

the devoted mind

*Seeking God's Face
in a World of Distraction*

Kris Lundgaard



P U B L I S H I N G

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"I thirst."
JOHN 19:28

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To
my son Kristian Augustine,
whose heart finds rest in God,

and

in memoriam
J. I. Packer,
my teacher

*Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD!
Seek the LORD and His strength;
Seek His face evermore!*

—PSALM 105:3-4

*Teach me to seek thee,
and reveal thyself to me, when I seek thee,
for I cannot seek thee, except thou teach me,
nor find thee, except thou reveal thyself.
Let me seek thee in longing,
let me long for thee in seeking;
let me find thee in love,
and love thee in finding.*

—ANSELM OF CANTERBURY

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Preface

our nearest approach to heaven in this world

*He often visiteth our Minds,
But cold Acceptance in us ever finds:
We send Him often griev'd away:
Else would He shew us all His Kingdom's Joy.*
—THOMAS TRAHERNE

All his kingdom's joy? That would be something to know about. And what is all his kingdom's joy but to know him and to have him? But how can our cold minds extend God warm welcome and taste his joy—not in eternity but in this troubled and troubling world? That's what I'd like to know, and I believe a seventeenth-century pastor's deathbed devotions can help.

Age and sickness had left John Owen “every way unable to do any thing for the edification of others.”¹ Convinced that he would never return to public ministry, he wrote out his meditations. His

1. John Owen, *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*, 1681, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855; reprint by Banner of Truth Trust, 1965, 1991), 7:263.

theme was Paul's blessing on the devoted mind: "To be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). No doubt the shadow of death sharpened his hunger for that promise. But when God later healed him, Owen turned those devotions into what he called a "small and plain discourse" for all our cold and captive minds.²

In it Owen explains why he thinks his book is well timed: He finds the world fervent "to impose itself on the minds of men," armed with the means to possess those minds. If the world catches people's thoughts, it will have their longings too, he warns. When this happens, even believers are hardened against faithfully following Christ, and they begin to "walk and talk as if the world were all" and to grow distracted, despondent, weary, and unresponsive to God's grace.³ But the spiritual mind has hope: its unwandering focus on Christ and heavenly things yields life and peace, the "*nearest approaches unto heaven and blessedness*" we can reach in this world.⁴

In the centuries since Owen wrote, the world has multiplied its means to trap our minds and cool our hearts. But he can still help us—if we can overcome the barrier of the *way* he wrote to reach the treasure of *what* he wrote. Owen's writing style is infamously intimidating, but his content is famously worth the trouble. J. I. Packer explained that "on first reading he tires the mind quite quickly," but if you press on to a third reading, by then you "should be able to grasp Owen's vision of the awesome beauty of God's ways."⁵

The awesome beauty of God's ways. That's where our minds belong, where he'll "shew us all His Kingdom's Joy." So for every cold and captive mind, mine included, I've adapted Owen's

2. Owen, 7:263.

3. Owen, 7:264, 496.

4. Owen, 7:497; italics his.

5. J. I. Packer, "John Owen on Spiritual-Mindedness," *Banner of Truth* 620 (May 2015), 15.

discourse in a way that I hope overcomes the barrier and opens a door to his exposition of what it means for us to seek God's face always.⁶

Three Motifs

One way I have represented Owen's teaching is through three themes or motifs: *the devoted mind*, *the seeking of God's face*, and *the Beloved*. These are scattered through Owen's book and expressed differently, but I've made them prominent. Together they focus and flavor my version of Owen's all-encompassing approach to spiritual mindedness.

