

Biblical Meditation

by
J. Hampton Keathley III, Th.M.
hamptonk3@bible.org

Introduction

Scripture declares of God's thoughts,

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.
"For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9).

We are also told to "be of the same mind toward one another" which means essentially that we must develop and maintain the mind of Christ or God's thoughts. We are to "stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Rom. 12:16; Phil. 2:5; 1:27). But if my thoughts are contrary to God's, then I must exchange my thinking with God's and for that process, He has given us His inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word. So what is our need? We are to study the Scripture, but for that to be effective, we also need to develop the art of biblical meditation.

Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Psalm 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 4:4 Tremble, and do not sin; Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.

If I were the devil (please, no comment), I would do my best to divide and fragment the thinking of the church of Jesus Christ. I would try to get God's people confused as to who they are and why they are here. I would try to get them preoccupied with other things. I would try to get them to live independently, to think like the world thinks, to think like the natural man thinks in the futility of his mind (Eph. 4:17-18). In other words, I would like to keep people away from serious involvement with the Word of God. I would want to keep their relationship to God's Word superficial and secondary. Someone has said that the Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. But he also has a number of cultural values or belief systems, actually illusions and snares, that he uses to confuse and manipulate the church so that it must, of necessity, fail in its calling and purpose whenever it operates under these illusions.

Each of these are opposed to and work against developing and maintaining the mind of Christ through studying and meditating on the Word. They are designed to keep us out of the Word which is so essential to our ability to avoid the delusions of Satan and the world system and to hear and respond to the call of God on our lives.

What Does It Mean to Meditate?

The first question we must consider concerns the meaning of meditation and what meditation involves. This is particularly important to the Christian because of the great and growing emphasis on meditation in eastern religions. Transcendental meditation, as it is often called, is not biblical meditation. It is dangerous and actually opens up one's mind for Satanic attack as it is found in New Age thinking. My purpose here is to deal only with the meaning and blessing of biblical meditation and to point out that eastern forms of meditation and biblical meditation are miles apart.

The Actions of Meditation

Meditation means “the act of focusing one’s thoughts: to ponder, think on, muse.” Meditation consists of reflective thinking or contemplation, usually on a specific subject to discern its meaning or significance or a plan of action.

Some synonyms would be contemplation, reflection, rumination, deep thinking, or remembering in the sense of keeping or calling something to mind for the purpose of consideration, reflection, or meditation. Compare for instance the following verses of Scripture:

Psalm 63:6 When I remember Thee on my bed, I meditate on Thee in the night watches,

Psalm 77:11 I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember Thy wonders of old.

Psalm 78:42 They did not remember His power, The day when He redeemed them from the adversary,

Psalm 143:5 I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy doings; I muse on the work of Thy hands.

The Objects of Meditation

In Eastern forms of meditation as in TM there is an attempt to empty the mind. Biblical meditation, however, is an attempt to empty the mind of the wrong things in order to fill it with what is right and true according to the index of God’s inspired Word.

All Eastern forms of meditation stress the need to become detached from the world. There is an emphasis upon losing personhood and individuality and merging with the Cosmic Mind... Detachment is the final goal of Eastern religion. It is an escaping from the miserable wheel of existence... It is merely a method of controlling the brain waves in order to improve your psychological and emotional well-being.¹

Biblical meditation involves becoming *detached* from the controlling and hindering influences of the world and *attached* to the living God through Christ that we might, through faith and transformed values, experience the sufficiency of the Savior and reach out to a hurting world in need of the living Christ.

Biblical meditation is object oriented. It begins with reflective reading and rereading of the Word and is followed by reflection on what has been read and committed to memory. In Scripture, the word meditate is generally found with an object (God, His Word, or works, etc.) or in a context where the object of meditation is understood.

In Scripture it does not mean to sit and ponder infinity or to empty the mind so some force can fill it by repeating some chant or mantra. Such is dangerous and opens the mind to demonic attack. Meditation in the Bible means reflective thinking on biblical truth so that God is able to speak to us through Scripture and through the thoughts that come to mind as we are reflecting on the Word, but that must also be filtered by the Word.

The goal of Christian meditation is to internalize and personalize the Scripture so that its truth can affect how we think, our attitudes, and how we live, our actions.

