide competition to participate in a special Chaldean study program of the Babylonian Empire. According to Daniel 1:4, the criteria for selection into this study program included “showing aptitude for every kind of learning.”

The books of Paul outnumber any other New Testament author: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Paul was a brilliant thinker with the best possible education, having studied under the famous Middle Eastern scholar Gamaliel.

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles were written by Luke, a trained physician and capable historian. Between Paul and Luke, who were fellow missionaries and traveling companions, they wrote sixty-two percent of the New Testament!

Kenneth Pike, himself a scholar and an intellectual of our generation, says, “Few of us remember that a large proportion of the pages of the Bible were written by the equivalent of Ph.D’s.” That’s not to say that all Christians should have Ph.D’s, or that all Christians should be intellectuals. But this does mean that we are to use and develop the intellect God has given us! In a society that so emphasizes caring for and developing our bodies on the outside, we who seek to live inside out should develop our intellects on the inside!

God’s plan for changing us from the inside out is through the renewal of our minds.

So how do we do that? Genesis 1:27 teaches a profound truth for inside out living. It is that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” This was never intended to mean “physical image”. The Bible teaches that God is Spirit and does not have a physical body. Therefore, the image of God must be inside us rather than outside us.

One of the major elements of God’s image in us is intellect. We have a rational intellect that is not present anywhere else in the animal kingdom. We are like God because we can think rationally. When we fail to think we fail to be like God. Theologically as well as practically, there is a direct connection between intellectual exercise and living out the image of God!

In Mark 12:30 Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” It is particularly interesting that when this call to love God first appears in Deuteronomy 6:4 “mind” is not included. Jesus

added it. I’m not fully sure why, but I must conclude that intellectual commitment was particularly important to Jesus. Therefore, it should be particularly important to “Inside Out Christians”!

Repeatedly in the New Testament we are advised about thinking right thoughts, about having the mind of Jesus Christ within us, about the important inside exercise of the intellect. It is God’s call for us to think!

Romans 12:1-2 speaks as directly and specifically to Inside Out Christian living as any verses in the Bible. Here is what it says:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of wor-

ship. 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.

God's plan for changing us from the inside out is through the renewal of our minds. That transformation comes when we have the mind of Jesus Christ, according to Philippians 2, and when we think God's thoughts after him. Obviously, if we fail to exercise our minds we will not be transformed inside or outside!

Jesus taught in John 8:32 that "you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Certainly he referred primarily to the truth of salvation. He later said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Our first and primary intellectual exercise is to know the truth of Jesus Christ and thereby to gain eternal life and freedom. That is an intellectual discovery and commitment as much as it is a matter of the will and emotion.

It was Augustine who said, "All truth is God's truth." Since God is the Creator of the universe, the truth of astronomy is God's truth. Since God is the first and greatest Artist, aesthetic truth is God's truth. Since God describes his Son as the "Logos" or "Word" in John 1, then all truth of sociology, psychology and physiology is God's truth.

I am a firm believer in the power of God's truth. We have nothing to fear in the truth. As long as we truly seek God's truth as God's people, we do not need to be threatened by the discoveries of science or the arguments of philosophers. We can be intellectually honest and free without in any way diminishing our commitment to Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

What then is our conclusion about God's image and God's call and God's plan and God's truth? It is that our minds belong to God! Our minds are made in his image! One of the key

elements to learning and living God's way from the inside out is through the exercise of our intellects. It means that we develop our minds for God!

But how do we do that? It begins by choosing the exercises. In order to grow and develop our minds we need to have varied exercises. Don't always think about the same things. No one gets into shape physically by doing 1,000 left arm curls every day. In the same way we must learn about different areas of the Bible, different parts of theology and different disciplines of the Christian walk. If you don't know much about prophecy, make that your topic of study over the next several weeks or months. Or learn about Spiritual Gifts.

But it's not just in spiritual things. We must also learn and grow in areas like music, medicine, mathematics or moose hunting! Think until you are strong mentally. Read enough about a topic so that you understand it. Study a book of the Bible until it makes sense to you. Discover God's world piece-by-piece until your mind is strong and not flabby.

Some exercises may add variety and bring repetition but not have much meaning. For example, you may learn to wiggle your ears, but what good is that if you fail to use your eyes until they atrophy and go blind? Think through the area where you most need to grow intellectually — what knowledge would best enable you to think God's thoughts after him and transform you from the inside out? Do those intellectual exercises first.

