

A photograph of a rustic wooden cabin with a steep, gabled roof and a red door, nestled in a dense forest. A stone path leads from the foreground towards the cabin. The scene is framed by tall evergreen trees, and the lighting suggests a bright, sunny day. The text "More Thought Conditioners" is overlaid in a white, italicized serif font at the top.

More Thought Conditioners

Brian Deneen

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*Twenty-one transformational Bible passages for
eternal life practice*

with commentary by Brian Deneen

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More Thought Conditioners by Brian Deneen, M.A.
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Introduction

The words of the Bible are powerful, life-changing words. Across all cultures and all epochs of human history, the Bible speaks God's revelation of life and hope for all people.

In 1950, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale published a booklet called Thought Conditioners. It contained forty Bible passages most meaningful to him during his Christian service as a pastor, counselor, author and speaker. In the introduction, he encourages the reader to follow his practice by choosing Bible passages most meaningful to them, then use the following practice:

1. First, read all the passages to get an overview of the chosen passages.
2. Then memorize each passage and reference. Do this by choosing the one most meaningful to you. Read and meditate upon it every day until that passage becomes a part of your life and thinking.
3. Do the same with each remaining passage.

Using this practice, the Bible passages can be incorporated into the thought process of the believer, "soaking" into the subconscious mind and becoming an

integral part of the thought process of our life in Christ. It's one good way to foster the "renewing of your mind" that Romans 12:1, 2 discusses (see page 7).

While there aren't forty Bible passages here, I have found these to be among the most meaningful to me in my years as pastor, teacher, church musician and Christian. They have all become part of my life thought process throughout the years and provided guidance and inspiration in times of trial as well as times of peace. They are in no particular order.

I also recommend reading "around" each passage to see the context of each one, reading before and after the passage to see "where the authors were" when they said and/or wrote the passage. This will help you understand the life setting and apply the passage more appropriately to your own life situation.

I hope that these Bible passages and my few comments offered here are inspirational to you, encouraging you as you live the eternal life of Christ that we have received as a gift from God. Always "Start with God" as you live your life now through Christ in the world.

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More Thought Conditioners

1. Eternal Life

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:7-10 NIV)

The mission of Jesus has been discussed and analyzed for the past 21 centuries. People have many opinions about that mission and have written many books about it.

Jesus also has a statement of his mission, one that is often ignored or disregarded. He is centrally concerned with giving life to everyone in our world. He is also uniquely qualified to give the life that he created to everyone and anyone who will accept it (see John 1:9-13). All the barriers that many would construct are pushed aside by Jesus in his effort to save his creation.

We, too, are included in His mission. Even though we are living in a far distant time, be assured that He is Lord of time as He is Lord of life. He rules both. He offers life, abundant and free, to everyone across the centuries of time - if we will accept it.

2. Life Direction

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5, 6 NIV)

I first encountered these verses when I was nine years of age. A man in our church in Fort Worth, Texas challenged me to read the Bible. He told me that if I read the Bible all the way through, he would give me a pair of custom cowboy boots. He suggested that I start with the book of Proverbs.

Well, I never got through the Bible that time and never got my cowboy boots. But I sure was fascinated by reading in Proverbs. These verses arrested my attention and have been critical to my life ever since. The Lord has made my paths straight, especially when I couldn't see the path ahead. I knew that I could trust Him to guide me through some very perplexing times. And He's still guiding me today. He will guide you as well. Trust in the Lord first. Then He will inform your understanding and make your paths straight.

3. God's Presence

No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Joshua 1:5 NIV)

"I will never leave you nor forsake you." This was the first communication I ever received from God. I was very young when God first reached out to me and this is what He said.

Of course, at that age, I had no idea what it really meant. What I did know was that I received what I came to know as the gift of God's presence immediately and, along with that, a peace and a confidence that has stayed with me through all of my life circumstances.

It would be five years more before He guided me to accept Him as my personal savior; but that's another story. He has been with me ever since. If any wandering away occurred, that was my affair, not God's. And He will always be with you as well. He never leaves. Turn to Him in repentance and receive His gift of eternal life.

4. The Work of God

Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:29 NIV)

The power of belief is key to living life. This human life that God gives to everyone, whether they serve Him or not, is governed by belief. You are what you believe.

With that said, the reality that Jesus has created is the framework for belief. All of human life is oriented toward God who has made all of us.

So when asked what the work of God is, Jesus quite naturally responded with this phrase: to believe in the one that He has sent, Himself, in person. When we believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we join with the creative reality that God has made and begin to live eternal life now.

