



Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God

John Piper

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John Piper's newest book will help Christians think about thinking. Focusing on the life of the mind helps us to know God better, love him more, and care for the world. Along with an emphasis on emotions and the experience of God, we also need to practice careful thinking about God. Piper contends that "thinking is indispensable on the path to passion for God." So how are we to maintain a healthy balance of mind and heart, thinking and feeling?

Piper urges us to think for the glory of God. He demonstrates from Scripture that glorifying God with our minds and hearts is not either-or, but both-and. Thinking carefully about God fuels passion and affections for God. Likewise, Christ-exalting emotion leads to disciplined thinking.

Readers will be reminded that "the mind serves to know the truth that fuels the fires of the heart."

Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God Details

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Matthew says

There are two basic errors that Christians tend to fall into. One is the elevate thinking and the life of the mind with regards to theology to a point where it fails to connect with real life and results in theoretical Christians who are lacking in love. The other is to essentially demonize thinking and theology because “it only divides” and focus solely on love, which results in Christians who may love others but who worship a God they don’t really know. John Piper’s new book, Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God, seeks to destroy the underlying assumptions and problems behind both of these errors.

Piper begins the introduction with these words: “This book is a plea to embrace serious thinking as a means of loving God and people.” Ultimately, as Piper points out numerous times throughout the book, if thinking hard about God and the bible doesn’t translate into love for him and the people around you, it’s pointless. Thinking is a means, not an end. It’s how we come to know God for who he has really revealed himself to be. In response, our love for him grows and spills over into love for people as well. As someone who can get very academic in my theological pursuits sometimes, I was encouraged to step back and examine my motives. This is a good thing for any Christian to do from time to time.

The structure of the book is very helpful. Piper begins by clarifying the aims of the book, as well as what he means by thinking (mostly, he means reading, and, more specifically, the bible). He then details the role of thinking in coming to faith. From a view of election, he details the futile nature of our thinking apart from the new birth which God initiates in us. Piper treads carefully as he notes our role in thinking with regards faith and God’s role in granting that faith. This all spills over into the next chapter on what it means to love God with your mind.

Piper also takes on two ways of thinking that are dangerous to the pursuit of truth through thinking, relativism and anti-intellectualism. I found Piper’s comments on relativism very powerful and virtually devastating to that way of thinking. He says:

Relativism enables pride to put on humble clothes and parade through the street. But don’t be mistaken. Relativism chooses every turn, every pace, every street, according to its own autonomous preferences, and submits to no truth. We will serve our generation well by exposing the prideful flesh under these humble clothes.

Ultimately where Piper comes down is that any way of thinking that does not submit to God’s truth and acts as though we can’t know God’s truth in the bible and creation is centered on pride, whether it is conscious or not. God has determined what is true, and any way of thinking that distorts this places us in the place of God. A humble approach to thinking that seeks to understand God’s Word and submit to that truth inevitably leads to a greater love for God and others. I would highly recommend this book for all Christians, both thinkers and those who aren’t naturally built that way, as a means to understanding the role of our minds in our faith.

Lauren says

Think is a good book to read in order to gain a biblical perspective on thinking. Piper does a good job of explaining how thinking and feeling are not mutually exclusive but work together to fuel one another. The point of thinking is to cause us to love God and our neighbor not to build up ourselves.

I find his arguments against anti-intellectualism helpful. God wants us to be humble in our understanding not to avoid intellectual development altogether. The verse "think over these things and God will give you understanding" shows our responsibility in seeking to understand but in the end it is God by His grace who gives the understanding.

Piper explains his arguments thoroughly and winsomely. I am far from an intellectual yet this book helped me to grow in my desire understanding of thinking biblically.

Rick Davis says

Great book on the importance of the life of the intellect for Christians.

A couple of my favorite quotes:

"If all the universe and everything in it exist by the design of an infinite, personal God, to make his manifold glory known and loved, then to treat any subject without reference to God's glory is not scholarship but insurrection."

"God did not give us minds as ends in themselves. The mind provides the kindling for the fires of the heart. Theology serves doxology. Reflection serves affection. Contemplation serves exultation. Together they glorify Christ to the full."