By *devoted* I mean a mind set apart for the Lord (Lev. 27:28), a mind completely given over to him and to his service (2 Chron. 31:4; 1 Cor. 16:15). I also use *devoted* to suggest a lover whose full attention has been captured by her Beloved, to whom she offers all her powers (Song 2:14, 16; 6:3; 7:10; 8:6-7), whose devotion is expressed by the hymn "Take My Life, and Let It Be."⁷

By *the seeking of God's face*, I mean the pursuit of his intimate presence, a sense of closeness, a clearer and deeper personal knowledge of him, and an assurance of his acceptance, love, and blessing. We are finding our way back to the intimacy of Eden, a journey now possible in Christ who is the "new and living Way" into God's holy presence (Heb. 10:20). Of course we won't fully realize this intimacy until we see Christ face-to-face in eternity, yet we taste it now and pursue as much of him as we can have on earth (Ps. 27:8). And as we draw near to God, he draws near to us (James 4:8).

6. For those who'd like to read Owen in his own words, yet gracefully abridged and modernized, I recommend R. J. K. Law's *Spiritual-Mindedness* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009). Law sticks to the script; I color outside the lines.

7. Frances R. Havergal, 1874.

I often use *Beloved* to name our Triune God or Christ himself. He is the object of the devoted mind—not in an academic sense but as the ultimate object of our desire, the One whose presence we seek. God has made the love, commitment, and intimacy of marriage the crowning image of his relationship to his people, so he is properly our Beloved (Song 8:6; Mark 2:18–20; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:29–32).

Let these three motifs remind you that the purpose of spiritual mindedness is communion with God.

The End of Each Chapter

By the “end” of each chapter, I mean two things: First, I mean what comes last. What comes last in each chapter is a section called “Reflection and Praxis.” You may be tempted to skip it. But it isn’t a set of exercises for overachievers; it’s meant to guide the real mind-work and heart-work of consolidating the ideas of the chapter where they must be consolidated: in our prayers and meditations, in our worship and conversation, in our contemplation of God and communion with Christ. Even if you don’t have time to do the suggested work when you read the chapter, reading through the exercises will extend some of your thinking about the chapter, and you can decide whether to come back to some of them later. I also use this section to suggest further reading for several of the chapters.

By the “end” of each chapter, I also mean its purpose. The purpose of each chapter is to draw our attention to our Beloved but not to admire him from a distance. Whether this end of each chapter is achieved is between you and God. You may draw close to him, or you may keep a safe distance. Reflecting on and practicing the content of each chapter is meant to help you draw close.

A Personal Note

I've rewritten John Owen's exposition of spiritual mindedness, which he wrote from the depth of his long experience with God. I don't mean to take credit for his spiritual maturity and nearness to God any more than I mean to take credit for his insights. Rewriting his work, much more than reading it, has made clear to me how far I have yet to go. Therefore, may the Spirit grant *us* the grace to devote our minds to Christ our Beloved, to always seek the face of the one who himself is our life and peace.

Introduction

the devoted mind

*O God, You are my God;
Early will I seek You;
My soul thirsts for You;
My flesh longs for You
In a dry and thirsty land
Where there is no water.*
—PSALM 63:1

The Great Thirst

Father Latour was lost. His canteen was empty. Fever in his mouth sickened him; dizziness unsettled him. The repeated shapes of the hills and junipers of the New Mexican desert made him feel he was “wandering in some geometrical nightmare.” He closed his eyes to clear his head.

When he opened his eyes again, his glance immediately fell upon one juniper which differed in shape from the others. It was not a thick-growing cone, but a naked, twisted trunk, perhaps ten feet high, and at the top it parted into two lateral, flat-lying branches, with a little crest of green in the centre,

just above the cleavage. Living vegetation could not present more faithfully the form of the Cross.

The traveller dismounted, drew from his pocket a much worn book, and baring his head, knelt at the foot of the cruciform tree.¹

In his own wasting thirst, he remembered “that cry, wrung from his Saviour on the Cross, ‘*J’ai soif!*’ Of all our Lord’s physical sufferings, only one, ‘I thirst,’ rose to His lips.”² Latour’s own thirst was redirected to the Living Water, to communion with his Beloved.

Here was a man whose only hope for life on this earth was water. What could make him, while he still had strength, delay his desperate search?

A greater thirst.