The Objectives of Meditation

(1) Worship—It is designed to focus on the Lord and His works (Ps. 27:4; 77:12). It is a place and space in our lives for communion with God. It is a means of elevating the spiritual over the material world and the world of activity: the world of hustle and bustle and coming and going.

¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Harper, San Francisco, 1988, p. 15.

(2) Instruction—It is designed to improve our understanding of the Word and God’s ways as it applies to our lives (Ps. 49:3 [i.e., understanding comes from the meditations of his heart]; 119:27, 97f). In meditation we exchange our thoughts with God’s.

(3) Motivation or Encouragement—It is designed to motivate and inspire us in service and courage for the works God has called us to do (Josh. 1:7-8)

(4) Transformation—It is designed to transform and change our lives. This would apply to all the above (Ps. 4:4; 19:14; 119:15; Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:1f).

In Joshua 1:8, God promised Joshua success as part of the fruit of his meditation on the Word, but this has nothing to do with the prosperity mentality of the positive thinking and eastern meditation that is so present today in New Age thinking where, through positive thinking, one is able to control his or her destiny. Rather this is the success of obedient and godly living which experiences God’s provision and deliverance from the enemies of this life. It is not a guarantee against trials and pain.

When Should We Meditate?

(1) At prescribes times set aside for Bible study and thinking on the Word (Gen. 24:63; Ps. 4:4; 27:4; 63:6; 77:6; 119:148). It means making space in a special place for God and spiritual values.

(2) At all times throughout the day and night, as we face the varied situations of life. It involves the constant application of the Word through remembrance and reflective thinking (Josh. 1:8).

Why Should We Meditate?

(1) Because of what the Bible is—Revelation from God. In the Bible God has spoken and through this book God reveals Himself, reveals who and what man is, and what His plan for man consists of. (Cf. Ps. 19:7f; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Isa. 55:8f.)

The Bible was given to us by God to be read and meditated on. “An unread Bible is like food that is refused, an unopened love letter, a buried sword, a road map not studied, a gold mine not worked.”²

(2) Because of what man is and needs—Reconciliation to God and one another. The nature of man and the nature of the world and Satan constitutes a great need for personalizing the Word: cf. Eph. 4:16f; 5:15f; 2 Cor. 4:4; etc. Because man is a holistic being, his spiritual, psychological, and physical faculties are complexly intertwined. Dr. Paul Meier writes:

To prepare myself as a Christian psychiatrist, I undertook college studies, an M.S. degree in human physiology, an M.D. from medical school, psychiatric residency training in two different programs, and theological course work from two evangelical seminaries. During those years I was equipped with many techniques and shortcuts for bringing human beings relief from anxieties, depression, phobias, fears, insecurities, and other kinds of emotional and physical pain. Among the many tools I learned to use, by far the one that has been most valuable in helping people attain spiritual well-being is Scripture meditation.³

Meditation affects man’s whole being. Another reason is the fact man does not innately contain God’s thoughts and ways. Again Meier writes:

Man is a totally depraved being, possessing selfish and ultimately self-destructive thought patterns and behavior. Show me a natural man, untaught in God’s principles and I’ll show you a natural man who suffers from emotional pain. I’ll show you a man who experiences the guilt and discomfort of a God-vacuum. I’ll show you a man who is unconsciously fighting and struggling for a

² Irving L. Jensen, *How to Profit From Reading the Bible*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1985, p. ix.

³ Paul Meier, *Renewing Your Mind in a Secular World*, edited by John D. Woodbridge, Moody Press, Chicago, 1985, p. 25.

sense of significance, using worldly ways (e.g., sexual fantasy, materialism, power struggles, and prestige) in a vain attempt to attain significance all of which will fail. The ways of the world bring temporary relief, like band-aids on open flesh wounds, but not ultimate relief from man's inner awareness of his insignificance apart from God.⁴

(3) Because of what the meditation does—Reformation of the mind and life. Using the words “meditate” and “remember” which is sometimes used as a synonym for meditate (Ps. 63:6; 77:5-7; 119:55-56; 143:5-6), let's note from Scripture some of the reasons we should meditate on the Word.

