Closing the Gap:
Recovering the Experiential Nature
of Reformed Spirituality

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During a break at a recent ecumenical gathering, I had the opportunity to speak with a Roman Catholic and a Methodist. When they learned that I was a minister in the Reformed Church in America and had my roots in John Calvin they both rolled their eyes. The Methodist quickly added, "Oh, you are the people who always try to explain everything!" Since this was a conference on spirituality I had a pretty clear idea of what she meant. Unfortunately there is much truth in her statement. We who call ourselves Reformed are prone to validate my Methodist friend’s observation. We often exhibit a strong concern for the analytical, intellectual, and cognitive dimension of the faith. Although this concern is absolutely essential, there is the danger that preoccupation with the cerebral aspects of Christianity may cause us to miss its more affective dimensions.¹

In defense, some might assert that Reformed people are merely attempting to provide the needed balance for those who emphasize the emotions to the neglect of the intellect. Indeed, in the contemporary church, experience appears to be the dominant concern of many. Whether this is in part a rebellion against the earlier emphasis upon the mind and intellect, or whether it is more reflective of our cultural desire for the immediate satisfaction of our wants cannot be explored here. Whatever the reason, the pendulum has swung towards experience. While healthy Christianity has always sought to balance the truth of doctrine with the passion of emotions and commitment, the contemporary texture of experience reflects a change. Previously, there was a concern that experience be built upon some objective source of revelation or truth. What we are currently witnessing, however, is a growing gap between the content and emotions of faith. Increasingly the current focus of experience is often devoid of any foundation. It is based purely on experience, often at the expense of biblical truth. This alarming vacuum tends to produce shallow and rootless followers of Jesus Christ whose only guide is their own feelings. Our narcissistic culture in which the individual rules supreme simply grants further permission to exalt experience over truth.

Certainly there is a danger equally destructive and deadly when the cerebral content of the faith is stressed. The pursuit of knowledge for knowledge’s sake
is of no value unless it descends into the heart to transform our lives. The mere accumulation of more information that is divorced from real life application is no mark of Christian maturity. Howard Rice has summarized the tension at both poles: "The intellectuals are worried about the dangers of mindless emotionalism, and the feeling people are worried about intellectual dryness and sterility." While considerable debate could be generated on both sides it does appear that the current champion is experience. We who are Reformed may need to read this as a critique and rebuke of our tendency to focus on the mind to the exclusion of the heart.

**Correcting Faulty Assumptions**

The truth is that from its beginning the Reformed heritage has sought to be intentional about integrating the head and heart. John Calvin began his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with a discussion of the nature of knowledge. The reader soon discovers that for Calvin knowledge involves more than the mind. Without piety there can be no knowledge. Calvin defines piety as "that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces." It is essentially a relationship with God that combines the mental effort of the intellect and the devotional intimacy of the heart. A similar theme appears when Calvin defines the basis of prayer: "the essentials of prayer are set in the mind and heart, or rather that prayer itself is properly an emotion of the heart within, which is poured out and laid open before God, the searcher of hearts." Because the Reformed tradition is much broader than Calvin, this article will reflect the voices of men and women who have sought across the centuries to discern and live from a Reformed perspective.

Jonathan Edwards also stressed the importance of integrating the head and the heart. He ministered during the Great Awakening and sought faithfully to discover and discern the distinction between the true and counterfeit expressions of God's renewing presence through the Holy Spirit. In addressing this specific issue he clarifies the need for balancing both dimensions of the faith by saying that "there must be light in the understanding, as well as an affected fervent heart, where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in that heart; so on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light . . . ." During a period of abundant excesses and concerns about the legitimacy of genuine Christian experience, Edwards was a wise and consistent guide. His insights still provide a valuable benchmark to evaluate and discern the authenticity of experience.