With his mind so keen on Christ that it resists his body’s self-preserving reflexes, Latour is an emblem, a symbol, of the devoted mind that finds life and peace. As an emblem, he embodies the thirst for communion with God in Christ that we will explore, a thirst never slaked. That thirst is born when God’s Spirit recreates us; it grows stronger the more we taste of heavenly things. A spiritual mind takes hold of heaven, of Christ, of God, and won’t let go. Such a mind knows that nothing else will satisfy, so it methodically lays aside every distraction for the sake of the One Thing Needed (Luke 10:42).

Paul sets such a mind apart.

The Great Comma

For to be carnally minded is death,
but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Rom. 8:6)

1. Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, in *Later Novels*, ed. Sharon O’Brien (New York: Library of America, 1990), 286.

2. Cather, 287; see John 19:28.

The two halves of Romans 8:6 are separated by a comma. On the page the comma looks small, but the gap it represents could swallow galaxies. No one lives in the gap; no one straddles the gap; the gap categorically divides humanity with a double dichotomy.

The first dichotomy is between two dispositions of the mind: *fleshly*³ or *spiritual*. Paul doesn't suggest a spectrum, a more-or-lessness. He states a stark either/or: either a mind is given over to the flesh, or it is devoted to the Spirit. The second dichotomy is equally exclusive: *death* or *life and peace*. Paul contrasts in a few words the misery of those who are fleshly minded with the happiness of those who are spiritually minded. The fleshly minded taste death now and, apart from God's saving grace in Christ, will endure eternal death; the spiritually minded taste life and peace now, and thanks to saving grace they will forever drink life and peace.

You might object that this is too black-and-white. You know that not even the godliest believers have their minds always on things of the Spirit, and you know unbelievers whose minds aren't always consumed by the flesh. We'll soon see that Paul agrees with you. But for now, we'll let the fork in Paul's road goad us. Let it prod us to confirm that we're on the life-and-peace side of the Great Comma. Let it kindle an urgency not only to understand what spiritual mindedness is but by grace to get and guard it.⁴

Paul's dichotomy notwithstanding, we know that no believer's mind is completely and continuously spiritual. Paul says as much

3. The NKJV translates forms of *sarx* as "flesh" for the noun and "carnal" and "carnally" for adjective and adverb. Except when quoting the NKJV, I will stick with forms of "flesh" for the sake of style. There is no difference in meaning.

4. The title of Owen's book is illuminating: *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*. Grace is the work of God's Spirit in us, and it is compatible with our obedience. In fact, by grace the Spirit recreates us; grace makes possible and calls forth our response to God. Grace and duty are therefore united by the gospel. What God has joined together, let no one separate.

when he tells the Galatian believers that “the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Gal. 5:17). Our own experience confirms this aggravating fact of the Christian life. Even Paul faced the same struggle.⁵ And as for unbelievers, those on the other side of the Great Comma, God’s common grace restrains even his enemies from nonstop evil.⁶

But our inconsistencies and inconstancy don’t blur Paul’s stark division between the fleshly minded and the spiritually minded. Though we waver, each of us has a spiritual bias; we are either dominated by thoughts and longings that lead to death or devoted to those that lead to life and peace. And these biases are rooted in our identity, in our relation to Christ.

Paul defines the two possible identities in terms of *flesh* and *Spirit*. Those on the death side of the Great Comma are “in the flesh,” and those on the life-and-peace side are “in the Spirit” (Rom. 8:9). Note how Paul characterizes these two classes in Roman 8: those in the flesh

- “walk according to the flesh” (v. 4),
- “live according to the flesh” (v. 5),
- “set their minds on the things of the flesh” (v. 5),
- have a mind that is “enmity against God,” that does not and cannot subject itself to God’s law (v. 7), and
- “cannot please God” (v. 8).

5. See Romans 7:13–25. For a defense of the classical understanding of these verses as a description of the Christian’s struggle, see J. I. Packer, “The ‘Wretched Man’ in Romans 7,” in the appendix to *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 263–70.

