

March 17, 2024

## “Meditation on God’s Word”

### Psalm 1:1-3

FCF: Not taking full advantage of what we have - meditation

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) God desires a deepening relationship with us.  
(magnet) Meditation is a key part of this.

#### **SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

It is hard to see people not taking full advantage of what they have. The unneeded loss is distressing, frustrating. Two examples. Imagine a group of folks on a road trip, traveling not to but merely through a National Park - mountains, canyons, wildlife such as they’ve never seen all around them. But they never stop to take it in. Another scenario - a patient is given a medicine that will cure their disease if they will simply take the full dose. But, for whatever reason, they decide to take but a portion of what is given. And so their symptoms are barely addressed.

It’s hard to see people not taking advantage of what they have. And too often that would be us. We’ve been in this mini-series on “Reading the Bible” for the last few weeks. Given what we’ve learned of what the Bible is and its potential impact upon our lives, it surely demands our attention. But even those of us who are committed to studying it may not be experiencing all that the Lord intends. We may not be taking full advantage of the great opportunities before us.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Psalm 1:1-3](#)

#### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

#### **SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

What is involved with physical disciplines? For the sake of our physical health, we will exercise, watch our diet, get good sleep, and a host of other things. What of spiritual disciplines? What can we do for the sake of our spiritual health? Don Whitney describes these as ([READ](#)):

Those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times.

They are God-given means of change - of growth in grace, in the fruit of the Spirit, in becoming more like Jesus. These spiritual disciplines include prayer, fasting, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship. And Bible intake - hearing, reading, studying, memorizing. But not just that. There is also meditation - all too misunderstood, underrated, and ignored in the church today.

But that ought not to be. Consider what we read a moment ago from Psalm 1. There we see God’s blessing is linked to meditation upon His Word. It allows the soul to absorb the water and the roots to go deep. Hearing, reading, and study only take us but so far. Let me put it this way. God desires a deepening relationship with us. And meditation is a key part of this.

How so? To get at that, let’s consider three things. First, a definition of meditation. Second, the fact we are designed for meditation. And then, third, our dependence in meditation.

#### **I. A DEFINITION**

So, first, a definition of meditation. What exactly are we talking about here?

##### *A) The Biblical Witness*

Well, before anything else, we should consider the biblical witness on this.

## 1. Commanded

There we see that meditation is commanded. Let me take you back to Joshua 1 ([READ Joshua 1:8-9a](#)). General Joshua is repeatedly told to be strong and courageous. And how? Meditation.

## 2. Commended

Meditation is commanded - for him and for us. Not only that, it is commended. It's striking how many times we see this in the Psalms. The word comes up 19 times - three in Psalm 77, eight in Psalm 119. The pairings are worth noting. Repeatedly, meditation is likened to the fixing of the eyes, to understanding, and a deep heart's affection. We learn of meditation upon the Lord's precepts, statutes, wondrous works, testimonies, and His law. I'll come back to this in a bit.

### *B) Some Considerations*

So with that, we can consider some definitions. Again, what are we talking about here?

#### 1. Don Whitney

Don Whitney has written a bit on this in his books. He helpfully defines meditation as ([READ](#)):

“(A) deep thinking about the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.

#### 2. Dave Mathis

Another author who has done some good work on this, Dave Mathis, says meditation ([READ](#)):

Is feeding our minds on the words of God and digesting them slowly, savoring the texture, enjoying the juices, cherishing the flavor of such rich fare. Meditation that is truly Christian is guided by the gospel, shaped by the Scriptures, reliant upon the Holy Spirit, and exercised in faith.

So how does this land on you? Is that what you had in mind? Let me share an image.

### *Illustration:*

I heard this in a podcast interview. Think of your time reading the Bible as watching a movie at normal speed. You push play and let it run. Studying the Bible is when you run the movie in slow motion so as to start observing and make connections. But meditation is when you hit pause to freeze the frame. This allows you to take in the moment, to really consider it.

### *Application:*

Again, this is not something new. We see this commanded and commended throughout the Bible itself. And, not surprisingly, the writings and reflections of church history ([READ](#)):

Thomas Watson (1620–1686): “Study is finding out of a truth. Meditation is the spiritual improvement of a truth.”

Samuel Ward (1577-1640): “Stir up thy soul in meditation to converse with Christ. Look what promises and privileges thou dost habitually believe. Now actually think of them. Roll them under thy tongue.”

Edmund Calamy (1600 to 1666): “Be like the bee that dwells and abides upon the flower to suck out all the sweetness.”

Again, God desires a deepening relationship with us. Meditation is a key part of this.

## **II. BY DESIGN**

Which brings us to this - we are designed to meditate. We are hard-wired for it.

### *A) Uniquely Human*

What do I mean by that? For starters, we can say it's a uniquely human thing.

#### 1. Part of image bearing

It's part of being made in God's image. We are made with certain God-like qualities, limited but real. We were made to stop and consider, to pause and ponder, to look at things and take them in.

## 2. Not true of animals

We were made to do this in ways animals are not. We can say the intense gaze upon prey or the fixated chewing of a bone is like meditation. But those are just analogies of the real thing.