While the intent of the Reformed tradition has been to seek a healthy balance there are times when one must choose one or the other position. Calvin wisely recognized that although there are limits to our human ability to fathom the depths of God, this should in no way encourage us to lazy thinking or haphazard
effort. It does acknowledge, however, that once we have wrestled with the issues and done our best to grasp some aspect of faith, we may need to stand back in wonder. Calvin reflected this principle as he considered the true nature of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper: "Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And, to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it. Therefore, I here embrace without controversy the truth of God in which I may safely rest." I suspect my Methodist and Roman Catholic friends would be astonished to learn that Calvin spoke these words. Yet this reflects the rich balance which was foundational for the Reformed tradition.

**The Passion for Experiential Religion**

Among others, the Puritans frequently spoke of experimental or experiential religion. Their essential premise was that the Christian faith needed both to touch the mind and to transform the heart. J. I. Packer maintains that "Puritanism was essentially an experimental faith, a religion of 'heart-work,' a sustained practice of seeking the face of God, in a way that our own Christianity too often is not." John Flavel, a seventeenth-century English Puritan, delineates this theme in his devotional guide, *Keeping the Heart*, based on Proverbs 4:23: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (NIV). Flavel begins his work by observing that the "greatest difficulty in conversion, is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion, is to keep the heart with God." He concedes that this is not an easy task because "Heart-work is hard work indeed." Three other Reformed thinkers reflect this same principle. Charles Hodge was a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary during the nineteenth century. While Hodge possessed a strong scholastic streak, a biographer can attest that he also appreciated and valued the presence of emotions: "Spirituality, therefore, required constant cultivation and involved both the mind and the affections. Piety included at least an ongoing devotional life which served as the presupposed experiential condition of the believer whenever he talked of experimental religion." William S. Plumer, also a nineteenth-century Presbyterian pastor and professor, states the case more strongly: "All knowledge which is unfelt and inoperative puffs up the mind and hardens the heart. It is better to have the workings of gracious affections than to be able to define them, or to speak ever so learnedly respecting them. The great use of a large part of divine truth is rightly to affect our minds and hearts, and so to control our practice." Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian, arrived on the scene a generation after Hodge and Plumer. He too reflects the Reformed perspective of remembering the crucial importance of the heart when he says that "to lay God upon the heart means, that one has made the choice, that one has come to give his heart to God, and now puts the
symbols of God’s Name upon the heart, in order to seal his heart for God, and strictly to see to it that his heart continues to be kept for God and for God alone." The sampling from various time periods and people reveals the great prominence Reformed piety attached to the heart.

**Meditation as the Means for Connecting Head and Heart**

Our contemporary culture emphasizes efficiency and speed, with the constant pressure to measure our effectiveness. While it is necessary to be wise stewards of all our resources, this same concern has overflowed into other areas with less than desirable results. In the realm of education, for example, students are encouraged from the earliest grades, either overtly or covertly, to work quickly. We teach them to read faster, not so they can grasp the insights better, but to be able to move on and conquer new fields. With typical perceptiveness, Henri Nouwen points out the ridiculousness of this in light of the fact that the word "school" means "free time." He laments what this constant hurry has done to our society:

*Books written to be savored slowly are read hastily to fulfill a requirement, paintings made to be seen with a contemplative eye are taken in as part of a necessary art appreciation course, and music composed to be enjoyed at leisure is listened to in order to identify a period or style. Thus, colleges and universities meant to be places for quiet learning have become places of fierce competition, in which the rewards go to those who produce the most and the best.*

The cultural context of previous Reformers was different. Although they faced numerous struggles, they were not conditioned to expect everything to be accomplished within a thirty-minute block of time. Reading, and in particular meditation, was a more common and acceptable practice. Perhaps this spiritual discipline more than any other practice holds the potential for closing the gap between the content and explanation of the faith and the heart-felt experience of the faith.