- It renews or reprograms our minds, exchanges our ideas for God's, so we can begin to experience God's ways (Isa. 55:8f; Rom. 12:1). Its the principle of GIGO or VIVO (garbage in, garbage out, or value in, value out).
- It monitors what and how we are thinking and thus protects us against the thinking and actions of the world (Ps. 1:1-2; Jer. 17:5-10). Many of our problems are symptoms of underlying dynamic mental processes going on inside. Meditating on the Word when done properly is designed to expose an often unconscious network of defenses, anxieties, and sources of self-trust (Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16).
- It enables and motivates us to walk after or according to God's plan and purposes rather than our own (Josh. 1:7f; Ps. 119:15).
- It produces spiritual stability and fruitfulness or success according to biblical standards (Josh. 1:7f; Ps. 1:3).
- It is a means of focusing on and resting in the Lord which enables us to cling to the Lord and find spiritual joy in the midst of suffering and testing (Ps. 63:6f; 77:6-12). It becomes a means of protection against a mental attitude of self-pity and discouragement (Ps. 4:4; 119:23, 78).
- It is a means of better knowing and understanding the Word which gives insight to life itself (Ps. 49:3; 119:27).
- It warms the heart and keeps us close to God (Jer. 20:7-9).
- It is a means of worship and seeking God which is ultimately the highest goal of meditation (Ps. 27:4; 77:12).

May we join the Psalmist who, rather than use the methods of the world to deal with his pain, declared his commitment to meditation when he wrote:

Psalm 119:78 May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; *But* I shall meditate on Thy precepts.

The Art of Meditation

How to Profit From Biblical Meditation

Biblical meditation is the art of reflection, of pondering and going over a matter in one's mind. It is important that we recognize we cannot divorce meditation from all the processes by which we learn and apply the Word. It is intricately tied to Bible study in all its forms.

Concerning one of the chief Hebrew words used for meditation, *hagah*, Herbert Wolf says, “Perhaps the Scripture was read half out loud in the process of meditation.”⁵

Biblical meditation involves the whole process of reading and observing a portion of Scripture in order to seek both its meaning and application. Though we generally think in terms of the final aspect in which one reflects on his observations and understanding of a particular text or concept of the Word, reading the text of Scripture reflectively is a part of the process of biblical meditation.

⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵ Herbert Wolf, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, p. 205.

The point is this. We can't effectively reflect on and respond to a portion of the Word or a biblical truth without the whole process of careful Bible study. Just as meditating in a vacuum or to empty the mind as it is done in eastern religions is dangerous and may open the mind to demonic attack, so meditating on error drawn from a misunderstanding of a passage can lead to unhappy results.

There are three things that must go together in biblical meditation: READING, REFLECTING, and RESPONDING. The ultimate purpose of these three are the three great purposes of Bible study:

- OBSERVATION—What does the text say?
- INTERPRETATION—What does the text mean?
- APPLICATION—How does the text apply to my life?

Reading

Careful reading for observation comes first. The word “read” or “reading” occurs 80 times in Scripture, 34 times in the New Testament. This involves the following:

(1) **Read Reverently**, ever mindful that you are reading the Word of God. The Bible is God breathed and each word and sentence has a purpose and function. This means reading deliberately, slowly, and alertly, not mechanically or legalistically.

(2) **Read Repeatedly**, going over and over the passage to observe more and more knowing that you do not exhaust the meaning of any verse even when it becomes familiar and you think you know it. There are always new observations to be seen or mined as a miner searches for silver or gold (Prov. 2:4).

(3) **Read Creatively**, visualizing yourself in the time, history, and situation of the passage as much as possible to experience a feel for what the author and the people of his day were experiencing. “Precisely because God chose to speak in the context of real human history, we may take courage that these same words will speak again and again in our own ‘real’ history, as they have throughout the history of the church.”⁶

(4) **Read With Study Tools In Hand**, with paper and pen and Bible study helps at your finger tips to help you observe and answer your questions. Howard Hendricks use to tell us in class something like, “A pencil, gentlemen, is the crow bar of the mind and understanding.” You wouldn't go mining for silver or gold without tools would you? Of course not. So we need to use tools like a CONCORDANCE, COMMENTARIES, BIBLE DICTIONARY, ATLAS, and WORD STUDY HELPS like Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Revel, or *New Testament Words*, by William Barclay, SCM Press, or *A Treasury of New Testament Synonyms*, by Stewart Custer, Bob Jones University Press.

