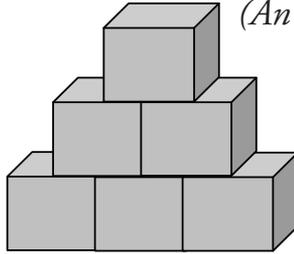


SPIRITUAL BLOCKS

(An Approach to Meditation)



Dr. Glenn Parkinson

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.
(Joshua 1:8)

Meditation is all but a lost art in today's world. We are simply too busy. Carving out time for important things almost always loses to the pressure of urgent things. After years of believing life must be packed as full as possible, we don't have much practice in detaching ourselves from all that is pressing/exciting/urgent/fun in order to ponder deep truths, even if we know that those truths are the ultimately the key to our happiness.

We highly value truth, but we are used to dealing with it in lectures, news reports and sermons. That is, we take it in academically; we record it and store it away, as we might to prepare for a quiz. We are taught to look at truth, not handle it—admire or worry over what we hear, but not use it to shape our own thought or action.

The problem is that we need to actually put truth to use in order to live effectively. Understanding what is true is only the first essential step. After understanding comes exercise and practice. Nobody ever learned to do *anything* just by being told what to do. Whether in art or plumbing or business or music or preaching or cooking, you have to actually apply the “head knowledge” you have received. Only when you can actually do something with it, have you learned it.

When biblical themes are described academically, they seem abstract. But when they are applied, they synchronize us to the rhythm of life as God designed it. Trusting and obeying God is not just about tithing or foreign missions. It is about how we think and feel, the course we choose to take, and how we respond to everything that happens to us.

Look again at one of the most familiar verses of the New Testament, and see something you may never have seen before:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

(Matthew 28:18-20)

Most Christians think the Great Commission calls us to learn *everything I have commanded you*, as if that were something we could do just by taking notes. Look again. Jesus commissioned us to learn *to obey everything I have commanded you*. Learning truth only begins with learning content. We must apply the truth before we have learned it.

That is why God told Joshua to meditate on His Word day and night. *Then you will be prosperous and successful*. Meditation picks up where academic instruction leaves off. Biblical instruction gives you coordinated pieces of truth. Meditation picks up these pieces and examines them, feels their weight, takes them apart and puts them back together, plays with them a while and then uses them as tools to make something good out of our ongoing experiences.

Don't confuse biblical meditation with the sort of meditation associated with eastern religions. Eastern thought seeks tranquility by emptying the mind. It has become popular in the West largely as a technique for relieving stress. However useful that might be, it has nothing to do with biblical meditation.

Also, biblical meditation is not about mere repetition of ideas, as if reciting God's truth has some automatic, magical impact. Even memorizing the Scripture itself is only helpful if it leads to reflection and application.

Biblical meditation is the spiritual discipline of *filling* the mind—exercising it to become intimately familiar with God's revelation, calmly and confidently working to relate that revelation to the situations and challenges of the moment.

A set of blocks is offered as a mental tool to fill the mind with *major biblical themes* when we need them. Our detailed understanding of the Scripture will grow year by year. But it doesn't take very long at all to become familiar with some powerful biblical themes. Our lives can become profoundly successful from a spiritual perspective if we simply exercise faith in these truths over and over again in the course of the day. For example, rather than simply filing away "the sovereignty of God" under "S" in the mental file cabinet, we can take out that truth and actually use it three, four—a dozen times a day. Using such truths as we deal with worry, make decisions, encounter frustrations, respond to attacks and nurture our aspirations is the way to actually *learn* them.

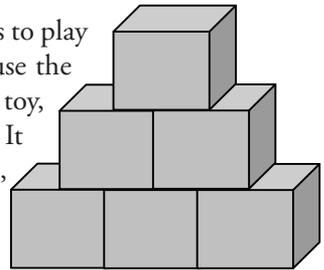
Think of meditation as working with mental transparencies. Usually, all we see is our immediate situation—the few facts that are in our face. Because that is all we see, that is all we react to. But imagine taking two steps back from whatever is in your face, and turning your situation into a transparency—the immediate facts are still solid, but the background is clear. Now lay that transparency over a major biblical truth, so that the truth shows through and dominates the scene. For example, imagine an obnoxious person filling your view, goading you into

anger. Step back two steps and put that person on a clear transparency, and then lay it on top of a picture of the cross—the cross where you learned about both God’s wrath and God’s love. Now God’s reaction to obnoxious human sin dominates the scene, not the face. You apply biblical truths by using them to put life into a larger perspective on a moment by moment basis. You then live according to that larger perspective.