It is difficult to define meditation in a single sentence because across the centuries the term has taken on different nuances. What is important is to recognize what meditation is not. Unlike some of the current spiritual practices which seek to empty the mind, meditation as practiced by the Reformers was for the purpose of filling the mind. Hughes Oliphant Old expresses Calvin’s view on the subject: "One should be quite clear that while in meditation there is a turning away of the mind from our works, this does not mean an emptying of the mind, but rather a filling it with something else, that is, with delight in the works of God and his coming kingdom." The Puritan Thomas Hooker defined meditation as "a serious intention of the mind whereby we come to
search out the truth, and settle it effectually upon the heart."\(^\text{15}\) Richard Baxter often referred to this process as "consideration." He defined it as "the reading over and repeating God’s reasons to our hearts."\(^\text{16}\) Consideration is crucial because it "opens the door between the head and the heart."\(^\text{17}\) Those outside the Reformed tradition often dismiss this practice with the pejorative label "discursive." Because they miss the accompanying Holy Spirit's role in meditation, they see it as little more than a series of mental gymnastics. Once again Old provides a helpful synopsis of Calvin's view: "For Calvin it is not our meditation which effectually applies the means of grace to our souls, but rather the Holy Spirit."\(^\text{18}\) Andrew Hoffecker comes to the same conclusion following his analysis of Archibald Alexander's piety: "Meditation is not simply a matter of stimulus (reading a particular scriptural passage) and response (feeling the appropriate religious affection), but an experience that can only be attributed to the Holy Spirit's illuminating the mind."\(^\text{19}\) In other words, the inner testimony of the Spirit is central to this process.

It should also be acknowledged that Calvin focused more upon the communal than personal nature of the faith. Meditation for Calvin never became a devotional reading of Scripture. Indeed there are numerous parallels between Calvin and the early monastics (especially Benedict and Bernard).\(^\text{20}\) They too focused on the communal nature of formation as lived out in their community worship and meditation upon the psalms. However, with the passing generations one can note an increased awareness and practice of meditation within the personal context. This is especially evident within the Puritans.\(^\text{21}\)

One can detect some similarity between the devotional practices of later generation Puritans and Roman Catholics, granted the two groups approached them from very different angles. Hambrick-Stowe clarifies this distinction:

> While Catholic spiritual theology was based on the faithful’s ability to stir up the uncorrupted spark of the soul to seek God, in Protestant thought no part of the person’s being was unmarred by the Fall. . . . Protestants based spirituality on God’s justification and sanctification of corrupted humanity, as opposed to the Catholic concept of lifting one’s soul to God, albeit through the gift of grace, by the strength of one’s still pure inner spark.\(^\text{22}\)

Cotton Mather is reflective of the Puritans who adapted some of the more Roman Catholic devotional practices. It has been said that "he collected and experimented with every method that came to his attention."\(^\text{23}\)

We can trace one of the more common methods of meditation to the early monastics. *Lectio divina*, or spiritual reading, is the normal term for this practice. Its roots predate Benedict who in the *Rule* instructs his fellow monks to make use of it. The four-fold process of *lectio* was intended to deepen one’s
experience with God through the Scripture rather than expanding one’s accumulation of knowledge. The four components can be described briefly: *Lectio* begins when one takes up and reads a passage of Scripture. The intent is to consume a short and manageable passage for meditation. One approaches this text with a sense that it is a personal message from God. Lewis Bayly encourages his readers to "Apply these things to thine own heart and read not these chapters, as matter of historical discourse: but as if they were so many letters or epistles sent down from God out of heaven unto thee."24 The next component is *meditatio*, or meditation, in which one seeks to reflect on what has been read. Here one personalizes the text by asking where it touches or connects with one’s own life. The process continues with *oratio*, or prayer, which arises as one responds to a careful reflection upon the Word of God. The fourth component is *contemplatio*, or contemplation. The monastics often referred to this as "lap time with God." It suggests pausing, much like the admonition of the psalmist: "Be still, and know that I am God!" (Ps. 46:10), and receiving any insights or reminders from God. Marjorie Thompson describes a pastoral analogy that was a favorite of the monastics to describe this process of *lectio*: "By this analogy we are invited to observe a cow: first the cow goes to pasture and eats some good grass (reading, taking in the Word); then the cow sits down under a tree and chews its cud (meditation, ruminating on the Word—if you recall how many stomachs a cow has, you get the picture, don’t you?); then the cow extracts from her food both milk (prayer) and cream (contemplation)."25