6. “Common grace” is God’s work in both believers and unbelievers. It bears fruit in our lives and brings God’s blessings. But it isn’t *saving* grace. See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, fourth revised and enlarged edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 1941), 432–46; note especially section 2, “The Restraint of Sin,” 442.

Paul explains that this is because they do not “have the Spirit of Christ” and therefore are “not his” (v. 9). In Galatians 5:19–21, he describes the unholy outworking of this fleshly mindset:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like.

Such a person is outside Christ and “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21).

But in Romans 8, Paul writes that those in the Spirit

- “walk . . . according to the Spirit” (v. 4),
- “live according to the Spirit” (v. 5), and
- “set their minds . . . on the things of the Spirit” (v. 5).

In fact, “the Spirit of God dwells in” them and they have “the Spirit of Christ” (v. 9), which orients their hearts to things of the Spirit. They bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).

So there are two kinds of people, one on each side of the Great Comma of Romans 8:6. Those with their minds set on the flesh are spiritually dead now (Eph. 2:1–3; Col. 2:13). Unless they believe in Christ and are born of the Spirit, they will eventually face God’s judgment and eternal death: “For if you live according to the flesh you will die” (Rom. 8:13). It can’t be otherwise, because, as Paul says, those in the flesh are hostile to God.

On the other side of the Great Comma are those who are in Christ, the spiritually minded who already have life and peace

but who can grow in spiritual mindedness. By that growth, they taste more life and enjoy more peace.

This book is about what it means to be spiritually minded, how we grow in spiritual mindedness, and what fruit of spiritual mindedness we can expect to enjoy.

Spiritual mindedness begins with the Holy Spirit.

The Person and Work of the Spirit

The New Testament writers sometimes use the word *spirit* to refer to the *person* of the Holy Spirit and sometimes to the *work* of the Spirit in believers to bring about the life of God in them. It's not always obvious which they mean. Jesus used the word in both senses when he told Nicodemus, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). In other words, those who are born from above by the power of the Holy Spirit live new spiritual lives empowered by the person of the Spirit in them.

Throughout Romans 8, Paul uses the word *spirit* in these two ways as well. For example, he speaks of the *person* of the Spirit in verse 9 as the "Spirit of God" and the "Spirit of Christ." Likewise, in verse 11 he mentions "the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead." Paul teaches us that we have the Holy Spirit to thank for all the rich benefits that we'll explore.

But in verses 4 and 5, Paul sets walking and living "according to the Spirit" against walking and living "according to the flesh." The flesh is the corrupted principle we are born with, the engine of our sin. Paul contrasts this with the new principle of life the Holy Spirit plants and cultivates in us, the *work* of the Spirit, which is the engine of our loving obedience—of walking and living "according to the Spirit."

Mind-Work in the Spirit

My theme is one aspect of this life in the Spirit—the work and disposition of the mind in Romans 8:5–6. Translations of verse 5 render it to “set [our] minds on the things of the Spirit” (ESV), to have our “minds set on what the Spirit desires” (NIV), or to “think about things that please the Spirit” (NLT). All of these convey the idea that this is work for our minds, but in so few words it’s easy to miss the fullness of that mind-work. The mind-work here isn’t limited to the kind of effort needed to memorize the Gettysburg Address or to solve a system of linear equations, as demanding as those tasks can be. The mind-work Paul calls us to demands more than notions and reasoning and memory, though it certainly includes them.

The Greek words behind our translations of *mind* and *mind-edness* in Romans 8 convey a fully rounded sense of the work that includes not only knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and discretion but delight. In a related text, Paul says to “set your mind on things above” (Col. 3:2), calling us not only to concentrate and focus our attention but to yearn. The spiritual mind tenaciously clings to its object, relishes it, finds satisfaction in it, cleaves to it, glories in it. Paul portrays a mind unreservedly devoted to its object; he portrays the *devoted mind*.