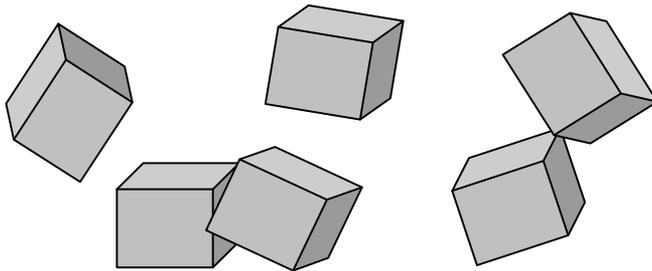
The meditation blocks described here are intended to teach meditation by example. That is, they do not represent some biblically perfect method or design. There is nothing especially spiritual about using cubes—or physical representations of any kind. The themes chosen for the blocks are those I have found to be fundamentally biblical over the years. If you wish to select different biblical themes or use some other geometry, all the better. The idea behind these blocks is to practice a discipline that can eventually take many useful forms.

So, why use blocks?

It all began when my wife gave me some blocks to play with. She knows that I think visually and could use the blocks to imagine concepts. Playing with my new toy, I enjoyed the stability of a simple sloped design. It pictured the way I want to feel inside: secure, stable, and ordered around what I know to be true.



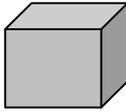
That, of course, is not the way I often feel. Major complications like family crises or a national disaster, as well as small but maddening frustrations at work, at home or on the road—any number of challenges, really—can become wrecking balls that smash my spiritual equilibrium.



Whenever I am aware that my spirit is in disarray—and part of the discipline is *being* aware—then I know I must again mentally rebuild my little spiritual formation. In my office, I actually began by literally taking the blocks and setting them down one at a time, reaffirming truth with each block, until I reached a biblical theme particularly relevant to the moment. I then simply exercised faith in that truth with respect to whatever had bowled me over. Finishing the pattern presented me with a visual picture of the renewed stability of my soul. Eventually, I found myself going through the routine in my head, even when the wooden blocks were not at hand.

Associating *themes* with blocks encourages application of major biblical truths. Having a *set* of themes and blocks gives me a balanced array of truth-tools to handle whatever I must face.

The next few pages outline the biblical content behind the themes. The booklet concludes with ideas for applying this tool.



God is Sovereign

The bottom row has to do with God. It only makes sense that life should be based on the Creator. God's essential character is the most important fact at any moment, in any situation. If I can remember that when I need to remember it, my life will be transformed.

"Sovereignty" seems like a good place to start, because it quickly puts us in touch with what God is. God is all-powerful and He is #1. As the Apostle Paul said,

*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him
be the glory forever!*
(Romans 11:36)

The idea of sovereignty involves two ideas: God's *control* of all things, and God's *preeminence* in all things.

God's control has no practical limits. That is, He can, and does, do whatever He pleases.

*The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom
rules over all.*
(Psalm 103:19)

Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.
(Psalm 115:3)

God is not part of our universe; He created it. He exists outside of both space and time, and can interact with us however He wishes. There is nothing bigger or more powerful than God. Nothing. Nothing at all. God can change or reverse any situation. Or, if God has a purpose for it, nothing can reverse what is happening.

*He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are
like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and
spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.*
(Isaiah 40:22-23)

Things that are genuinely big to us are genuinely small to Him—not necessarily insignificant, just small and easy to work with. In fact, the occurrences in our lives *are* significant because of and to the extent that they are important to God. It pleases God to reveal Himself in the common things of our lives.

God is never overwhelmed. He is never at a loss for what to do. He is never surprised. Things are never out of control because God is always in control. Always. Whether we know it or not, whether we feel it or not, God is always in control, and He always does what pleases Him.

God's character is delightfully good, pure and unchanging. However, the universe and its inhabitants exist for *His* purposes.

“Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”
(Isaiah 43:6-7)

The universe as a whole and we in particular exist for His glory, or the expression of His invisible nature. The universe does not exist for our purposes. *We* do not exist for our purposes. This is what we mean when we say that God is preeminent. God is #1. The Lord has the first place. In every situation, every question to God regarding what is happening to us ought to begin with “Sir”. We find it so difficult and distasteful to affirm God's preeminence in the things touching our lives because sin has made us woefully dysfunctional. Nevertheless, God is #1 whether we affirm it or not, and we can only be in harmony with Him when we recognize that fact.

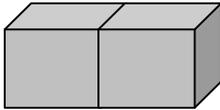
We connect with God's preeminence through Jesus Christ.

For by [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth ... all things were created by him and for him.
(Colossians 1:16)

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:9-11)

All things were created by Him (control) and for Him (preeminence). Christ rules in and over every situation—absolutely every one. There was a time when He was clothed in humility and allowed us to abuse Him. That day is over. He still suspends His judgment of the world that will force all knees to bow, while He lovingly calls a multitude to willing repentance. But He is in control and He has first place right now.

The first thing to remember whenever we are spiritually off balance is that God is sovereign. Frankly, I often need go no farther than this first block to effectively reorder my soul.



God is personal

If the first block reminds us of what God is, then the second affirms who God is. God is a person. Personhood describes the ability to think and feel and plan and act. It implies intelligence, emotion and intent.

We know God is a person because of His creation. The Scriptures make the point that we can tell much about God by examining the things He created.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made. (Romans 1:20)

In particular, we understand something of His divine nature by looking inward at ourselves. We are persons. We think and feel and plan and act. We have intelligence, emotion and intent. While God is surely a great deal more than His creation, He is certainly no less. An effect (creation) can never be greater than its cause (God). The Lord may be unique in His immensity and purity, but if He created us, then He must *at least* be as much of a person as we are.

That means that the most appropriate way to relate to God is on a personal level. It is demeaning to relate to God as if He were a mere force, or a set of abstract principles. Any of us would be offended if someone dealt with us that way—as a number or some impersonal quantity.

It is important to look at God when you deal with Him. I am, of course, using a figure of speech; God is a spirit. I am referring to the difference we instantly sense, after we have been on hold listening to a recording for ten minutes, when someone picks up on the other end. Even though we cannot see him or her, we begin to think and behave differently—we are dealing with a real person now. We never speak to a person the way we do a recording.

It is easy to forget to do this with God. It is easy to quote facts about Him, all the while ignoring His presence in the room, or mentally rehearse facts about Him, all the while ignoring His presence in your soul. The issue is much larger than formal prayer; it has to do with relating to Him as a person.

But if we must relate to God, then *how* do we relate to Him? We relate to different persons in different ways, depending on our relationship. To relate inappropriately can be offensive. What is our relationship with God? How do we act? What can we expect? What do we call Him?

Fortunately, the entire Bible explores that exact question. The Old Testament word for a defined relationship was *covenant*. After describing the strained, broken and antagonistic relationship humanity developed with God, the Bible proceeds to recount God's efforts to establish a positive relationship with a chosen people who desire to know Him as a friend.

The Old Testament uses God's historical relationship with Israel to illustrate (positively and negatively) the relationship God wants to build. The Lord once summarized the relationship He desires by comparing it to a marriage:

I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.

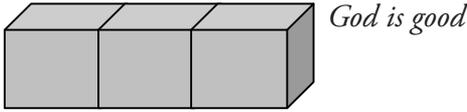
(Hosea 2:19-20)

Here we learn that the Lord wants to know us, and for us to know Him, in a relationship characterized by integrity, faithfulness and grace. The more we study God's covenant in the Bible, the better we understand the relationship He would have with us. We find that aspects of marriage constitute but one of a number of roles that properly relate us. Other roles include aspects of other relationships we are familiar with—Father/child, King/subject, Master/servant, Brother/brother, Friend/friend, Physician/patient, Coach/athlete, General/soldier, Teacher/student, Shepherd/sheep, Lover/lover, Lawyer/client, among others.

What actually creates these wonderful roles is our faith in Jesus Christ.

Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. (Hebrews 9:15)

All that was modeled and promised in the relationship, or covenant, with Israel is made eternally real and available to people of any race or class through faith in Christ. If we embrace Jesus as the key to our relationship with God—by affirming His Lordship and salvation through repentance and faith—then we gain access to all the roles described in the biblical covenant. We can adopt those roles as the occasion demands and know how to relate to God as a person.