That belief also conditions everything we say and think. In so doing, we express the life that he gives through our lives now. Accept that life now and be transformed into His eternal intention for you, growing constantly, guided by His omnipotent hand and enjoying the "mind of Christ" now.

5. Born Again From Above

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." (John 3:3 NIV)

The new life that Jesus describes is so different from life without Him that it is an actual new birth. Being born again is not so much a formula as it is the result of what God does in the believer. We are completely made new.

Make no mistake - we are born again from above and given eternal life when we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Of course, it takes us the rest of our earthly lifetime to explore that new life and grow into it. Our growth begins immediately, the same way that an infant begins to grow, learn and mature. And Jesus is there with us every step of the way.

6. Think This Way

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. (Philippians 4:8 NIV)

Our thoughts determine our life and conduct. What we think about habitually conditions our entire lives. Our minds control our bodies and, consequently, our entire lives are shaped and colored by those thoughts. They express our beliefs, creating a life that conforms to the beliefs that we hold deeply about ourselves. So thinking about the right things is key to living our lives in Christ. This is not limited to specifically "religious" subjects. Indeed, all of our thoughts need to be conditioned toward God's reality of light and life. To change your life for the better, think better thoughts.

That is exactly what the apostle Paul recommends in this passage. Thoughts that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy are a great catalog of the way we can think to condition our lives. Our attitudes and even our physical health will improve as we meditate on life-giving thoughts. Our thoughts will and do determine our lives. So think thoughts that conform to these qualities to be on the eternal life path.

7. Be Transformed!

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1, 2 NIV)

Our world has a particular pattern of thought and action. We are perhaps all too familiar with it, so no description will be offered here. As we live our lives in our minds, that mental life then controls and maintains our bodies in accordance with our thought habits. Rather than adopting that pattern of the world, "buying in" to those prejudices and judgments, the apostle Paul instructs us to offer our very bodies as living sacrifices for God's purposes. When we do so, we find ourselves conforming to God's pattern. It is His desire to transform our thinking, to renew our minds according to His thoughts and ways on an ongoing daily basis. Then we will know God's will in our lives.

We choose the beginning by offering our bodies as living sacrifices. Current culture is not our model; God's holiness takes over. So our physical bodies are brought into God's life intention as our minds are renewed. Then our lives - mind, body and spirit - are transformed into God's intended image for us. Renewal follows that choice and continues all the days of our earthly lives and into eternity. It is God's way for us.

So let us employ all the tools and resources that we have in modern life as our part to saturate ourselves with God's thoughts in Scripture and God's way in our daily life and conversation. Then we will live out the life of His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

8. Eternal Life Now

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24 NIV)

There is a common idea that we receive eternal life when we die to this world. Death is seen as the portal to life eternal in heaven with Jesus. But Jesus says in this passage that we are already eternal citizens. Death is not the beginning of eternal life. Belief is that door.

When you believe in Jesus, you have "crossed over" into eternal life at that instant. Your life is then protected and promoted by Jesus Christ, the life-giver. Your name is written in the Book of Life, never to be erased. You are transformed (that is, converted) from death to life.

What a tremendous, freeing truth! The very life of Jesus Christ is yours as you accept Him into your life. And it happens now!

9. Fruit of the Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25 NIV)

Fruit is the natural result of the tree's purpose. Similarly, it is God who works in us to transform our very nature, leading to new and different fruit from that transformed nature. Indeed, His perfect knowledge of us is the only pathway to bearing this fruit in our lives. Any other way falls short. Another characteristic of fruit trees is their need for pruning. Again, the husbandman knows just how much to prune and when to do it to increase the fruitfulness of the tree (see John 15:1-8).

The fruit metaphor is a very accurate statement of our life process. God, the ultimate husbandman, carefully accomplishes the "pruning" in our lives to produce His abundant fruitfulness in us.

So let that pruning of "the flesh" that gets in the way of God's fruitfulness occur in God's timing and way. Then we will be "in step with the Spirit" and living out God's abundant fruitfulness in our lives.

10. Rest for the Weary

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV)

We get tired when we work in our strength alone. Jesus takes our heavy burden and gives us rest even as we work. That divine rest is God's gift that is only available if we come to Him to receive it. We cannot work it up on our own.

Notice that this is an active rest. The yoke of an animal is a coupling together with an implement in an effort to plant and to harvest. Our yoke to Christ is also a coupling together with a difference - it is easy and light. Jesus is doing most of the pulling.

So when you find your yoke hard and your burden heavy, draw aside with Jesus. Let Him teach your part to you. Then you can be refreshed and renewed, finding rest for your soul, secure in the knowledge that He is bearing the burden.