It is not surprising to find variations of *lectio* within the Reformed tradition. John White, another English Puritan, described a similar method of reading and praying Scripture in his *A Way to the Tree of Life: Discourses in Sundry Directions for the Profitable Reading of Scriptures* (1647). Richard Baxter’s classic, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, reflects similar themes for reading Scripture and offers detailed directions to encourage fellow Christians in this practice. He urges frequent use of contemplation because "if thou come but seldom to it, thou wilt still keep thyself a stranger."26 He warns that "Whereas frequency will habituate thy heart to the work, and make it more easy and delightful. The hill which made thee pant and blow at first going up, thou mayest easily run up when thou art once accustomed to it."27 Perhaps more than any other person, Baxter offers a vivid and engaging model to encourage the closing of the gap between head and heart.

Moses Hoge, a Presbyterian minister, served as president of Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia (1807-20). Offering spiritual guidance to students and countless others was a central part of his ministry. On one occasion his spiritual counsel bears a strong resemblance to the Benedictine pattern of *lectio divina*. "It is significant," comments Arthur Thomas, "that in this one letter he
included the four traditional approaches to the devotional life advocated by the Benedictines—lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio.\textsuperscript{28}

Fascinating parallels exist between this process of experiencing Scripture and Eugene Peterson's contemporary approach of "contemplative exegesis." Foundational to his understanding is that Scripture must be heard rather than just read. In that sense, the way many pastors handle Scripture has done a great disservice to the church. He insists "that the widespread academic practice, which pastors have unhappily fallen in with, of treating the Scriptures primarily if not exclusively as a phenomenon of print, a textbook written to provide us with information about God or doctrine or morals or religious history is a fatal error. A textbook is the one thing that the Scriptures most emphatically are not."\textsuperscript{29} While Peterson never mentions lectio, one may safely assume that he would strongly support this practice.

Guides for Recovering the Experiential Nature of Reformed Spirituality

Our brief review of the principles and practices of meditation within Reformed spirituality has brought us to the prime concern: the practical question of application. It is one thing to appreciate the historic roots of one's tradition; it is a very different matter actually to appropriate the richness of that heritage. To assist this exploration we will examine how meditation can be used with Scripture, the Lord's Supper, and in daily life.

Scripture

We Christians, living on the threshold of a new century, are inundated by the Information Age. As a by-product of the Information Super Highway, an endless glut of data clings to us like leaves on a rainy day. Sadly, this increase of information has decreased our sense of mystery and awe. We become so consumed with managing information that we lose sight of the importance of being transformed by what is truly significant and of eternal worth. The recovery of a healthy, balanced experience of Reformed spirituality could breathe new life into our churches and souls. The initial step toward this recovery is to take Scripture seriously. Amazing as it may seem, many evangelical and Reformed churches who pride themselves on believing the Bible rarely read any Scripture in worship. Preachers and worship leaders need to read Scripture and read it well. Further, preachers need to craft sermons that invite listeners to engage the text, not to make them feel good, but to bring them into the presence of the living God. Puritan sermons were so constructed that they also served as models to guide people in practicing meditation later on their own. Listening to these biblical exercises weekly formed in them a similar
reflective approach to guide their mental reflection and stir the affections of their hearts.

Further, to expand the validity of our spiritual experiences we need to slow down and read more with our hearts. The Rule of the Taize Community of France includes this nugget of wisdom: "Read little, but ponder over it." Nathanael Ranew reminds us that the key to maturity is found more in the quality than the quantity of our reading. He expands this principle when he writes: "It is not the great and much reading makes the scholar, but studying and pondering what is read. It is not reading much that makes the knowing Christian, but meditating on what is read: reading without meditation is like swallowing much meat without due chewing; that makes a mean man, so this makes a lean mind." Richard Baxter builds upon this base by encouraging his people to utilize their senses when they meditate on Scripture: "For the helping of thy affections in heavenly contemplation, draw as strong suppositions as possible from thy senses." He continues by asserting that the more we rely upon the scriptural manner of representing God the more our senses will elevate our heart. Baxter then connects the use of the senses with imagination as a way to draw us more fully into the scriptural account. He cautions his readers not to fall into the idolatrous trap of the Papists who draw pictures of them, but to allow the specific texts to create the proper image within the reader. He then continues to describe the process:

But get the liveliest picture of them in thy mind that thou possibly canst, by contemplating the scripture account of them, till thou canst say, "Methinks I see a glimpse of glory. Methinks I hear the shouts of joy and praise, and even stand by Abraham and David, Peter and Paul, and other triumphant souls. Methinks I even see the Son of God appearing in the clouds... and hear him say, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father'; and see them go rejoicing into the joy of their Lord."

While Richard Baxter and Ignatius of Loyola would be on opposite sides of the theological fence, there are obviously parallels between Baxter, and Ignatius' use of the senses and imagination in his Spiritual Exercises.

One tangible result of meditating on Scripture is that as one reflects and turns the words over in the mind and heart, the theme is often summarized in a very succinct and powerful image. Perhaps no one demonstrates the Puritans' mastery of this more vividly than Thomas Watson. Imagine preaching that would unearth these gems: "Sin shall not be cast in like cork which rises up again, but like lead which sinks to the bottom." "The plumb-line of reason is too short to fathom the deep things of God. A man can no more reach the saving knowledge of God by the power of reason, than a pigmy can reach the pyramids." "Or as in a watch, the wheels seem to move contrary one to
another, but all carry on the motions of the watch: so things that seem to move
cross to the godly, yet by the wonderful providence of God work for their
good."36 In an age before the advent of psychology, the Puritans were
perceptive observers and wise physicians of the soul. They realized their task
was greater than just changing people’s minds. Ultimately they sought to change
the imaginations and the entire way people viewed the world through the
scriptural truths of God.37 Likewise for us today, a sensitivity to biblical
images provides a helpful way to remember, recall, and stir up the memory.
Especially within our image-laden and symbol-saturated media culture it is both
wise and necessary for the church to offer biblical images to counter all the
world’s less than friendly images which surround and tempt us. The words of
Thomas Watson serve as both summary and challenge for our own spiritual
practices: "Leave not off reading in the Bible, till you find your hearts warmed.
. . . Let it [the Scripture] not only inform you, but inflame you."38

The Lord’s Supper

The sacrament of God’s grace revealed through the Lord’s Supper has
always held a central position within the Reformed faith.39 This may be
startling news to Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans. How can
Christians confess the centrality of the Eucharist, yet celebrate it so infrequently?
Yet, whether we celebrate the supper weekly (as Calvin always desired), or
monthly or quarterly (as is often the case), the real issue is how we come to the
table. Hughes Oliphant Old communicates the importance Calvin attributed to
the Lord’s Supper:

At the Lord’s Supper, particularly, we are to meditate and this
meditation is a remembering of the Divine acts of creation, the
mercies of providence and the grace of redemption. For a
Reformed spirituality the meditation which belongs to
approaching the Lord’s Table is just as important as meditation
on the Scriptures.40

This development suggests that our participation in the Lord’s Supper can be
revitalized through preparation and expectation. We need to ask if we are ready
in mind and heart to eat at the Lord’s Table and whether we come with a desire
to meet Christ and other Christians through the bread and cup. Henry Scougal,
a seventeenth-century professor at Aberdeen, reminds us of the transforming
power of the Lord’s Supper "for moulding the soul into a holy frame":

Therefore I shall recommend . . . the frequent and
conscientious use of that holy Sacrament, which is peculiarly
appointed to nourish and increase the spiritual life when once
it is begotten in the soul. All the instruments of religion do
meet together in this ordinance; . . . all the subjects of contemplation do there present themselves unto us with the greatest advantage; . . . And certainly the neglect or careless performance of this duty is one of the chief causes that bedwarfs our religion and makes us continue of so low a size."  

Because Reformed people would never want to be guilty of "careless performance," especially in relation to the Lord's Supper, both preparation and meditation are important.