Often, the simplest ideas are the most profound. “God is good” is elementary enough for a child to understand, yet it has such deep implications.

You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.
(Psalm 119:68)

*Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes
refuge in him.* (Psalm 34:8)

Goodness is one of the most fundamental concepts in any language. It describes what is essentially positive, pleasant and proper. You could make a long list of specific attributes detailing the goodness of God—loving, just, patient, kind, protecting, upright, pure and so on.

These attributes describe the nature of God differently than they describe the nature of any human being. When we speak of being good, we must think of a higher standard, external to ourselves, by which we are measured or judged. The Creator, on the other hand, has no standard above Him. There is no abstract “goodness” He has to live up to. Goodness is whatever God inherently is. One might say that He doesn’t live up to a standard, He lives it out. This makes God’s perfection unchangeable.

It is the Lord’s unchangeable character that defines all that is good in His creation. *Good* and *evil* are not defined by any creature—not by vote and not by personal choice. They are defined only by the character of God. That which reflects God’s character is good; that which does not is evil.

This makes good and evil a personal matter with God. To choose what is good involves affirming or worshipping Him. To choose what is evil means ignoring, rejecting or opposing Him. That is why, to be true to Himself, God will forever bless those who are good and judge (punish) those who are evil.

The goodness of God means that we can know ahead of time how God will consistently respond to our desires, decisions and behavior. God always blesses good and curses evil.

Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart. But those who turn to crooked ways the LORD will banish with the evildoers.
(Psalm 125:4-5)

Of course, the Lord's determination to save a multitude from his judgment complicates what would otherwise be so simple. In order for God to offer a way for sinners to be forgiven and not judged, His curse on the unrepentant world must be suspended for a time. As a result, much good presently goes unrewarded and much evil goes unpunished. This makes the world a very unfair place to live. But fundamental to biblical faith is the conviction that Christ will return when the work of salvation is complete, and on that day everything will be made right.

However, even during this period of limited divine reward and punishment, God is still God. While the consequences of Heaven and Hell are reserved for the future, He still finds ways to consistently respond to good and evil in this life.

Believing that God Almighty will always find a way to bless godliness and oppose ungodliness is what the Bible means when it speaks of *fearing* God. To fear God means to take His responses to our choices more seriously than anything else. To fear God is to understand that the Sovereign Lord will react to every moral choice we make—every single one—and His reaction makes every other consequence insignificant by comparison.

“The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.”
(Job 28:28)

In terms of punishment, it is true that salvation in Christ eliminates that aspect of fear which has to do with retribution (1 John 4:18). We have already been punished through Christ, our substitute.

Believers cannot afford, however, to ignore God's displeasure just because we no longer fear His judgmental punishment.

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ... Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.
(Hebrews 12:7-11)

The Lord will not stop reacting to our sin once we become His children. God's good character moves Him to oppose everything in us which tends toward evil—all that is self destructive, ugly, foolish—anything that could hurt us or

would be unworthy of a child of God. With understanding and patience, God skillfully disciplines us until we see the problem and choose what is right.

The fear of God, however, is just as much about reward as it is about discipline, God always finds ways to reward choices which honor Him.

The eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. (2 Chronicles 16:9)

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)

While Paradise awaits Christ's return, the Lord has many, many ways to enable us to taste Paradise in this world—precious fellowship, amazing provision, remarkable endurance, and a peace that goes beyond human understanding.

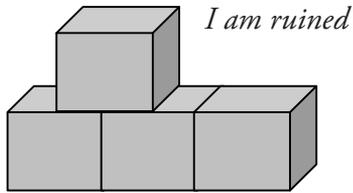
More than that, God is storing up eternal rewards for His children. While it is true that our service to the Lord is imperfect, Christ's sacrifice has atoned for all our failings. One day, our God shall take great delight in richly rewarding every single act of goodness pursued in Christ's name.

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. (Hebrews 6:10)

"Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:23)

It is important for us to see right and wrong as fundamental to life because God is good, and His good character is unchanging. We must learn to fear God (take Him more seriously than anything else) in every moral choice, knowing that both in this life or in eternity, there shall be consequences.

And the consequences of honoring God are fantastic! God is good.