### *B) Pale Imitations*

But there's something else. Because we as human beings are made to do this, we should expect to see mention and expression of it all around us - even if they are but pale imitations.

#### 1. Explanation

Here's what I mean. Given that we are all hard-wired to meditate, to pause and to ponder deep things, we should not be surprised to see non-Christian expressions of this. If we are made to do this, we should be surprised if we didn't see this. It's not a matter of "if" but "what" and "how."

#### 2. Examples

So we see meditation as a part of other religions. Think of faiths of the Far East. But unlike in those cases where meditation involves a passive emptying of the mind, Christian meditation is an active filling by biblical truth. Or think of secular science. Many are writing of the benefits of meditation, of slowing down, being still, breathing deeply. There's something to that. But more.

Again, the point is that we are made to meditate. It is part of our very design.

### *Application:*

What are the implications of this? For starters, it means we ought not to be dissuaded from meditation in any way by those who would warn of the "inherent dangers." The logic there so is incredibly flawed. Should we avoid prayer as well? These folks need to read their Bibles.

But there's something else. The subject of meditation can be a bridge in conversation with many people today. There's a curiosity about it. We don't need to criticize that. We can engage and ask questions, to try and discern who and what folks are seeking. And pray for them.

Again, God desires a deepening relationship with us. And He made us to meditate.

## **III. IN DEPENDENCE**

Which brings us to the last point. Assuming meditation in God's word is good and right for us to do, how are we to go about it? Fundamentally, it is to be done in dependence on Him.

### *A) Looking to the Holy Spirit*

Partly, this means looking to the Holy Spirit - relying upon Him as we read and pray.

#### 1. Inspiration

Over the last few weeks, we've talked about the inspiration of Scripture. Meaning, it is God-breathed. The Bible has come from the Holy Spirit's work in and through the human writers.

#### 2. Illumination

But the Spirit's work does not stop with the inspiration of the texts. He continues to work in the illumination of the texts - helping us to understand, receive, and apply what is written. That is what we could call "the X-factor." We need Him to open the word to us. And us to the word.

## B) *Listening to the Words of Jesus*

So we look to the Holy Spirit. And, with that, we also listen to the words of Jesus.

### 1. Invitations stated

I've spoken already of inspiration and illumination. But there are also invitations, words spoken by Jesus to His followers. Consider just a few ([READ Mark 6:31a; John 1:39a; John 21:12](#)).

### 2. Invitations abiding

Now I am fully aware of the contextual historical context of each of these statements. That has to be heard. But let us keep in mind the commands to and commendations of meditation. The Spirit's work of illumination is real. As are Jesus' words of invitation - to take time with Him.

The point being Christian meditation is always done out of a posture of dependence.

### *Application:*

"But how do I do it?" you ask. "What does it look like?" Don Whitney has a list of 17 possible methods, each worth considering. And I can give you those if you're interested. J. I. Packer had three questions he would ask. "What does this show me about God?" "What does it show me about life in this world?" "What direction does it give for my life today?" The ACTS approach can be helpful - adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. I would add one more. As you are reading this larger passage, what is it that stands out? And why? What might be the Lord's prompting to your heart in the surfacing of that particular word or theme?

But whatever the method, the posture is critical. It must be dependence. You are not just sitting down alone with your Bible. There is the power of the Spirit and the presence of Jesus.

Again, God desires a deepening relationship with us. And meditation is a key part of this.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Let me leave you with a couple of images. Neither are mine. Both are good ([READ](#)):

A simple analogy would be a cup of tea...Your mind is the cup of hot water and the tea bag represents your intake of Scripture. Hearing God's Word is like one dip of the tea bag into the cup. Some of the tea's flavor is absorbed by the water, but not as much as would occur with a more thorough soaking of the bag. Reading, studying, and memorizing God's Word are like additional plunges of the tea bag into the cup. The more frequently the tea enters the water, the more permeating its effect. Meditation, however, is like immersing the bag completely and letting it steep until all the rich tea flavor has been extracted and the hot water is thoroughly tintured reddish brown. Meditation on Scripture is letting the Bible brew in the brain.

Meditation is like the brewing of tea. But there is yet another way to think about it ([READ](#)):

Meditation can also be compared to lingering by a fire. Imagine that you've been outside on an icy day and then come inside where there's a hot, crackling fire in the fireplace. As you walk toward it, you are very cold. You stretch out your hands to the fire and rub them together briskly during the two seconds it takes to walk past the glow and the warmth. When you reach the other side of the room, you realize, I'm still cold. Is there something wrong with you? ... No, the problem isn't you; it's your method. You didn't stay by the fire. If you want to get warm, you have to linger by the fire until it warms you...The failure to linger is the reason why many fail to remember or find their hearts warmed by the fire of God's Word...

Which is an important point. Meditation can be described as the missing link between our Bible intake and prayer. As we take the time to slow down, the Spirit uses that to shape and fuel our soul's response. Simply taking in information becomes more - an experience of transformation.

Again, God desires a deepening relationship with us. In love, He has provided several means to bring that about. And meditation is a key part of this. Will we lay hold of this means?

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