Dinah Van Bergh, daughter-in-law of Thodore Frelinghuysen, represents the richness of Dutch Reformed pietism. An entry in her Diary reflects her meditative preparation and the deep desire to share in communion:

On the following Sabbath the Lord's Supper was to be administered again, and I desired to partake again, as I saw how much I needed to have my faith strengthened and to be kept near the Lord. While I prepared for it, I found free access. I frequently renewed my choice for the Lord as my portion, and of his service as my employment.

Also of the loving faithfulness of which new proof was about to be furnished this day by the Saviour's pledges, which would be exhibited on his covenant table in the form of bread and wine. My heart longed to partake of Christ experientially. I had to exclaim, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."  

These stirring words reveal one pilgrim's hunger for God and how she was nourished at the Table. Another component of preparation which marked Van Bergh was her sense of expectation. Earlier in her Diary she records these impressions: "I greatly rejoiced that the administration of the Lord's Supper was to take place on the next Lord's Day. All through the week I looked forward to its observance." Imagine the sense of growing anticipation that grew within her daily as she approached Sunday's worship. This derives from a heart that desires God and embodies the Heidelberg Catechism's confession that we belong to God. The Eucharist is a means of grace that draws us into a vital communion that strengthens us in our union with Christ. At the same time it strengthens our bond with fellow Christians, a reality reflected in these words of Van Bergh: "I was blessed with intimate fellowship with the Saviour as again I was enabled to desire all grace on the ground of the covenant's fullness, and I could again freely declare all my soul's sentiments to the Lord . . . . I was encouraged to exercise much confidence, and was strengthened in the Lord so
that I freely dared to entrust all to him. I enjoyed intimate communion with all the people of God as well.\textsuperscript{44}

Alexander Whyte, a Scottish pastor known for his ecumenical spiritual tastes (he wrote a book in appreciation of Teresa of Avila that was used in a monastery), records the engaging power of the Supper to stir up our senses: "But on the communion Sabbath you both hear, and see, and touch, and taste your salvation, till all your bodily senses are, so to speak, sanctified to the salvation of your souls.\textsuperscript{45}" Whyte then quotes from Robert Bruce's sacramental sermon: "We get a better grip of Christ in the sacrament. The same thing which thou possessed by hearing of the Word, thou possesses now more largely. For by the sacrament my faith is nourished and the bounds of my soul are enlarged; and so where I had but a small grip of Christ before, as it were betwixt my finger and my thumb; now, I get Him in my (whole) hand.\textsuperscript{46}"

Those are strong words for a Calvinist, or at least for the impression many have of Calvinists. Yet the soul has been stirred and the affections warmed to inspire great love and service for Christ. Horatius Bonar, another Scottish pastor, has captured beautifully the imagery of the Lord's Supper. His best and most beloved communion hymn, "Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face," perhaps echoes the love strains of the Song of Songs. The third stanza describes our intimacy with Christ:

\begin{quote}
This is the hour of banquet and of song;
this is the heav’nly table spread for me;
here let me feast, and feasting still prolong
this hallowed hour of fellowship with thee.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

\textit{Daily Life}

Unlike medieval and monastic spirituality which separated people into the privileged and holy ones (priests and monks) and the profane (the common people), Reformed spirituality sought to return piety to the people. Perhaps no one has captured this more eloquently and succinctly than Abraham Kuyper. "If knowledge of God is eternal life," he writes, "then increase of this knowledge must be obtainable by some means within everyone’s reach—the scholar in his study, the laborer at his work, the busy mother in her home.\textsuperscript{48}"