Jonathan Beigle says

Think is all about really going deep when reading the Bible and trying to understand, not just get through it. Piper talks a lot about how some people have the "gift" of thinking and some do not. I totally agree. I'm not really much of a thinker, and I need to do a better job trying to better understand the Bible. During the latter third of the book, Piper really focused on battling anti-intellectualism which says that we don't really need to understand everything, but just need to have faith. Admittedly, I'm in this camp, and struggle to move out of it. It seems that many people have pride in knowing exactly what the Bible means (Piper argues against this too), but we will never really know everything about God, heaven, theology, etc. until we get to heaven. Piper says that we need to lean more toward understanding instead of anti-intellectualism.

Some of my favorite quotes:

p. 35 - "If we are to live according to our nature as human beings in the image of God, and if we are to glorify God fully, we must engage our mind in knowing him truly and our hearts in loving him duly."

p. 63 - "We are an adulterous generation. We love man-centered error more than Christ-exalting truth, and our rational powers are taken captive to serve this adulterous love."

p. 80 - "Loving God with the mind means that our thinking is wholly engaged to do all it can to awaken and express the heartfelt fullness of treasuring God above all things." (probably the key quote in the whole

book...he repeats it several times)

p. 90 - "To 'love God with all your mind' means engaging all your powers of thought to know God as fully as possible in order to treasure him for all he is worth."

p. 123 - "If we abandon thinking, we abandon the Bible, and if we abandon the Bible we abandon God."

p. 182 - "Humility is the great prerequisite for understanding the truth of God."

p. 184 - "Thinking that does not aim to display Christ and build up people is not worthy of God's approval."

Ray Umphrey says

Piper's book, Think, is a great introduction to Christian thinking. In this book, Piper attempts to kindle the desire for Christian thinking among evangelicals. He does this by sharing his personal experience, by defining the practice of Christian thinking, and by answering the criticisms of the relativists and the anti-intellectuals. It is a helpful antidote to the excesses of relativism and anti-intellectualism. The seasoned Christian thinker, however, will find little here which is ground-breaking. Relativists may find Piper's section on relativism lacking in thorough argumentation. Overall, Think is a good read which would be helpful to encourage Christians to think about their faith in a deeper way.

Jake says

John Piper's books are always a refreshing read when scattered throughout other writers with varying styles. I love that he references almost everything; I love that you can be confident he's done his research, and I love that he has a clear passion for the Bible and what it has to say about anything and everything.

That being said, this book was a great Piper read. He tackles a lot about the processes of thinking and feeling and their connections to our individual relationships with God. His focus is on Godly thinking as a means of loving God more. He says, "Loving Him with all of our mind means that our thinking is wholly engaged to do all it can to awaken and express this heartfelt fullness of treasuring God above all things" (Kindle location 1186). Piper emphasizes the gospel and how truly understanding the gospel is the same as accepting it because of Holy Spirit's work in illuminating the Truth.

His emphasis on humbly dwelling on the "compelling beauty" of God is a great encouragement and challenge for the individual who is mostly wrapped up in thinking about God in a systematic and analytical way. On the other hand, his emphasis on the importance of rational and logical use of the mind is a poignant and directive message to people so caught up in beauty, passion, and feeling that they're missing some huge things in their relationships with God.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book about using (in Piper's words) both thinking and feeling, both meditation and experience, both belief and passion in relationship with God as means to know Him and love Him more.

p.s. John Piper has some great responses to the Relativistic bent of our society and my generation!

Some favorite quotes:

"Some joys are only possible on the other side of sorrow" (location 317).

"Our self-centered hearts distort our reason to the point where we cannot use it to draw true inferences from what is really there. If our disapproval of God's existence is strong enough, our sensory faculties and our rational faculties will not be able to infer that He is there" (location 822).

-A great, great summary of the blindness that we experience before illumination from the Spirit of God allows us to see.

"The corruption of our hearts is the deepest root of our irrationality" (location 828).

and the answer...

"Because our hearts now see Christ as infinitely valuable, our resistance to the truth is overcome. Our thinking is no longer the slave of deceitful desires, because our desires are changed. Christ is the supreme treasure. So our thinking is made docile to the truth of the gospel. We don't use our thinking to distort the gospel anymore. We don't call it foolish. We call it wisdom and power and glory [I Cor. 1:3-24]" (location 1009).

