

How to Be Spiritually Minded

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By John Piper

This article was triggered by the drift of my mind on Sunday afternoon toward the Apple Computer video ads. They are funny. But as I was pondering Mac vs. PC, I began to ask myself if I was lured away from being spiritually minded. I do believe it is possible to think about computers in a spiritual way. But was I doing that? Or was I drifting into the very fascination and desire that makes God feel remote and the Bible unattractive and heaven irrelevant and hell inconceivable? It was a critical moment. God snatched me.

Being spiritually minded is a matter of life and death. Paul said in Romans 8:6, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but *to set the mind on the Spirit* is life and peace.” The phrase “set the mind on the Spirit” translates a noun phrase, *phronēma tou pneumatos*—“mindset of the Spirit.” There is no good one-word English equivalent for *phronēma*. It is not just “mind” but also “attitude.” And not just “mindset” but also “attitude-set.” It is the *frame* and *disposition* of our mind. To say that we have a “*phronēma* of the Spirit” is to say that the Spirit is shaping our mind-attitude-set according to his own. It exalts Christ and values God and cherishes the Word of God and sees people and things with a relentless God-consciousness.

I long to be spiritually minded all the time. I want to see the world with spiritual eyes—computers and all. So I stopped computer gazing and wrote the following strategies for being and staying spiritually minded. They are not in any particular order. Only as they came to me with a few tweaks.

Realize your outer nature is wasting away and inner nature must be renewed by setting your mind on things that are above.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Take radical steps to keep your mind pure.

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. (Matthew 5:27-29)

Make God the gladness of all your joys.

Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. (Psalm 43:4)

Literally the phrase “my exceeding joy” is “gladness of my joy.” I take this to mean that in all our joys God should be the gladness of the joy. Every joy should become a joy in God. If a joy cannot offer a taste of who God is, and be enjoyed the more for that, then it is unspiritual joy.

See each person you meet as you will see them a hundred years from now.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. (Luke 16:22-23)

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. (2 Corinthians 5:16)

Ponder that at every moment, even your happiest, there is misery and wailing in 10,000 places, some of them very near.

Will that not kill all our joys? Better to be real and sad than happy and fake. But I don't think we have to choose. Real and happy and sorrowful is possible. That is why Paul says that he is “sorrowful yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10). Listen to this heart-wrenching story that David Bricker (head of Jews for Jesus) tells.

Some months ago I was flying home from a meeting when the man sitting behind me began gasping for breath. An announcement over the plane's intercom called for a physician. Soon a doctor and several nurses came to the man's aid but to no avail. I began to pray for the man and his wife, who was sitting beside him. The pilot announced that due to a medical emergency the plane was going to land in Edmonton. I could hear the activity behind me escalate as the doctor and nurses took turns doing CPR. If you've never been near a person who is dying despite these efforts, I can assure you that it is not much worse than what we see on television. The sound of air being forced out of a human being's lungs, the sounds and smells of the death rattle were horrific. I heard the doctor pronounce, “Time of death, 10:25 A. M.”

And then the captain announced that the passenger's situation had “stabilized,” and therefore we would continue to San Francisco. I don't know how many people realized that what was announced as though it was the passing of the emergency was actually a veiled announcement of the passing of this man's life. Certainly those of us nearby knew. The flight attendants pulled a blanket over his head. His wife, still beside him, was sobbing and moaning. And then the flight attendants began to come through the aisles . . . serving lunch! Lunch!? How could anyone in that cabin eat after what had just happened? But they did. (Jews for Jesus, Newsletter, Nov. 2006, p. 1)

That is a parable of the world at any given time. Some are eating lunch and thousands are wailing. It helps to remember this when we are carried away from reality with some computer ad.

Remember Jesus' warning about what chokes spiritual life: cares, riches and pleasures of life.

Those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. (Luke 8:14)

The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (Mark 4:19)

Ponder what smells good to God and what he delights in!

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:2)

For we are the aroma of Christ to God. (2 Corinthians 2:15)

His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. (Psalm 147:10)

Be friends with spiritually minded people.

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Proverbs 13:20)

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33)

Read God-besotted, spiritually minded writers.

For example, read the sermons of Jonathan Edwards and John Owen in Volume Seven of his *Works, On Spiritual Mindedness*. Here are some sample sermon titles from volume 25 of the Yale edition of Edwards' *Works*, just to give you a flavor how different things were in those days:

"The Great Concern of a Watchman of Souls"

"The Beauty of Piety in Youth"

"The Church's Marriage to Her Sons, and to Her God"

"Yield to God's Word, or Be Broken by His Hand"

"Saving Faith and Christian Obedience Arise from Godly Love"

"The Peace Which Christ Gives His True Followers"

"Men's Inhumanity to God"

"Christ Is to the Heart Like a River to a Tree Planted by It"

"God Is Infinitely Strong"

Ponder your life that will very soon be without a body.

Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8)

How attached are all your joys to your body?

Think about how short life is.

"All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:24-25)

Ask for spiritual-mindedness.

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. (Psalm 90:14)

The psalmists pray often for the heart and mind they long to have.

Remember you died with Christ and have crucified the flesh.

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:24)

The most basic key to spiritual-mindedness is the deep assurance that you really have died and risen with Christ and that you are forgiven and justified in him.

Accept God's appointed suffering as discipline to bring about greater spiritual mindedness.

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:7-11)

Go to the hospital to pray with a dying man.

It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. (Ecclesiastes 7:2)

I did this last week and it had, as always, a sobering effect and blew away much worldliness from my mind.

Risk being thought foolish and weird.

It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. (Matthew 10:25)

Realize that millions of people in the other religions of the world are not looking for people with more American cultural coolness or techno savvy. They are looking for a "holy man," a "man of God."

The question will not be, "Is he quick-witted and fast-talking and clever?" The question will be: "Does he pray a lot? Does he know his holy Book, much of it by heart? Is he self-denying and focused on God? Is he powerful in his weakness?"

Longing to be spiritually minded with you,

Pastor John