The second row of blocks is about me. The Bible reveals quite a bit about fallen human nature and the humanity Christ is renewing. These two blocks are bookends; neither gives a complete picture by itself, but together they remind me who I am. The first bookend isn't pretty.

There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins
(Ecclesiastes 7:20)

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away ... there is no one who does good, not even one.

(Romans 3:10-12)

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
(1 John 1:8)

The Bible says that the first human being, Adam, was created in the image of God. Adam chose sin—he chose to supplant God's rightful place as Creator to define good and evil—and his choice warped the human spirit for all his descendants. Indeed, Genesis 5:3 (speaking of a time after the Fall) is careful to note that Adam had a son "in his own image," not in God's image.

This means that we were born with a spiritual predisposition to reject God's rightful authority, replacing it with our own or assigning it to "gods" of our own devising (idols).

For although they knew God [from nature], they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened ... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised.

(Romans 1:21,25)

This inborn predisposition is not something we grow out of, but rather become more encased in as we grow up. Each of us finds our own way to justify a hunt for satisfaction that takes us far away from God's design for human happiness. The human heart is susceptible to distortion and lies concerning God. We are predisposed to suggestions that put God and God's will in an unfavorable or unappealing light.

One direct result of sin is that we naturally tend to put ourselves first in any relationship or social setting. This predictable tendency works to degrade every relationship we have, from the office to the home—even on the roadway. Warfare, crime, national and ethnic tensions, class and career struggles, family feuds, intergenerational conflict, sexual and child abuse—all of it and much more come out of our tendency to put self first.

Another result is even more personal and pervasive. The Bible says that human sin cuts us off from God, our source of life. This brings the sting of death not only to our spiritual discernment and relationships, as mentioned above, but also to our physical bodies. On the one hand, we easily become enslaved to physical cravings. On the other hand, we are vulnerable to accident, disease and death.

Presbyterians have a good term for the impact of sin. It is called *Total Depravity*. The point of this term is not that we are as bad as we could be. We aren't. (We can always get worse!) The point is that every part of our being has been wrecked or broken by sin. If our soul were a house, then every room has been trashed to some degree—body, mind, spirit, emotions, relationships, desires, aspirations, self-image, health—everything. Some parts of a person may be in much better shape than other parts, but no part is innocent or untouched by the predisposition to distrust and displace the Living God.

Knowing I am ruined tells me I should expect opposition to any effort toward godliness in several areas. First, I should expect opposition in my own heart. I should expect conflicting and confused desires within me. Negative ideas about God's competence or concern may sound appealing.

I should also expect opposition from my key relationships. Others in my life will tend to put themselves first, as I do, and may resist giving up to God some of their influence with me.

In addition, I should expect opposition from my body, and I should never underestimate the seductive power of comfort and the gratification of physical desires.

In all of history, there has only been one person free of sin. Born of a virgin by an act of the Holy Spirit, Jesus did not inherit the sinful predispositions of Adam. His sinless record enabled Him to become our Savior—a second Adam as it were, founding a new race of humanity defined by spiritual rebirth.

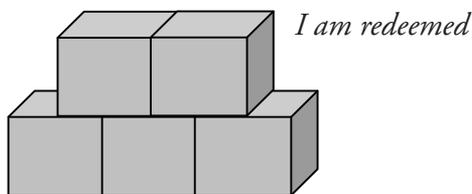
In this life, however, I shall never be as sinless as Jesus. I should never expect myself to be perfect, or be surprised when I fail. This in no way excuses my sin. It does mean, however, that I need not go through the elaborate, repeated pretense of condemning myself for my failures, as if they were unnatural to me. They are quite natural to all that I have inherited from my connection with fallen humanity.

I need to do three things with regard to my sin. I need to grieve over how I have been hurt and how I hurt others. I need to take realistic steps to live more successfully in light of my weaknesses and the weaknesses of others. And to be able to do both of those things, I must stop condemning myself and others.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "it is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.
(Romans 12:19)

Condemnation, vengeance, retribution, judgment—these are not bad things. They are good things... when performed by a good and perfect God. It is, however, completely inappropriate for us to try our hand at them. For one thing, we are not perfect. For another thing, we are not God, who alone has the right to judge. We must rest in God's forgiveness in Christ, and leave the condemnation or forgiveness of others in His hands. It is His business.