Characteristic of Reformed spirituality is the awareness that God is equally present Tuesday at work, Thursday at home, and Sunday in worship. Because all of life belongs to God, God is always with us. This insight was verified through the diversity of Kuyper’s own life. He was a theologian who wrote both scholarly and popular devotional works, a politician who eventually led his country as prime minister, and an educator who started the Free University of Amsterdam. His considerable talents also extended to the formation of Christian labor unions. To Kuyper all these activities were spiritual and reflected his devotion to God.
This liberating truth calls us to become more alert to the divine reality. John Flavel cautions us never to forget the many blessings of God: "A bad heart and a slippery memory deprive men of the comfort of many mercies, and defraud God of the glory due for them." Therefore, to assist our memories he challenges Christians to pay greater attention to God: "Without due observation of the works of Providence no praise can be rendered to God for any of them." Matthew Henry offers similar wisdom: "See much of God in every creature, of his wisdom and power in the making and placing of it, and of his goodness in its serviceableness to us." And the contemplative awareness of the Puritan pastor, Cotton Mather, enabled him to perceive God in everything he saw. So earthy were his meditations at times that once, while observing a dog relieve himself, he reflected on his own humanity.

Although nurturing such daily awareness might seem very difficult to some, it is essentially a matter of practicing meditation on the day's normal events. Experiences at work, at home, or shopping can become a source for reflection and wonder. As an aid to this spiritual exercise, Norvene Vest offers five steps which she calls lectio-on-life: First, recognize that life happens. Second, pay attention to a specific event. Third, allow yourself to be touched by that event. Fourth and fifth, wonder how to respond to that event, and then actually respond.

At times life is difficult, regardless of how faithfully we may live. There are periods when God seems to be more absent than present. During these painful periods of spiritual aridity, we must wait, and cling to the promises of God. As Flavel reminds us: "You have made God wait long for your reformation and obedience; and therefore you have no reason to think it much if God makes you wait long for your consolation." In an entire devotional on the theme, Waiting on God, Andrew Murray reminds us to keep ourselves properly focused during those periods of waiting: "There is a danger of our being more occupied with the things that are coming than with Him who is to come."

Christ is coming, and in the words of Richard Baxter, "The question will not then be, How much have you known, or professed, or talked; but How much have you loved, and where was your heart?" Reformed spirituality at its core never neglected the heart. Tragically, there have been Reformed Christians who failed to appropriate the fullness or richness of the foundations and principles of their tradition. The best of Reformed piety begins with the solid foundation of Scripture. How does God address us, and what do these texts mean today? But our faith is never meant to be restricted to our mind. Instead, it must descend and transform the heart so we may experience the grace and goodness of the triune God. The prayer with which John Calvin began his lectures serves as a fitting conclusion and challenge for all who seek to close the gap and reclaim the experiential nature of Reformed spirituality: "May the Lord grant that we may
engage in contemplating the mysteries of his heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to his glory and to our edification. Amen."

ENDNOTES

1. I am fully aware of the helpful insights of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). This personality profile contends that while people have a combination of both thinking and feeling functions they will normally prefer one over the other in making decisions. This has profound implications for spirituality. One might assume the Reformed tradition tends to attract more thinking types than feeling types. Unfortunately, space does not permit me to explore this more fully. For a helpful introduction to the MBTI see David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, Please Understand Me, (Del Mar, CA: Gnosology Books, 1984). For sources which address the spiritual application of the MBTI see W. Harold Grant, Magdala Thompson, and Thomas E. Clarke, From Image to Likeness, (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist, 1983) and Reginald Johnson, Celebrate My Soul, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988).


4. Calvin, Institutes, 3.20.29.


6. Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.32.


17. Ibid., 359.

18. Old, op. cit., 22.


27. Ibid., 345.


33. Ibid., 388.


35. Ibid., 27.


37. Richard Peace has developed some of these ideas for the contemporary Christian in "Imagination and Bible Study in Groups," *Christian Education Journal*, 13 (Spring, 1993), 74-82.


39. Howard Rice addressed this theme at the Third Annual Gathering on Reformed Spirituality at Grand Rapids, MI, July 13, 1995. His plenary was entitled, "Eucharist: The Center of Reformed Spirituality."


43. Ibid., 61.

44. Ibid., 78.


46. Ibid., 249-50.


50. Ibid., 114. Calvin reminds his readers of the same need to observe God’s glory, *Institutes*, 1.5.1-2.


52. Lovelace, op. cit., 119.


54. Flavel, op. cit., 197.