Love-Work of the Mind

Romantic love, if we can believe the poets, is quasi-religious. The lover is progressively captivated by his beloved in a devotion analogous to the spiritual mindedness that brings life and peace. We can think of the work of a lover’s mind—and the work of the mind set on the Spirit—as devotion, and we can think of that devotion in three acts: *contemplation*, *inclination*, and *satisfaction*.

Contemplation

Ubi amor, ibi oculus: “Where love is, there is the eye.” The lover turns his eye to his beloved and compares her to a summer’s day or a red, red rose. His mind scours all that is good in nature as he looks for images to help him to describe and enjoy her beauty. The spiritual mind likewise turns to God and compares him to a rock, a shepherd, or unapproachable light but finds in those comparisons only shadows, for he is beyond compare. The devoted mind exalts the Beloved above the gods and the creatures of highest heaven. It pores over God’s words, God’s wisdom, God’s ways—everything that will reveal him more clearly. The spiritual mind is devoted and can’t be satisfied with a glance but must gaze, muse, meditate. And this gaze isn’t distant and detached; by the Spirit the lover approaches God to behold him in his sanctuary (Ps. 63:2; Eph. 2:18).

Inclination

When Solomon dedicates the temple in 1 Kings 8, he asks God to “incline our hearts to Himself” (v. 58). God answers that prayer when we consider him and his ways with minds renewed by the Spirit. Our hearts are softened and warmed by the beauty, majesty, and glory we see in him, and our affections are stirred so that we lean toward our Beloved and long for him “as the deer pants for the water brooks” (Ps. 42:1). Contemplation whets the mind’s appetite and keeps it sharp. But the heart inclined toward God closes the distance in eager approach.

Satisfaction

Possessing and relishing the Beloved, the devoted mind acquires a palate trained by the Spirit: God and heavenly things become savory. This is the satisfaction and joy of spiritual life. Mere notions about God are a mouthful of lukewarm water. But the devoted mind drinks the love of Christ, declares it the

best wine, and rejoices “with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

These three acts follow a natural progression: contemplation (mind-work) leads to inclination and satisfaction (heart-work). Our hearts follow whatever captivates our minds.

Come Away

Is it hard to imagine your mind being as fixed on Jesus as Latour’s in the desert? Such devotion often feels like a fantasy to me. Yet Paul doesn’t say the spiritual mind is a rare, exclusive prize for elite saints; it is the reality promised to all in Christ; it is Life and Peace. So we thirst, and our Beloved calls: “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away” (Song 2:10). Throughout the following chapters, we’ll rise and move toward our Beloved. We’ll explore the meaning and practice of the love-work of the devoted mind. Our souls “shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness” (Ps. 63:5).

As we go, we’ll attend to the three acts of devotion. In part 1, we’ll explore the *contemplation* of the devoted mind. We’ll turn our eyes toward the beauty of our Beloved. We’ll find that the Spirit creates in us a new taste for that beauty, as well as eyes to see it in places as obvious as God’s nature and Christ’s love, and in the unexpected places of trials and temptations.

In part 2, we’ll see how the Beloved we behold moves our hearts and *inclines* and *satisfies* the devoted mind. We’ll discover that through our contemplation, the Spirit not only creates a new disposition of the mind but inclines our hearts toward God in the undivided love he calls us to and deserves. We’ll reflect on the promised flourishing of the devoted mind in life and peace and deepen our grasp of what it means to find our rest in Christ alone (Matt. 11:29).

Reflection and Praxis

1. The subject of this book is “spiritual mindedness.” What ideas do you already have about spiritual mindedness? What do you think Paul means by the phrase in Romans 8:6?

2. Do you know anyone you would describe as spiritually minded? What about them makes you think so?

3. Do you think of yourself as spiritually minded? Why do you think so? Describe the ways you are (or are not) spiritually minded.

4. What would you like God to do in your life as you read and reflect on this book? Write a brief prayer that seeks from him the grace for just that.