(5) **Read to Understand**, purposely, to make observations of the text that will help you understand its meaning. This means asking questions like our six important friends in Bible study, who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Of course, such reading requires constant reflection and pondering over the text you are reading. This brings us to our next point in the process of meditation, reflection.

Reflection

Irving Jensen writes, “Reflection is the mind and heart at work, thinking over and concentrating on what the eyes have seen ... Reflection in Bible reading should have the intensity of meditation, whereby the soul has the desire and intention of obeying God's Word.”⁷

So, how can we read the Bible like this? Jensen suggest the following which I have summarized as follows:

⁶ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1993, p. 20.

⁷ Jensen, p. 48.

(1) **Reflect Purposely**, to fulfill the biblical objectives of meditation—worship, instruction, motivation, transformation. As the Psalmist who prayed: “I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard Thy ways” (Psa. 119:15), and again, “Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts, So I will meditate on Thy wonders” (vs. 27).

(2) **Reflect Imaginatively**, visualize the setting and put yourself there. Try to feel the burden, the concern, the fear, the love, etc. Seek to taste and feel every word you read.

(3) **Reflect Humbly**, realizing that you are not reading just a book, but that which is the very Word from God, God-breathed and authoritative, alive and powerful. It should truly humble us to know that in the Bible, the Holy One who is also the Almighty One, has spoken to us in the Bible.

(4) **Reflect Prayerfully**, trusting the Spirit of God to open up your eyes and heart to see, understand, and respond to the Word. Again, read as the Psalmist who prayed: “Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law” (Ps. 119:18). This is also the position of humility and respect. God’s Word is a spiritual book requiring spiritual perception.

(5) **Reflect Patiently** but expectantly, waiting on the Lord to teach you and show you. Time and patience are important elements to effective meditation and examination of the Word. Again remember that the great enemies of meditating on the Word are noise, hurry, and crowds. Thus, the Psalmist, looking for insight to God’s Word and direction in his life prayed, “Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, For Thou art the God of my salvation; For Thee I wait all the day” (Ps. 25:5).

Concluding his section on reflection, Jensen writes:

The purpose of reading and reflecting on Scripture is response, responding and applying the passage to our own lives. So we naturally turn to the third aspect of meditation and the ultimate purpose of the Word. The call to reflection in Bible reading is expressed in Samuel’s plain words to Saul, “Stand here thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God” (1 Samuel 9:27, KJV).⁸

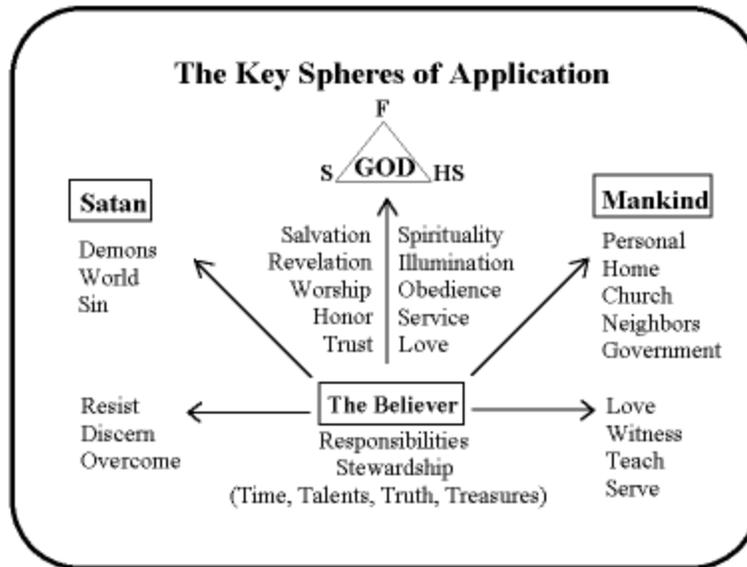
Responding

Responding is the process whereby we make personal application of our observations and understanding of the text. Through meditation we internalize that we may personalize.

(1) **The focal point of application:** You are the focal point in application. This is not selfish or self-centered. 2 Tim. 3:16 makes this clear. You are meditating on the Word as part of your search for spiritual help, direction, and food. The Bible is addressed to each of us personally.

(2) **The key spheres of application:** (see diagram).

⁸ Ibid., p. 52.