11. Light of the World

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16 NIV) (See also: When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12 NIV))

John's gospel tells us that Jesus Christ is the light that gives light to everyone (John 1:9-13). In fact, the world is full of light, both physical and spiritual. Our eyes are made to function best in light. Indeed, our vision of color shifts to shades of gray with less-than-adequate light.

Jesus makes us into the light of the world. Notice that He is the one who is transforming us into that light, changing us in the process. He says, "You ARE the light of the world." The rest of the key is that He gives that light to all who follow Him. It is the result of "walking in the light as He is in the light" (1 John 1:5-10). We are purified and empowered to be in fellowship with Him eternally, the natural consequence of our fellowship together.

12. God's Plans

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

God's plans for those who obey Him have always been the same: a return to the fellowship and life of eternity. He brings His image to life in us that we may illustrate the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:3-14). This has always been His purpose, to include everyone who will accept Him. "Whosoever will may come" (John 3:16-21).

So the choice is ours. Will we accept the best life, the life that God, who has all power and authority in the universe (Matthew 28:16-20), has planned for us? Or will we try to substitute our own plan using no power and authority whatever? I, for one, opt for God's plan. It's always so much better and more complete than mine alone could ever be. And it's also eternal, never to fade away.

Anyone can accept God's perfect plan. Join with me and the billions of Christians alive on planet earth today in God's plan for your life. You can't do any better than perfect and eternal.

13. Our Strength

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10 NIV)

The law had been lost to the people of Israel for a long time. Now that the law had been discovered again, Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest wanted to teach them the words of the law.

The people wept when they heard the words of the law because they then knew they had not kept the law at all. The feast days, the sacrifices and all the rest of the law of Moses had lain dormant in the hearts and minds of the people. They were weeping in sorrow, regret and even fear that they were risking their lives in ignorance of the law.

But the direction of the leaders was different. They knew that a new day was dawning for Israel, a day of obedience and blessing. Indeed, obedience leads to blessing, rejoicing, confidence and security whenever the people of God repent and turn to Him.

So today, if you have been grieving over life events that have gone awry, disaster that seems certain, your own disobedience or any other happenstance that separates you from God, turn to Him in obedient repentance today. Then you can rejoice along with those ancient Israelites because the joy of the Lord is your strength as well.

14. The Love Command

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34, 35 NIV)

This is the direction that Jesus Christ gives to all of His disciples. Let's notice a few things about what is said here.

First, this is a command. It is not a menu item, a nice option when you feel like it or any neutral ground from which you decide what to do. No, this is a command to be followed by all of those who claim Christ as Savior.

Second, this love practice is a witness to those who are in your world. Everyone with whom you come into contact will know that you are Christ's disciple ". . . if you love one another." The "if" looms large; if you don't love one another, the implication is that your discipleship is called into question by those observing your life.

Let's imagine that everyone who claims to live in Christ followed this command daily. What a change we would see in our world! Changing the world through loving one another as He has loved us is His plain intention. And He is the one who empowers us to love as He has loved. Let it ever be so in our lives.

15. Salvation's Results

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:16-18 NIV)

Part of this passage is very familiar. Indeed, some have taken to writing the Bible reference to it in large letters on placards at sporting events. It is likely the one Bible verse reference that many people know.

The rest of the passage is less familiar. Indeed, the rest tells us that there is an eternal cost to not believing in Jesus Christ: God's condemnation. And that condemnation has already occurred. A judgment verdict has already been entered: people do evil deeds. The condemned status of non-believers is a current reality. Judgment day has already occurred. Saving us from this judgment is why Jesus Christ came to earth.

Belief in God's one and only Son is the antidote to the poison of evil that currently infects and destroys everyone on planet earth. Anyone can believe and pass from death to life now (see John 5:24). Indeed, we must do this now in order to come into the light of eternal life.

There is no neutral ground; unbelievers are condemned already. Today is the day of salvation. Accept Him now and gain eternal life today.

16. Christ's New Creation

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:16-21 NIV)

People tend to regard belief in Jesus Christ as a religious experience, part of their lives in addition to whatever else they do. Our passage tells us that this worldly, "religious" point of view no longer applies when we truly accept Jesus Christ as savior and Lord.

The new birth issues in a new creation. The old ways and thoughts are swept away and we are continually recreated by God, the only one who has the power and knowledge to do that. No earthly authority has the ability that God exercises on behalf of those who are "in Christ."

The "old" that has gone includes everything that we hold dear in our limited understanding and view. This likely includes our "old" concept of religion. God gives us a new life, replacing the

old life with eternal life in Him. This new life includes a new ministry for all believers: the ministry of reconciliation. We reach out in daily witness to everyone we meet with this message: be reconciled to God. He is the one who delivers that reconciliation through us.