"The phrase 'compellingly beautiful' stresses two things that I am arguing for. One is that loving God is not a mere decision. You cannot merely decide to love classical music-or country western music-much less God. The music must become compelling. Something must change inside of you. That change makes possible the awakening of a compelling sense of its attractiveness. So it is with God. You do not merely decide to love him. Something changes inside of you, and as a result he becomes compellingly attractive. His glory-his beauty-compels your admiration and delight. He becomes your supreme treasure. You love him"

-Wow, this is an amazing quote. Such a good way of understanding so much about loving God and why so many people don't love Him. It's both convicting to my own heart and illuminative of others'.

Piper quotes J Gresham Machen from "What Is Faith?" about relativism and it's mindset.

"This temper of the mind is hostile to precise definitions. Indeed nothing makes a man more unpopular in the controversies of the present day than an insistence upon definition of terms...Men discourse very eloquently today upon such subjects as God, religion, Christianity, atonement, redemption, faith; but are greatly incensed when they are asked to tell in simple language what the mean by these terms" (kindle location 1456).

Aaron says

My full review review is available at Blogging Theologically:

R. C. Sproul once lamented that, "we live in what may be the most anti-intellectual period in the history of Western civilization." Strong words, to be sure. But there's something to them, isn't there?

Consider, for a moment, how we determine our agreement with ideas and experiences. More often than not, it's based on what we feel. If it feels good, we do it; and if it feels good, it must obviously be good for us, right?

This comes into play in how we develop (or don't as the case may be) our doctrine as well; we chafe at the hard truths of the Christian faith—the exclusivity of Christ, the atonement, the authority of Scripture, and countless others—because they don't feel good. So we don't wrestle. We don't engage. We don't search the Scriptures.

We don't think deeply.

And because we don't think deeply, we rob ourselves of a deeper love for God.

In his latest book, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God*, John Piper seeks to help readers understand how the heart and mind glorify God together and that “thinking is indispensable on the path to passion for God” (p. 27)...

Treyyyy says

*4.5 stars

I really enjoyed this book, it was much different than I thought it was going to be but very thought provoking. It touches on topics like 'How can the act of thinking less to salvation in Christ?' and other... thinky topics... Haha!

It was very matter of fact and clear which in one way was refreshing and made it easy to understand, but I can see how some might think it sounds harsh.

I did really like this book and if you're looking for a book on deeper thinking and a better understanding of the topic, this is a great resource!

Michelle Nezat says

This book was a timely, well thought out, reminder that thinking is absolutely part of the Christian experience with God. He makes the case against the "thinking elite" and even speaks to the general "non-thinker". Loved it.

Alexis Neal says

A decent enough book. It was, perhaps, less revelatory than Piper may have hoped, at least for me, but I already agreed with him about the importance of thinking (love the Lord your God with all your *mind*, after all) and the danger of intellectual pride and spiritually dead knowledge. I have seen in my own life the emptiness of head knowledge alone, and have also been guilty of intellectual laziness when I avoided thinking about challenging spiritual truths instead of continuing to grapple with those truths by the light of Scripture. So I agree with Piper that we love God best with heart *and* mind *and* soul *and* strength. Still, for those who struggle with a natural (or learned) antipathy to intellectualism, or those who place their faith in knowledge and understanding (and there are many Christians in both camps), this could well be a much-needed rebuke.

I particularly liked Piper's discussion of reading as thinking, but that's hardly surprising, since that discussion included linguistics, hermeneutics, textualism, and any number of other areas that I find inherently interesting.

All in all, a fine book, though not exactly earth shattering (for me, anyway).