(3) Important questions for application:

- How does this truth apply to my life in four spheres: in my personal life, in my family, at work, in my church, and in my neighborhood?
- In view of this truth, what specific changes should I make in my life? In other words, am I applying this truth? If not why not? Was it ignorance, rebellion, indifference?
- How do I propose to carry out these changes? We need to be specific here.

(4) Three vital responses for application:

First, the response of confession: The Word of God is like a sword (it penetrates), like a mirror (it reveals), and like a critic of the heart (it judges and reproves or exposes our attitudes and actions). Whenever we read the Word, it should be with an open heart that is ready to acknowledge sin and confess it. So David prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my ways, and see if there be any wicked way within me” (Ps. 139:23-24a; cf. 1 John 1:7-9; “walking in the light”).

Proverbs 28:13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

Second, the response of faith: One of our reasons for meditating on the Word is to develop and build our faith. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God,” (Romans 10:17 brick by brick). We must mix faith with what we read and hear. In other words, we must act by faith in what God has shown us from His Word or our hearts can become hardened (cf. Mk. 6 and Heb. 3:7f).

Hebrews 4:2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Third, the response of obedience: When we obey the Word we are demonstrating the reality of our love for the Lord and how much we really believe what we have seen and learned. It demonstrates our faith and just how serious we are in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

1 Sam. 15:22-23 And Samuel said, “Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being* king.”

In his excellent book, *Pathways to Power*, a book written in the early 1950s, Dr. Unger wrote:

Meditation upon God's Word is fast becoming a lost art among many Christian people. This holy exercise of pondering over the Word, chewing it as an animal chews its cud to get its sweetness and nutritive virtue into the heart and life, takes time, which ill fits into the speed of our modern age. Today most Christians' devotions are too hurried, their lives too rushed.⁹

If that was true in the early fifties, how much more is it not true today—forty years later in an age that has become even more activity oriented, materialistic, and consumer minded. Unger goes on to say:

But holiness and hurry never did suit well together. Prayer and preoccupation have always been strange bed-fellows. A head knowledge of the Word may perhaps be consonant with the scurry of the age, but not a deep heart experience of its preciousness. A deep knowledge of spiritual things can only come by the way of unhurried reflection upon God's truth and by prayer.¹⁰

Speaking of Satan and his activity, someone has said "our adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds." What we need is a time for quiet, stillness, and solitude for the purpose of meditating on the Word.

Listen to these words from the Psalms:

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 104:34 Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; As for me, I shall be glad in the Lord.

From these verses it is clear that our meditation can be unacceptable and displeasing to the Lord. What does this mean? What are the implications of this? In what ways can my meditation be unacceptable and displeasing to the Lord? There are obstacles, dangers or hazards, and hindrances to meditation.

Problems, Hazards, and Hindrances to Meditation

Writing to the Corinthian church the apostle wrote,

2 Corinthians 10:5 *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

(1) "Speculations" is the Greek *logismos*, "calculation, reasoning, reflection, thought" and in this context it refers to **wrong thinking or reasoning** and is connected to those thinking processes and attitudes that usurp God's viewpoint and stand against the knowledge of God and what that should do to and in our lives.

(2) We see that Paul and his co-workers were committed to destroying and dealing with any such thinking in their lives because it was so **destructive to their ability to wage war against the enemy** and carry out God's purpose as soldiers of the cross. The suggestion is that this is a **daily battle**, an ongoing process without which we are unable to obey and serve the Lord. He uses a military term, "taking captive" (*aichmalotizo*) plus the present tense which point to this as a continual struggle and warfare.

(3) The battle concerns **our minds** in both the content of our minds and in the way we think with our minds, the human devices of our minds which are so often influenced by Satan. "Thoughts" is the plural of *noema*, "mind, thought, purpose, device, design." It is used of the schemes or devices of Satan in 2 Corinthians 2:11 and of the effects of his work on the minds of men (blinding, in 4:4).

(4) Finally, we see that this affects **our obedience to Christ**. If we do not bring our thoughts captive, control them and order them according to the Word, the mind of Christ, we cannot live in obedience. The goal and result of every thought captive is obedience to the Lord.

⁹ Merrill F. Unger, *Pathways to Power*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1953, p. 41.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

So, meditating on the Word, internalizing and personalizing the Scripture, is a crucial part of the Christian life. It becomes part of the means by which we can bring every thought captive to Christ.