Here is mine: *Dear God my Father, as I write, prevent me from settling for secondhand spirituality. Grant me the grace to draw near to you in Christ and the grace to know your presence with me; help me to taste and see your goodness, to be satisfied with your beauty, and to love you with all my heart, all my soul, and all my mind. Amen.*

Part 1

contemplation

1

the devoted mind is of the Spirit

For with You is the fountain of life.
—PSALM 36:9

The Doctrine of Provenance

Suppose you come into a little money and decide to acquire a Navajo rug. Not just any rug, but a historic treasure you'll not only admire and enjoy now but later pass to your daughter when you leave this old world. You set your eyes on a Two Grey Hills design from the 1920s. Before you drop your twelve grand, what should you do?

Verify the rug's provenance. You'll need to see a certificate of authenticity, something that confirms it is in fact a Two Grey Hills rug woven in the 1920s. You don't want your daughter to hear from an appraiser, "You've inherited a beautiful rug, and the *style* is Navajo, but it was woven in Mexico in the 2020s." The *sine qua non* of a Navajo rug and the measure of its value isn't only its artistry or its artisanship but its origin.

Spiritual mindedness, according to Paul, is a treasure. He appraises its value at “life and peace” (Rom. 8:6), and in our final chapter we’ll see that “life and peace” is shorthand for our inheritance in Christ. If we think of spiritual mindedness as a fine rug, the fibers woven to create it are spiritual thoughts and longings. And the fundamental criterion by which the Great Appraiser will judge a mind—whether it is truly spiritual—is the origin, the fountain, of those thoughts. The *sine qua non* of a spiritual thought isn’t its doctrinal precision or even its object but its origin.

The fountain of truly spiritual thoughts is the Holy Spirit.

That should sound familiar. In the introduction, I said that spiritual mindedness begins with the Holy Spirit. I’m repeating myself, but I need to elaborate on an implication of that truth.

In the next several chapters, we’ll survey the objects of a spiritual mind. We’ll consider what it thinks about, such as God’s being and character, Christ’s person and work, heaven, and things above. We’ll look closely at each because we want to grow in spiritual mindedness. And because such thoughts are heady and even sublime, we can easily mistake deeper understanding of the doctrines of God, Christ, and heaven for growth in spiritual mindedness. It’s true that deeper understanding is necessary for growth in spiritual mindedness, but it’s not sufficient. A thought about God or Christ or heaven isn’t spiritual just because it’s about God or Christ or heaven; Satan trembles with thoughts of God and Christ, but his thoughts are demonic (James 2:19). Our thoughts must be born of the Spirit.

Growth by the Spirit

The Spirit sanctifies us throughout our lives. He matures us in holiness through a two-beat rhythm, enabling us more and more to put sin to death and to put on Christ (Rom. 8:13;

13:14). His sanctifying work extends through the farthest reaches of our hearts—our minds, wills, affections, and consciences—but our attention now is on the Spirit’s sanctifying work on our minds.

As we put on Christ, our minds are “renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created [us]” (Col. 3:10). As our minds are renewed and we’re being transformed, Paul warns each of us “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). He says it’s possible for us to misread our own maturity level. In other words, we might not yet be as spiritually minded as we think.

The art and skill to know ourselves well and weigh our spiritual mindedness isn’t easy; it takes maturity. Over time we realize that as God prompts us to set our minds on things above—prompts us in his Word or in our prayers or in creation—even as believers we often respond to him “according to the flesh.” Our thoughts of him can be abstract, barren notions. Yes, even as believers.

To know whether our thoughts are truly spiritual, we need to know whether they flow from the Spirit. Our gracious God provides a way we can test their provenance.

The Earmarks of the Spirit on Our Thoughts

When the appraiser examines your rug, he looks for the indicators that set Navajo rugs apart. He considers how faded the colors are, how worn the materials. He confirms that it’s Churro wool, woven with a continuous warp thread. To verify that it’s an original Two Grey Hills, he holds it up to the light to see the tight weave.