Blake says

Although not my favorite book by author, pastor, and theologian, John Piper, I think Piper, in the book, "Think", addressed some critical issues within the culture and especially within the Evangelical world. Often feelings and thinking are pitted against each other as if the Christian life is either all thinking with no feelings, or, given the other extreme, the Christian life is all "feelings" with no thinking. One ends up with either dead orthodoxy or emotional frenzy, depending upon which extreme one takes. Sadly, deep thinking has taken a hit within the church in recent decades. "Knowledge puffs up" became the banner cry of many as they attempted to put down knowledge and promote an agenda that was feeling driven with an "all we need is love" mindset. Sadly, that mentality has more in common with a Beatles' song than it does a sound understanding of God's Word. In the pages of the book, Piper explains the meaning of "Thinking" and how critical thinking is to salvation and to living a life of faith. In fact, Piper spends one chapter explaining how we love God by treasuring God with all of our mind. One of my favorite sections was where Piper addresses the issue of Relativism, given that relativism has saturated the mindset of our culture and sadly, the church in some cases. After this section, Piper gives attention to the Anti-Intellectualism that has seeped into the church and shows how it isn't godly to be opposed to intellectualism. Piper challenges the reader to think and to think deeply about the person and character of God and His wonders. He challenges the reader who is opposed to deep thought to change and to, not only think, but to think deeply about the glories of the Creator and the salvation He has provided. Last, Piper ends his book with a final plea, which I think should be at, both the start and the finish. The plea is in two parts. One is to those who are all about knowledge at the expense of feelings. The other part is a plea to those who have neglected knowledge and have bought into the idea that they are the more spiritual because they simply love and have feelings. I suspect that the book won't be widely read because it tends to be more philosophical in essence, but it should be read since it will stimulate the reader to THINK!

Rachel says

I go back and forth about Pastor John/Dr. Piper (which of the two I choose will color the way I listen to him so I try to pick both). Especially when it comes to the (in my opinion) needlessly ubiquitous discussion/debate about gender roles and subjugating women with regard to leadership in the church. And something about the rigid Calvinist bent to which he vocally subscribes just flat rubs me the wrong way. **HOWEVER.** However...

I've observed and I believe that the majority of "Christian literature" (such a broad term) on the life of the mind is mostly written in the interest of the quality of life of the reader. Topics such as how to avoid chronically negative thinking, how to identify and fix patterns of thinking that are inconsistent with the truth about who God is, who He says that we are, and our relationship to Him--these are important and good! We

need to address these problems in a biblical way! But at the end of the day, it seems like those topics end with US--what will improve our life, feelings, relationships (even our relationship with God), etc. The mind is such a complex enterprise and the brain such a devastatingly beautiful thing in design and power; it seems that there must be more meant for the purpose of such an elegant and sophisticated process than ideas which are well-intentioned but at their core are focused more on us and less on God than they should be.

Among many well-exposed points, Pastor/Dr. discusses the process of thinking as a faculty meant to ascribe glory to God (isn't this what everything is for?), and so (as I read it) asserts that we think best when we think about the wonder and majesty of God Himself. This makes so much sense that it's thrilling (I love when things make sense!) and embarrassing all at the same time. Let's see here: I spend a good portion of my headspace thinking about people I care about. Family members, friends, and let's not forget that one gentleman that has had my attention at any given moment since I was 13. But how much of that time is spent in fascination of Jesus Himself? Not enough! For a kid who grew up in church, it seems like the more lofty thing is to think deeply (no pun intended) about profound theology or doctrine instead of the God-man Himself. If I spent half as much time thinking about Him as I do everyone else...(wondrous...I don't even know how best to finish that thought). Barriers to good thinking are also discussed in the book, such as the cultural problem of relativism, and the dangers of anti-intellectualism in some areas of the church. But the primary takeaway for me has been to examine the content of my thoughts, and not just in the way of avoiding sinful thinking. This is less of a "what should I NOT be thinking about?" (for this is the life of the "good Christian") and much more of a "what should I be thinking MORE about?" issue. And for me, it's the person of Jesus Himself.

And, when I really think about it, wouldn't that do SO MUCH to solve the issues that the other books on thinking are looking to address? One stone for an infinite number of birds.

Eli Moyer says

An invigorating and inspiring counterbalance to the overriding anti-intellectualism that permeates today's Evangelicalism.

Douglas Wilson says

This was a very fine book. I enjoyed it immensely.

Brian Eshleman says

Makes his point that Christians are called to engage emotions and logic and that we too often use faith as an excuse not to concentrate. Does seem repetitive in places, like a bulked-up sermon series.