The importance of this is further seen in the Psalms, particularly, Psalm 119. Six times the Psalmist prays for understanding and three other times he speaks of the understanding which comes from the Word:

Psalm 119:27 Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, So I will meditate on Thy wonders.

Psalm 119:34 Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, And keep it with all *my* heart.

Psalm 119:73 Thy hands made me and fashioned me; Give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments.

Psalm 119:125 I am Thy servant; give me understanding, That I may know Thy testimonies.

Psalm 119:144 Thy testimonies are righteous forever; Give me understanding that I may live.

Psalm 119:169 Let my cry come before Thee, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Thy word.

Why does the Psalmist pray like this?

- Because he knows that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man to direct his way.
- He distrusts himself, his own thoughts and ways, and so he specifically prays for understanding.
- He fears lest he should misunderstand, or misconceive, or misapply God's teaching, or narrow its significance to his life.
- He wants to comprehend its full range and thrust as it bears on his thoughts, purposes, attitudes, reactions, relationships, view of life and people.
- He wants understanding that he may, through God's wisdom, conform his life to God's ways because only in this does one find the way of life.

Thus, eight times in this Psalm, we read of him meditating on the Word that he might better understand the Scripture and apply it to his life (vss. 15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148).

But listen to these words from the Psalms:

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

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From these verses it is clear that our meditation can be unacceptable and displeasing to the Lord. What does this mean? What is involved here? In what ways can my meditation be unacceptable and displeasing to the Lord? Plainly, there are obstacles, dangers or hazards, and hindrances to meditation.

Some Snares of the World to Consider:

- (1) **Materialism**—a problem of the wrong values.
- (2) **Activism**—a problem of the wrong priorities.
- (3) **Secularism**—a problem of the wrong trust.

In each of these we are confronted with the spirit of self-sufficiency. In His creative grace, God has given us each certain abilities, gifts, talents, and information through education and experience to use in life for our blessing and the blessing of others. This can give us a false sense of security and sufficiency because we are able to do so much and often seem to be able to handle life on our own, though this is a deception of the human heart. It's part of

the age-old lie of Satan, the old serpent and deceiver who wants man to think he can be his own god and handle life just fine by himself.

Such an attitude causes us to ignore our need for time alone with the Lord in the Word and prayer. As he considered the foes of this world and the challenges of ministry Paul cried out, “And who is adequate for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16). But in the next chapter, he said:

2 Cor. 3:4-6a And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant,

But where do we get such confidence and how do we demonstrate it? By spending time with God in His Word and in prayer. The self-sufficient man either ignores God altogether or only runs to God in times of extreme difficulties.

(4) Religionism and Legalism—a problem of the wrong source of faith. In this one’s life is filled with overt religious activity, but one that fails to take time for the inner man.

(5) Two Myths Perpetrated by the World—we call these myths because they are often passed off as truisms through a lot of repetition.

Myth 1: The Bible is too difficult to understand for the ordinary person to grasp. Only the skilled theologians with technical training can deal with the Scriptures. While we need teachers, still, all believers can read the Bible and grow if they can read their newspaper.

Myth 2: The Bible is boring. Such a statement reflects the taste and preference of the person reading it. The Bible is filled with action, with drama, with not just history, but redemptive history. I suspect the real problem here is our next danger.

Snares of the Flesh

(1) Laziness: Meditating on the Word suggest labor, work. Here is one of the real problems of our negligence. We fail in our need to meditate studiously and worshipfully in the Word because it takes time and work. Our problem is we are lazy. It has been said that all human sin finds its roots in three basic human problems, the sins of pride, dishonesty, and slothfulness.¹¹

(2) Sensuality: The church today is filled with what we might call sensuous Christians. A sensuous Christian is one who:

- Lives by his feelings rather than through his understanding of the Word of God.
- Cannot be moved to service, prayer, or study unless he “feels like it.”
- Thinks he doesn’t need to study or meditate on the Word because he operates by his feelings.
- Doesn’t want to know God, he wants only to experience Him.¹²

Without the knowledge of the Word, however, no one can be sure of his experience. It may be demonic and purely of the flesh.