Similarly, the pattern and heft of our thoughts about spiritual things bear distinguishing earmarks of their origin. We hold

them up to the light of the Word and Spirit to inspect those marks. We look for the fruit of those thoughts in our love to others, the dead giveaway of the Spirit's work. When we see the earmarks of the Spirit, our confidence before God grows.

Spiritual Thoughts Come Freely

"If you had a month off and money were no object, where would you go?" An icebreaker like that reveals something about us. Whether we say we'd trek our way across Patagonia or dine our way across Paris, we reveal what we believe would refresh and recharge us. "When your mind has the evening off, where does it go?" That's a more revealing question because it's not hypothetical. Though work and family and domestic duties demand much of our attention, we all have discretionary time when our minds are free to roam.

And roam they do. But the Spirit renovates our minds. When we are born of the Spirit, he becomes in us "a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). The life he creates isn't everlasting just because it carries on without end. It is everlasting because it is life in communion with the eternal Father and Son by the Spirit (John 17:3). And the thoughts that bubble up freely in our minds savor of the Spirit, their source. Our minds begin to roam toward a new destination: our Beloved and all things in relation to our Beloved.

When your mind is free, whether you're walking in the forest primeval or on your treadmill in your garage, what fills it? When our minds are least constrained by the duties of the moment, we can best judge their inclination.

Spiritual Thoughts Proliferate

Remember, our sanctification is lifelong, and our thoughts and longings are at the center of that lifelong work. When we are born again in Christ and given his Spirit, we aren't instantly

endowed with an undistractable interest in heavenly things. But our new minds, prompted by the new principle of life implanted in us, turn toward God. We turn to him in an arrow prayer¹ or in the words of a hymn, in mulling over memorized Scriptures or in puzzling out how best to live according to God's will in a sticky situation. We turn to him in set times of prayer and worship, in public and in private. We turn to him in sleepless hours at night and in the daily commuter traffic snarl. In the next two chapters, we'll see how we can turn to him in trials and temptations. And over the years, as the Spirit works and our minds and hearts are tuned more and more to God, we learn the blessedness of the one whose "delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2).

Spiritual Thoughts Delight

Another sign that the Spirit himself lies behind our thoughts of spiritual things is their effect on our hearts. When our minds are renewed, we pray not only because we're compelled by a sense of duty or because we need God to help us out of a mess. We pray because in prayer our hearts rest in the satisfying nearness of our Beloved. Paul tells us that through Christ we "have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18). We meet our God in the holiest place, behind the veil (Heb. 10:19–20). In prayer we approach his throne of grace, and he welcomes us there (Heb. 4:16).

David describes this delight in God's presence—our faith's comprehensive taste of God's goodness, grace, mercy, and love:

1. A brief, welling-up-on-the-spot cry to God evoked by circumstances. It might be a cry of praise, contrition, or thanks or a cry for help for yourself or someone else.

How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
Therefore the children of men put their trust under the
shadow of Your wings.
They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,
And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.
For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light. (Ps. 36:7–9)

Spiritual Thoughts Transform

There is no smugness in the spiritual mind, no “God, I thank you that I am not like other men” (Luke 18:11). When the root of our thoughts is the Spirit, they produce his fruit: “Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). And if the fruit of our thoughts is love, they do not puff us up in spiritual pride, for pride opposes love (1 Cor. 8:1). In fact, our thoughts are most certifiably spiritual when they humble us, while the flesh exalts itself in knowledge and the *appearance* of spiritual mindedness.

Thoughts that have their source in the Spirit aren’t everything there is to life with God. As C. S. Lewis put it, “Thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping.”² And thinking about visiting “orphans and widows in their trouble” and keeping oneself “unspotted from the world” is different from visiting and keeping (James 1:27). If thoughts of God’s holiness, no matter how precise and profound, don’t provoke our own devotion to God and reverent worship of him and devoted service to him, they have no trace of the Spirit in them.