As for me, I am ruined.



The last block was hard to swallow because it required us to take responsibility. This block is even harder because it requires us to accept being loved beyond all we could reasonably expect or hope for.

There is a sense in which every other block up to now prepares us to understand this one. Our salvation is accomplished by a sovereign God. It is personal—His establishment of a covenant or relationship with us. It is founded upon God's goodness, requiring that Christ endure God's wrath and earn a perfect reputation all for our sake. In short, it perfectly restores one who is ruined.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you.
(Deuteronomy 15:15)

Redemption is an old term having to do with buying a slave for the purpose of freeing him. That was how Old Testament Israel first experienced salvation—as deliverance from Egyptian slavery.

A number of other models followed, each describing the same experience of saving faith in different ways. For example, there is justification, a term from law courts indicating that a person is not liable for charges made against them. Adoption is a totally different image that shows how a non-relative can become part of the family and an heir to the family's name and wealth. Naturalization describes the believer transformed from an alien to a citizen in God's kingdom. Reconciliation pictures two estranged persons finding a way to put aside their differences. Incorporation describes the mysterious way believers are spiritually joined together as a great Body, with Christ as its Head. These and other biblical images describe how Jesus Christ creates a new, saving relationship between God and the believer.

God's Spirit accomplishes this in two ways. He begins by bringing to life the spiritual ability to see God for who He is, and therefore love and trust Him accordingly—this is the part of humanity that died in Adam and is reborn in Christ. Then, the Holy Spirit responds to our new faith by giving us a completely new identity from God's perspective, exchanging our record of imperfection

with Christ's record of perfection. God's love and commitment toward us thus become eternally secure while we pursue the ongoing process of spiritual transformation.

Our redemption directly addresses all the ways in which we have been ruined. First of all, our inner predisposition to distrust God is reversed.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

If Christ is in you ... your spirit is alive. (Romans 8:10)

The sinful nature ["flesh"] desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature ["flesh"]. They are in conflict with each other ... (Galatians 5:17)

In my inner being I delight in God's law. (Romans 7:20,22)

God's Law used to be an outside influence, ineffectively hammering away at a thick shell of sin encasing a soul dead toward God. But through the gospel of Christ, the Holy Spirit causes a rebirth in the core of our spirit. This turns the tables and makes trust in God our innermost influence. Instead of condemning us from the outside, God's Law becomes the deep longing of a revitalized heart.

The old shell of warped thinking, feeling and behaving (our *flesh*) hasn't gone away. Instead of resisting the external demands of the Law, it now works to suppress the growth of new inner desires, causing constant conflict. But it cannot fully resist God's central influence. We are changing from the inside out, and all our sin can do now is slow us down.

Our relationships also begin to be healed. The reason is obvious. When you give up the need to be #1, it is easier to genuinely care for others.

Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:11)

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

The same faith that binds us to God, binds us to everyone else bound to Him with the same faith. If we have the same Father, then we are brothers; the same King, then fellow citizens; members of the same body, then members of one another, and so on. The Church becomes a worldwide family spanning cultures and generations.

Faith actually changes our attitude toward every human being, whether we are related by a common faith or not.

From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.
(2 Corinthians 5:1)

Love your neighbor as yourself. (Mark 12:31)

Love your enemies, do good to them ... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.
(Luke 6:35,36)

I honor God by treasuring everyone made in His image, however imperfect that image might have become.

On top of all this, we now have the hope of eternal life even as our bodies wear out.

We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven.
(2 Corinthians 5:1)

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:13)

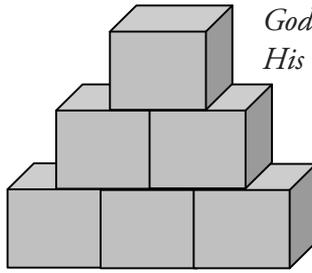
God has decreed that when Christ returns, all humanity shall be raised from the dead—some to glory and some to judgment. Those who were redeemed by faith in this life inherit a new earth. Knowing that I will live for ever, and shall do so in great glory and joy, gives me the perspective I need to generously share this life, and bear whatever hardships I encounter along the way.

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
(Psalm 90:12)

The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.
(Romans 13:11)

Only a few short days remain for me before I enter into the next phase of glory! These days are a precious gift, enabling me to serve Christ in ways I will never again be able to repeat. I must order my priorities accordingly, and live with eternal joy just around the corner.