We become the righteousness of God in this process. He transforms us, restoring His image in us. In turn, we become Christ's ambassadors in the world, empowered by His Holy Spirit to deliver His message of reconciliation life and love.

Leave behind all the death and destruction that life has been and follow Jesus Christ. Accept His new creation into your mind and heart. Then he will recreate you in the image that He has in mind. It is the best possible life that He has created just for you.

17. Perfect in Love

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:43-48 NIV)

Our transformation in Christ includes love for everyone in our lives. It is easy to love those who love us, as our passage points out. Praying for our persecutors and loving our enemies, however, are actions that God motivates and brings about in us.

Indeed, these are not "natural" (i.e., worldly) actions. Nothing in an "under the sun" (see Ecclesiastes) viewpoint would indicate that this is even a rational course of action. Nevertheless, Jesus commands us to do just these things.

This love and prayer for those who want to destroy us are steps of faith in the life we live through Christ. As we step out in faith, believing that God will bring this to pass through us, God does indeed act in these situations in our lives in transforming ways.

As a result, God works to transform us into His perfection. He loves the world, enemies and all. He gives life to everyone, whether they serve Him or not. His perfection is a perfection of love. As we serve Him, we are changed into that perfection of love as well through the power of His Holy Spirit. It is God's everyday miracle in us.

18. God's Good Works

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV)

Many read verses 8 and 9 of this passage - and stop there. One could therefore conclude that good works have no place in the Christian life because one is saved by grace, not by works.

But keep reading. Though we are not saved by works, God definitely has planned good works for us to do as a result of our salvation. Indeed, He has an entire life full of them already prepared in advance for us to do. Our part is to faithfully walk into that preparation and do those good works.

These are God's good works, not ours. He originates and prepares these good works to be the sum and substance of our life in Him. God creates in us the desire and ability and then inspires us to accomplish the work that He has prepared. We can work with confidence, knowing that the results of His prepared work are in His hands.

19. Set Free!

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. " (Romans 8:1,2 NKJ)

The apostle Paul, the author of this passage, writes this statement as the capstone of his reasoning in Romans about resurrection life in Christ (see Romans 6-8:1). Indeed, Paul has good reason to write about freedom. Before he became a believer himself, he murdered people for believing in Jesus Christ. He was set free from that condemnation "in Christ Jesus." He needed freedom most of all!

While we may not be murderers, our unbelief separates us from God just as certainly as if we were. No one "gets away" with sin; it must be destroyed as we live out life in Christ. Only Jesus Christ has the power not only to forgive but to destroy sin in the life of the believer (see 1 John 3:1-10). It is that freedom in Christ that God brings to life in us as we walk with Him.

20. Living in the Light

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:5 - 7 NIV)

Light characterises the life of Christ in us. The light that is God leaves no room for darkness of any kind, not even a shadow. This light is imparted to us when we accept Jesus as our personal Savior and grow in our relationship with Him. God's eternal life in us dispels the darkness that formerly occupied our lives

Faith in Jesus Christ results in a daily walk with Him. He not only forgives our past sins but is intimately involved in our lives to help us walk through this world in His very own light of life.

The apostle John writes very clearly about this life walk in this passage. It is a summary of true teaching about life in Christ that enables all believers to walk in God's life and light daily.

The ongoing purification of the believer through fellowship and confession is the result that God intends. In this process, though sin is not impossible, we certainly do lose our "taste" for it. Sin becomes an "if" in our lives. What was once a habit is replaced by God's righteousness as we continue to choose His light and life.

As we walk in the light as He is in the light, our dynamic fellowship with Christ and other believers comes to life. That "complete" fellowship is completely in God's light, a result that He brings about as His workmanship in us. He continually leads us into more light and life as He gives life to and through us as His kingdom purpose.

Continue to choose His purpose in your life. May His light of life be your daily walk as we walk together in Him, bringing His kingdom to pass on earth as it is in heaven.

21. Build Up One Another in Conversation

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29)

Just about everyone talks on a daily basis. We even speak sometimes without thinking about the effect that our words will have on others.

The speaking that we do daily is very powerful and influential. This passage is included in the directions for living life in Christ so that we may speak with a life-giving purpose. To do so, we must carefully consider how and what we say so that others can be helped (the old word is "edified") along their life path.

Consider how our world would be transformed into God's image if believers in Christ did this all the time. Think how much more life we would all have, supporting and encouraging one another without being patronizing. It takes practice. God can do it through you!

That is the goal of this command. God enables us to think like He does when we talk. Let's listen to Him before we speak so He can use what we say to transform our world into His image.

Notes