We might paraphrase James and say that spiritual thoughts without works are dead.

2. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963, 1964), 4–5.

Search Me, O God

If spiritual thoughts flow and even overflow when the mind is free, and those overflowing thoughts delight and change us, then they are supernatural. They are earmarks of the Spirit's life in us. The way for us to see the Spirit's work in us, and to see where we need to grow, is by examining our hearts regularly.

Self-examination is a discipline. It's a duty we're called to, because without examining our hearts how could we admit that we are sinners and confess our sins (1 John 1:8–10)? To do it well, we need God's grace.³ The way we examine ourselves—the way we obey all God's commands—is shaped by his grace. That might sound odd. But think about how Paul calls us to vigorous obedience: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12–13). God's gracious, empowering presence is the air our obedience breathes.

So what is God's grace in this discipline of self-examination? The freedom and light of the Spirit. The freedom of the Spirit is that our conviction of sin and failure is not condemnation but a call to turn to our Father in Christ (Rom. 8:1). The light of the Spirit illumines our hearts and minds: “O LORD, You have searched me and known me” (Ps. 139:1). David trusted God's Spirit to know him better than he knew himself, so he didn't search his own heart without help. He called on God:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if there is any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps. 139:23–24)

3. Remember the phrase from Owen's title: *grace and duty*. Keep them together.

Self-examination, then, is done in faith and dependence, as we trust God to show us the truth about ourselves.

By the light of the Spirit, we see our hearts clearly. We lament how few thoughts we have of Christ and God and heaven and how brief and shallow those few thoughts are. We regret those wasteful times when we let our train of thought get dragged down another rabbit hole. And we mourn over and ask forgiveness for our negligence.

But the Spirit won't show us only our straying and wasted thoughts. It's God's fatherly disposition to be pleased with his children (Phil. 2:13). He sees all our secrets, including our holy thoughts, and rewards us (Matt. 6:4, 6). He trains and disciplines us so we will yield "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11). He is "the God of patience and comfort" (Rom. 15:5). "He remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14). So his Spirit not only convicts but confirms (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:24).

With this perspective, our self-examination itself becomes a time of communion with God, of renewal, of reconciliation, of drawing near to our Beloved.

This too is spiritual mindedness.

Reflection and Praxis

1. Regular prompts to spiritual mindedness include the acts of corporate worship: confessing sin, confessing faith, praying, singing, hearing the Scriptures read and preached, presenting tithes and offerings, celebrating the Lord's Supper, receiving God's benediction. Choose at least two or three acts from this list and write down ways these can become missed opportunities. (Obvious examples include daydreaming through the service or gathering your things to leave during the benediction. A less obvious example might be nursing a critical attitude toward the

selection of hymns.⁴⁾ The goal of this exercise is to tune in to ways we squander prime times to fix our minds on things above.

2. Choose at least two or three acts of worship from the above list and write down ways you can turn them to your mind's spiritual advantage. (For example, if your church makes the order of worship available early, prepare the evening before by thinking through the content of the hymns so you will be able to sing them with understanding and delight.) The goal of this exercise is to tune in to ways we can train ourselves in the love-work of the mind.

3. Write a prayer in which you seek the help of the Spirit to examine your thought life in light of Colossians 3:1–3.

4. Assuming you have a stable schedule, review your regular routine to identify the times each day when your mind has no demands from family or work. Choose a time that you can most likely protect from distractions. Choose a discipline of spiritual mindedness, such as memorization and meditation on Scripture, prayer, or devotional reading that would fit that time. Commit the next seven days to that discipline. Consider using a journal to help you to connect your thoughts from day to day. After seven days, assess what you have done and determine whether to continue or try something else.

4. Music is a gift from God to deepen both our thoughts and longings toward him, but because people have strong opinions about it, we easily deform the gift into a stumbling block. For a clearheaded discussion of this from a concerned layman, see C. S. Lewis, "On Church Music," in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1967 and 1995), 94–99.