Sproul reminds us:

The Bible is addressed *primarily* though not *exclusively* to our understanding. That means the mind. This is difficult to communicate to modern Christians who are living in what may be the most anti-intellectual period of Western civilization. Notice, I did not say anti-academic or anti-technological or anti-scholarly. I said anti-intellectual. There is a strong current of antipathy to the function of the mind in the Christian life.

¹¹ R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1977, p. 17f.

¹² Adapted from Sproul’s, *Knowing Scripture*, p. 27f.

... We turn to feelings rather than to our minds to establish and preserve our faith. This is a very serious problem we face in the twentieth-century church.

Reflect for a moment. What happens in your own life when you act according to what you feel like doing rather than what you know and understand God says you should do? Here we encounter the ruthless reality of the difference between happiness and pleasure. How easy it is to confuse the two! The pursuit of happiness is regarded as our "unalienable right." But happiness and pleasure are not the same thing. Both of them feel good, but only one endures. Sin can bring pleasure, but never happiness. If sin were not so pleasurable, it would hardly represent a temptation ...

It is precisely at the point of discerning the difference between pleasure and happiness that knowledge of Scripture is so vital. There is a remarkable relationship between God's will and human happiness. The fundamental deception of Satan is the lie that obedience can never bring happiness. From the primordial temptation of Adam and Eve to last night's satanic seduction, the lie has been the same. "If you do what God says, you will not be happy. If you do what I say, you will be *liberated* and know happiness."¹³

And the point is that those who live by their feelings will not spend time meditating on the Word and if they do, it will be for an emotional high rather than to truly know God and obey Him.

(3) Procrastination: Often, we do not feel like reading or studying the Bible. This is to be expected. Old patterns often die hard and slowly. It takes time to develop the pattern and discipline needed to make this a priority. We are in a spiritual struggle and after years of operating in the flesh, we must recognize we are dealing with a spiritual battle which must be overcome by faith and transformed desires.

(4) Unbelief: We wonder, "Will meditating on the Word really make a difference in my life? Will it give insight to life? Will it make me wiser than all my teachers as the Psalmist declares?" The answer of course is yes, but only a strong conviction of this will translate into consistent action.

(5) Wrong Focus: Preoccupation with the wrong objects, the objects of our pain, our fear, or anger, will keep us from meditating on the Word where we find God's solution. But in our human defense solutions and in our desire to control our own lives, we have a hard time with these wrong objects of preoccupation. Note the following passages and the principle of EXCHANGE, RENEWAL and REPLACEMENT:

Numbers 11:5-6 We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, 6 but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.

Psalms 119:28 My soul weeps because of grief; Strengthen me according to Thy word.

Psalms 119:78 May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; *But* I shall meditate on Thy precepts.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

Some Hazards We Face

There are things that can make our meditation less effective or even detrimental.

(1) Mistaking interpretation for application: Sometimes we think that because we have understood a passage or a truth, we have therefore applied it. Some examples:

¹³ Ibid., pp. 28, 29.

- We know what the Scripture teaches about the tongue and how deadly it can be, and how God abhors gossip or slander.
- We know that practicing good hospitality is scriptural. Thus, we may assume we are controlling our tongues and that we are hospitable in what we do, since we understand these truths.

But in reality, this may not be true of us at all. Most of have a long way to go in both of these areas of truth and we constantly need the searchlight of the Word on our actions. “As growing Christians, we often learn a great deal, and it is easy to assume we have translated our knowledge into experience.”¹⁴

(2) Mistaking an emotional response for application: What is true with understanding a passage is equally true and perhaps even more subtle in our emotional responses to a particular passage or truth. Experiencing an emotional response, a feeling of excitement and joy or even tears of conviction, does not mean we are applying the Word obediently or even the particular truth that brought about the response. It doesn’t guarantee that we will either. Compare 2 Corinthians 7:8-11; Hebrews 12:17.

(3) The expectation of instant results: This is particularly a problem in our culture because we are on the search for instant gratification. As we meditate on the Word we will see areas that need change and that we need to work on through the disciplines of biblical godliness. But this often takes time and continued fellowship with the Lord in the Word. We want these areas brought under control and changed yesterday, often without the spiritual battles and the process of growing and learning to depend on the Lord for change. We want the product without the process. But God is interested in the process, the daily regimen of walking with Him through prayer, the Spirit, and the Word. The point is, we need to be patient and not allow the struggle to discourage us from the process.