I am redeemed.



*God and I will accomplish
His will together*

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. (2 Timothy 2:20-21)

God's people discover their purpose through faith in Christ. Christ inspires us to understand our goals in terms of God's will and God's plan.

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. (Matthew 6:33)

Our Father in heaven ... your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10)

The Lord intends to apply through us the salvation His Son accomplished. God has prepared assignments for each of His people to achieve, working with His Spirit alongside. To that end, He has shaped our place in history, our environment, our gifts and our specific opportunities.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

One of the keys to understanding our own calling from God is to realize that we rarely know the specific intended outcomes of our service. We are simply told our duties; God sovereignly manages the myriad of variables and uses our work to complete His intended goals.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

Three areas comprise most of our understanding of our duties, or calling. In the first place, we have God's Law.

His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.
(Psalm 1:2-3)

God's Law refers to everything in the Bible that teaches or illustrates how God's character is properly reflected in a human being. This external standard used to expose our sin and threaten our condemnation. Now, however, that is old news. Christ's redemption has shielded us from God's curse and the Holy Spirit has written the essence of the Law upon our deepest desires.

Now, God's written Law serves as a reliable standard to guide and express our raw spiritual motivations. It includes commandments, proverbs, the history of God's dealings with Israel, and most important of all: the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus concentrates all of God's Law into one seed—love—and then cultivates that kernel until that it bears all the fruit described by God's Law. Cultivating the love inspired by Christ into godly character and practical commitment is the principle way we respond to our calling.

More specifically, we also pursue our calling by being faithful in the relationships, or roles, God has assigned to us.

Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. (1 Corinthians 7:17)

"And who knows but that you have come to [this] position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

We accomplish God's will by being the kind of son or daughter, spouse, parent, worker, citizen, etc. that God has called each of us to be. These roles in our family, career and society outline our own individual calling. Being faithful in each one, even in small matters, opens the way for the Lord to accomplish His redemptive purposes through us. Such faithfulness may even result in Him entrusting us with additional roles and responsibilities.

However, if we want to be involved in one particular project which is dear to our Lord's heart, it is not difficult to find it.

"On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:16)

Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into ... Christ. From him the whole body ... grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Every single Christian has gifts and opportunities to support the worship, the edification and fellowship, or the outreach of Christ's church. The expansion of Christ's church is the great project that suspends God's judgment of this planet. The Church's health and growth should be the personal concern and passion of every Christian.

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

When my soul is stable and coordinated, I am aware of God's will and can work to accomplish it alongside His Spirit.

Using the Blocks

Putting the blocks to work as a means of meditation involves three steps.

- Memorize the themes of the blocks. This is simple memorization, not meditation, but is necessary to use this scheme. If you use actual wooden blocks, you may want to label them if that would be helpful.
- Study the basic content behind each theme. This is not so much meditation, as it is study. The more we understand and appreciate the truth of a biblical theme, the better we can use it. Make this a life-long goal, since the themes are truly fundamental. Begin by setting aside time to do this privately or with a group, and then revisit these themes often as other study and experiences give you deeper insight.
- When your life seems out of balance or out of control, use the blocks to meditate on the most important truths you know. Starting with the bottom row and working up, place each block (either literally if you have real blocks, or mentally) and ponder the theme it represents. Since you have already studied the theme, don't just rehearse facts. Meditation assumes you are already familiar with the facts. Meditation takes a few moments—or even seconds—to *apply* those facts to the immediate situation. Apply the truth by affirming what you know and then immediately think, say and do whatever is appropriate.

God is Sovereign

Affirmations

- It is not necessary for me to control everything. God is in control.
- God is not waiting for me to make everything come out OK. I am responsible to handle myself, not everyone and everything.
- It is not necessary for me to understand and agree with everything God is doing. God is directing all things to accomplish His ends.

Actions

Turn your lack of control into an opportunity to rejoice in God's sovereignty.

- Pray to God. Express your apprehension. Affirm that He is in control. Affirm that life (including your life) is about what *He* wants. Express thanksgiving that He has already taken your well being into account.
- If there is someone close by involved in your predicament, express to them your satisfaction that God is in control.
- Do something tangible to celebrate your relief and joy that your life is in good hands.