But what are the sources of the actual exercises that we might do to mature and be transformed intellectually? It begins with people. Who are the people who make you think? Find them and spend time listening and interacting with them.

Books are really just another form of people. It is like spending time with the author and with the author's ideas. This is true of every book from the Bible to novels to pornography. The issue is

to pick the books that will exercise our minds for good.

Going places, seeing things, experiencing God's world. Nothing will exercise our minds more than seeing the poverty in a ghetto rather than simply hearing about it from a distance. Nothing will impress us more in missions than working as short-term missionaries.

The exercise of the mind means thinking about what goes into it. It's meditation and cogitation and processing. It's connecting up the new idea with yesterday's experience. This is an often-missing ingredient in our intellectual atmosphere. We watch TV; we travel; we listen to a lecture or read a book and merely store the data. That's not enough. Intellectual exercise requires processing, no matter how difficult or time consuming that becomes!

If your purpose in life is to honor God through your business, then you will give priority to growing intellectually in the areas of business. It may mean interviewing others who are successful in business, reading books or going back to school for an MBA. Strike the balance by going back to purpose.

Albert Einstein liked to play the violin. He was good at mathematics. We must beware of spending all our intellectual resources on just what we like. We need to develop in those areas where God has gifted us. We need to strike the balance between what we like and what we're good at.

But even beyond that, striking the balance calls for seeking out new areas of thinking, new areas of exploration of all God's truth. Walter Wilson was a physician who became an evangelist. His desire was to always grow intellectually, looking for knowledge where he was ignorant. One day he was in a conversation and something was mentioned about lace. He discovered he knew almost nothing at all about lace. So he made it a goal to become something of an expert

on the topic. He learned about all the different types of laces, their names and the different ways in which they were manufactured.

Some years later he rode in a taxi with a stranger who was in the lace business. Wilson's knowledge led to a conversation about lace. The man was fascinated because he had never met anyone who knew quite so much about lace but was not in the business. It was through that conversation that Walter Wilson was able to introduce his new friend to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Here was a man who grew intellectually in accordance with his purpose and for his own benefit, but also for the salvation of others and for the glory of God!

Personally, I've sought to grow intellectually by learning about computers and word processing. In the beginning I couldn't even figure out how to turn the hardware on! I've realized gaps in my knowledge of literary classics and gone back to read or reread Walden or Moby Dick or some of the writings of Shakespeare. Recently I thought about how long it's been since I've read

a best-selling novel so I bought one and started reading a little every day. I've tried to read materials and inter-

act with people who have different ideas and perspectives than my own — all to grow and stretch.

The key to exercising our minds is not just the matter of choosing the exercises; it is also necessary to set up systems.

A missionary who was an honor student in college and graduate school moved overseas and quit growing intellectually. He read few books. He interacted with too few new ideas. He subscribed to no magazines. He told me that after 20 years his mind had atrophied. The intellectual power and prowess that once was his had somehow lessened until the potential of the image of God in his intellect was nothing compared to what it should be.

We need to strike the balance between what we like and what we're good at.

I resolved that day to help him out. I subscribed to some magazines for him, bought him some books and tried to encourage him. In reflection I conclude that the reason it happened was because he lacked a system for intellectual exercise.

What we need is a system, and that comes out of being inquisitive. Ask more questions than you answer. Find out about other people's jobs, hobbies, homeland, religion or ideas. Make it your system.

Make study a regular part of your day. Set aside a disciplined time to read something new and different. It may be as much as an hour a day or as little as a day a year. But make it your system.

Set some goals for intellectual growth. Write them down and make yourself accountable to someone. For example, go back to school or take a correspondence course; make appointments with interesting people; subscribe to a stimulating journal or magazine. Make it your system.

But don't dream my dreams. Dream your own dreams . . . your own dreams for exercising your mind that was created in the image of God.

A story is told that one day Harry Truman visited the elderly Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. The old man was reading Plato's Republic. Since Holmes didn't have to read it, Harry Truman asked him, "Justice Holmes, why at this point in your life are you reading something like Plato's Republic?" To which Holmes replied, "I may be old, but I haven't stopped growing!"

That's the way we ought to be. As Christians who are committed to live inside out in God's image, no matter how old we are, we should continue to grow intellectually . . . and do it for the glory of God!

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