(4) The problem of maintaining the right objectives: It must never be limited to selfish or personal pursuits like simply feeling good about ourselves. We must maintain the elements of the great objectives of meditation (WORSHIP, INSTRUCTION, MOTIVATION, TRANSFORMATION) and the great purposes of God as in the great commission (cf. John 15:7-8).

(5) The problem of the right interpretation: Here is an important question. *Under what conditions can our meditating on the Word properly affect our lives as the inspired and inerrant Word of God?* OUR ANSWER: The Bible can only affect us properly and direct our lives into the will of God so far as it is understood, and it can only be understood when it is properly interpreted. “A misinterpreted Bible is a misunderstood Bible, which will lead us out of God’s way rather than in it.”¹⁵

We face a couple of obstacles in relation to this:

(1) The rules we follow: How are we using and interpreting the Word?

Are we approaching the text of Scripture like a person casting lots? Some do. Some people prayerfully open their Bible to see what happens to catch their eye, or they shut their eyes, open their Bible, and insert their finger on the page. They then read the passage supposing this is God’s will and word to them for the day.

G. Campbell Morgan used to tell of the man who followed this method and came up with “Judas went out and hanged himself.” Finding these words unhelpful, he did it again and this time got “Go, and do thou likewise.” In desperation he tried once more and this time the words that jumped at him were, “That thou doest, do quickly.” Morgan’s point (mine too) is that though this practice shows vast reverence for Scripture as God’s means of communicating with us, it is of itself superstitious and wrong headed, savoring more of magic or witchcraft than of true religion; it is precisely not understanding God’s Word.¹⁶

Study the text by its grammatical, historical, plain and normal meaning according to the context and the analogy of Scripture. This means going to the text to observe it for facts from the text as we would study any written document though recognizing Scripture’s spiritual content, continuity, and inspiration.

¹⁴ Josh McDowell, *Guide to Understanding Your Bible*, Here’s Life Publishers, San Bernardino, CA, 1982, p. 102.

¹⁵ J. I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle For the Bible*, Cornerstone Books, Westchester, IL, 1980, p. 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21-22.

Too often, in their search for application, people may detach the text from its context and the facts of the passage “to find personal meaning in them by feeding them into the world of one’s private preoccupations and letting that world impose new senses on old phrases.”¹⁷

(2) The blinders we wear: This is the problem of our preconceived, preformed ideas from our backgrounds. We are each the product of tradition and human tradition can neutralize the impact of the Word on our hearts

Mark 7:6-13 And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 7 But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ 8 Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” 9 He was also saying to them, “You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. 10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death’; 11 but you say, ‘If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban that is to say, given to God,’ 12 you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; 13 *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

There are benefits and blessings to some traditions, but there are also problems. We are also the victims of our past. This means we are willing to open our eyes to some things, but we also close them to other things because of our prejudice or preconditioned notions. None of us are exempt from this. It is a problem we need to be alert to and work on.

Conclusion

These are some of the problems we face. Our need is to be alert to them and work on overcoming them, but let’s not allow these things to discourage us in our commitment to meditate on the Word. God’s Word is alive and powerful and is absolute truth. Meditate on the following verses. They are rich and rewarding.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Psalms 119:9-15 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Thy word. 10 With all my heart I have sought Thee; Do not let me wander from Thy commandments. 11 Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee. 12 Blessed art Thou, O LORD; Teach me Thy statutes. 13 With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Thy mouth. 14 I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, As much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate on Thy precepts, And regard Thy ways.

Psalms 119:23 Even though princes sit and talk against me, Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes.

Psalms 119:27 Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, So I will meditate on Thy wonders.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

Psalm 119:48 And I shall lift up my hands to Thy commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Thy statutes.

Psalm 119:78 May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; *But* I shall meditate on Thy precepts.

Psalm 119:97 O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.

Psalm 119:99 I have more insight than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation.

For additional reading see the *Seven Subtle Snares of Worldliness*.

J. Hampton Keathley III, Th.M. is a 1966 graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and a former pastor of 28 years. Hampton currently writes for the Biblical Studies Foundation and on occasion teaches New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute, Northwest Extension for External Studies in Spokane, Washington.