God is personal

Affirmations

- God is here with me now. He's in the room, right beside me, right behind me or right above me. (speak to Him – say something)
- What covenantal role might apply to this situation?
 - Father / child
 - King / subject
 - Master / servant
 - Teacher / student
 - Brother / brother
 - Physician / patient
 - Husband / wife
 - Lawyer / client
 - Shepherd / sheep
 - Lover / lover
 - Coach / athlete
 - Friend / friend

Actions

Turn your situation into an opportunity to explore an aspect of your relationship with God.

Thinking of God as my _____, and me as His _____, then:

- Address Him appropriately (Sir? Dad? Doctor? Beloved? etc.)
- Confess sins or failings as you would in that context.
- Ask Him to do for you what that role implies.
- Count on Him to do what He has promised, and respond by doing what that role requires of you.

God is good

Affirmations

- Only God defines what is right and wrong in this situation—not other people, not society, not Satan, not even me.
- In Christ, the fear of punishment is removed forever.
- But God never ignores the good and evil we do. I cannot change God, I cannot successfully oppose Him and I dare not ignore Him. I need to fear Him (take Him more seriously than anything else).
- In Christ, God will wisely discipline me in this life for every wrong thing I do. No exceptions. I count on Him to love me that much.
- In Christ, God will reward me for every good thing I do, either now or for all eternity. No exceptions. He takes that much pleasure in my righteous choices.

Actions

Turn your choice into an opportunity to be blessed.

- Expose what you see that is evil, destructive, or unwise. Identify it specifically in words and sentences. Share it with a companion in your spiritual journey.
- As an act of admiration, describe to God everything you see that He delights in regarding your current situation, or would delight in as soon as you do it.
- Make your choice something that gives God pleasure.

I am ruined

Affirmations

- My worst enemy is my own set of old habits of thought and behavior that are infected by warped ideas and passions.
- I am not surprised or intimidated by my failings. God is neither surprised nor intimidated.
- Sickness, disease and death are out of place in Paradise, but all too normal in the fallen world we have produced.

Actions

Turn your weakness into an opportunity for strength.

- Express in specific words the lies you are being tempted to believe about God. Counter each lie with the truth about Him.

- Grieve over the ways you have hurt yourself and others.
- Stop condemning yourself. Stop it. Live in God's forgiveness.
- Stop condemning others. Stop it. Leave their condemnation or forgiveness in God's hands.
- Change things. Make realistic adjustments that take your weaknesses and the weaknesses of others into account.
- Let your physical deterioration serve as a daily "reality check" for your plans and priorities, to make sure they are not bound to the passing things of this world.

I am redeemed

Affirmations

- God never has to think for a moment about how to react to me. He has *already decided* to bind Himself to me in love forever.
- My old, sinful habits of thought and behavior are no longer *me*. They slow me down, but they cannot stop my progress in the faith.
- Because God sees me through Christ, I see others through Christ.
- I will never die. When others bury my body, my soul will be marvelously hosted until the day I am resurrected and the whole creation is remade.

Actions

Turn your eternal salvation into an opportunity to taste Paradise now.

- Just for the joy of it, do something to show God how much you love Him in return.
- Carefully and thoughtfully tell God exactly what your heart desires, going beneath the surface habits of selfishness to reveal your deepest aspirations to be like Him.
- With regard to someone you are dealing with, picture you and him/her together with Jesus. How does He think of him/her? Say something to this person that demonstrates the same attitude.
- Estimate how many days, maximum, you have left in this life. Make plans for using them to best effect; make plans for leaving; and make tentative plans for the life to come.

God and I will accomplish His work together

Affirmations

- I am alive today because there are still things God has planned to accomplish along with me.
- The Lord has given me His Spirit, His truth, His Church, specific gifts, hand picked opportunities—everything I need to accomplish His purposes for me.

Actions

Turn *every* situation into an opportunity to serve God.

- Apply one of the 10 Commandments—quote a commandment and do something to obey it right now.
- Imitate Jesus Christ—do exactly what you believe He would do if He were taking your place in your situation.
- Do something wonderful in one of the roles to which God has called you—pick a role you have neglected, or where you see a special opportunity and make (personal) history with God's Spirit.
- Build up Christ's Church—make a difference; make your church better than it would be without you.



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