

# Writing Down Our Thoughts

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**I**t is a well-known fact that the New England pastor and revival leader, Jonathan Edwards, was taught by his father to write down almost every new thought he had, a method he practiced throughout his life. His "Miscellanies" are now an invaluable source of wisdom. In his written out thoughts are found the embryonic form for many of his sermons and books.

I keep a "Commonplace Book" as well, as so many did in the past. And though I don't write out everything I think, I often wish I had.

Here are some reasons for writing out our thoughts:

- We more easily discipline our minds to sustain our thoughts without interruption.
- If interrupted, because we have written our thoughts, we are able to return to them again for further contemplation and development.
- We can also return to our reflections in the distant future, when otherwise they might have been totally forgotten.
- Writing demands that we organize our thinking connectedly or cohesively on a subject.
- We train our minds to express ourselves meaningfully and accurately.
- We build a reserve of good thoughts for a time when our thinking is more vacuous, or our spirituality is in decline.
- We teach ourselves the significance of learning by demonstrating to ourselves that cogent, biblical thinking is worth writing down.
- We find that our developed thoughts sometimes emerge in our public speaking or private conversations, even though we did not prepare to use them.
- We have a cache of mature thoughts to peruse as seed for public writing or speaking.
- We leave our thoughts to future generations when normally the preponderance of them, if not every last one of them, would have vaporized upon our death or mental decline.

My Commonplace Book is a collection of all kinds of thoughts related to the Christian worldview. After years of attempting a variety of forms, I have settled on this simple plan. I prefer to use a normal composition book, 9 3/4 x 7 1/2 inch size. These are the books that are often a mottled black and white color, with stiff boards, and are produced by Mead and others. Because these pages are folded in the middle and sown rather than stapled, the book will last much longer than a normal student

notebook. The pages will not come out. You may be able to afford a more expensive notebook for your commonplace book, one with a nice binding and acid free paper.

My index is written from the back page to the front, starting at the top. That is, I write the titles for each of the sections as they come up, and then the number following. The titles are simple, such as, "The Blood of the Covenant, 1" ; "Mental Clutter, 9"; "Observations on the Law in Galatians, 56"; "The Church: The Uniqueness of the Bride, 67"; "Sinning Full Measure, 34"; etc. If you wish to make several entries on the same subject, you may simply add the additional number following the title, i.e. "Sinning Full Measure, 34, 48."

Then each set of thoughts is entered, beginning at the front, with a number and its title written in capital letters out in the left margin so that it stands out. I like to include Bible references that I quote in small letters in the margin, but this would not be necessary or helpful to everybody. Some of the entries take pages, but others only a few lines.

When the book is finished, the titles could be entered into a computer with the numbers following and automatically alphabetized. This may be copied and cut to size, then pasted into the front of the book. The main index could be kept in the computer to help you find items you wish to use later and to make a more complete index as other books are added. The outside of the book should be numbered with the number of items included, i.e. 1-65. The next book would be numbered 66-124, etc., depending on the number of items found inside.

A Commonplace Book should be a tool for your thoughts, not other's thoughts. If you quote others or record another person's ideas in general, it is your thoughts about those ideas that make up the contents of a good commonplace book, in my opinion. Don't begin to use this book for a note-taking book for sermons or teachings you hear. You might keep another notebook for that, if interested. In the future, there would be good reason to make copies and bind these books together in a suitable way for posterity. I know that you will think your thoughts are too paltry to keep, but they are the work of a lifetime and need to be passed to others for their spiritual benefit. Sometimes, as you know, it is the simplest of observations that has the most profound effect on us, and others.

Don't delay. The thought you had just this morning will soon blow off the table of your mind!

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