

MEDITATING ON THE WORD OF GOD NOURISHES THE HEART Psalm 1:1-2

INTRODUCTION:

I don't know what images come to your mind when you hear the word meditation...but I suspect that the word does conjure up some pictures. If you are like me, you may think of some guru, sage or Buddhist practitioner sitting cross-legged on the ground with his thumb touching his middle finger. You may imagine him with his eyes closed humming a monotone note as he tries to clear his mind of everything. You may think of meditation as some magical mystery tour of your inner self.

If that is what you think of when you hear the word "meditation" then it may trouble you that the Bible speaks of God's people meditating.

- Genesis 24:63 says that Isaac meditated.
- Joshua 1:8 records that the LORD told Joshua to meditate on the Book of the Law and to do so both day and night.
- The other 16 times that the words "meditate" or "meditation" appear in the Bible, it is in the book of Psalms.

18 times, the New International Version of the Bible uses the words "meditate" or "meditation." But that is only a part of the picture. There are two Hebrew words that convey the idea of meditation. Together, they appear 58 times in the Old Testament. Sometimes they are translated as "meditate" or "meditation". But sometimes they convey the idea of listening to God's word, reflecting on God's works, remembering God's deeds, ruminating on God's Law and more.

In none of these occurrences of these words does meditation refer to some kind of sanctified navel-gazing or aimless introspection. Each time the Bible speaks of meditation, there is a specific object upon which or upon Whom we are commanded to meditate. We are called upon to meditate on God, His works and His Word.

- In Psalm 145:3-5, David writes:
 - ³ *Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;*
 - his greatness no one can fathom.*
 - ⁴ *One generation will commend your works to another;*
 - they will tell of your mighty acts.*
 - ⁵ *They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty,*
 - and I will meditate on your wonderful works.*
- In Psalm 48:9, the Sons of Korah say:
 - ⁹ *Within your temple, O God,*
 - we meditate on your unfailing love.*
- And in the very first psalm, which is the setting for the text for the sermon for today, the unidentified author wrote:

¹ *Blessed is the man
 who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
 or stand in the way of sinners
 or sit in the seat of mockers.*

² *But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.*

³ *He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither.
 Whatever he does prospers.*

- Matthew 14:13 (and several other passages, as well) records for our information that, in the midst of a very busy ministry and at the end of a very demanding day, Jesus made a habit of withdrawing to a lonely place, apart from even his disciples, where he could be with God and pray. His example in being immersed is one we try to impress upon those who would be his disciples. Ought we not also to implore them to meditate like Jesus did?

When the Bible urges us to meditate, there is a subject upon which we are to center our attention: it is God, His work and His Word.

At this point, it might be appropriate to define our term for this morning. Meditation has been defined as, “*continuous calm thought upon some subject.*” I like that. It sounds right to me: “continuous calm thought.” To me, that means that meditation is not magical or mystical. It is simply settling down and taking the time to think.

Anyone here besides me that ought to take more time to sit down, settle down, center down and simply think? I once saw a plaque with these wise words: “***When I works, I works hard. When I sits, I sit loose. And when I think, I fall asleep.***” Can you identify with that? That leads me to believe I am not very good at thinking.

If meditation really is continuous calm thought upon some subject, some of us may need to practice the discipline of meditation so we can exercise the discipline without drifting off to sleep...or drifting off to other thoughts than the One about whom we have set out to think.

In his now classic book *Celebration of Discipline*, author Richard Foster states, “*In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in ‘muchness’ and ‘manyness’, he will rest satisfied.*” I have no doubt that Foster is correct. Satan loves to see us too busy to spend time thinking about our Father. Satan is delighted when the sounds around us drown out the still small voice that speaks our Father’s words. Satan is pleased when the crowds

that crowd around us also crowd out time we could be alone in our Father's presence.

If we truly want to be followers of Jesus, we must also follow him to that lonely place where, apart from the distractions that would divert us, we can engage in continuous calm thought about the LORD. So let me give you some suggestions for how to meditate.

Begin by selecting a passage upon which you will meditate. This next part may sound familiar but I want you to write it out on a 3 X 5 index card. Carry that card with you throughout the day – but this time, not for the purpose of memorizing the words but for the purpose of internalizing the words. Don't just read the words; think about them. Think deeply about them. Then, at a time that you have set aside for the purpose, meditate on those words from God.

I want to share with you six specific ways to meditate on Scripture:

1. **Pronounce it** – that is, read it out loud. There is something powerful that happens when we not only see the words but we also hear them – even if we are simply hearing them from our own mouths.

Read the words aloud as if you were reading them to a friend, intending to convey to him the meaning, the emotion and the significance of the text.

Read the words aloud again as if you were reading them to a room full of people. Project the words. Say them with emphasis, with power and with flair. (Now can you see the advantage of going to a lonely place to practice this kind of active meditation? If you do this in the front yard, your neighbors will think you're a nut.)

Read the words aloud a third time and try to imagine the way the author would speak them if he or she were sitting beside you and speaking directly to you.

2. **Paraphrase it** – Say the passage again but this time in your own words.

One time I gave a high school youth group the task of rewriting 1st Corinthians 13 in their own words. You may remember that 1st Corinthians 13 is often called the Love Chapter of the Bible. Leslie Gray, who was probably 12 years old at the time, paraphrased a portion of 1st Corinthians 13 as, "Love believes the incredible, attempts the impossible and embraces the unlovable." WOW! That has stuck with me for 30 years.

You can be as creative as you wish, as eloquent or as plainspoken as you like, as verbose or as brief as you want. Just put those words in your own language to say what they mean to you.

3. **Picture it** – Visualize the passage. If it is a historical event, try to see the wild waves or the angry crowd or the agonizing death. If it is a parable, try to picture the man who fell among thieves or the ripened fields or the lost sheep. If it is a portion of an epistle, try to visualize the First Century church members listening to this for the first time, or try to visualize the practices of the church that would have prompted the letter. Let the scene play out on the big screen in your mind and see it as Stephen Spielberg or George Lucas or Ron Howard might stage it.

Late one afternoon in 1912, C. Austin Miles was...meditating. He writes:
“My hands were resting on the Bible while I stared at the light blue wall. As the light faded, I seemed to be standing at the entrance of a garden, looking down a gently winding path, shaded by olive branches. A woman in white, with head bowed, hand clasping her throat, as if to choke back her sobs, walked slowly into the shadows. It was Mary. As she came to the tomb, upon which she place her hand, she bent over to look in, and hurried away.... Mary reappeared; leaning her head upon her arm at the tomb, she wept. Turning herself, she saw Jesus standing, so did I.”

In response to this image, Miles wrote the familiar hymn, “In The Garden”. Is it any surprise that the repeated refrain of that song is, “He walks with me and he talks with me”? Friend, if you want to know the joy of walking and talking with Jesus, you need to develop the discipline of meditating on God, His works and His Word.

4. **Personalize it** – Ask yourself, “What does this text say to me?” “How does it apply to me?” “How should my life be different because of what I read here?”

In 1st Corinthians 3, Paul told the Christians in Corinth:

² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. ³ You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

In a similar way, we need to get God’s Word off of the pages and into our hearts so that we become living letters, known and read by our families, our friends, our neighbors, our colleagues and everyone else. The first step to that is to personalize the words of Scripture and apply them to ourselves.

5. **Pray it** – the next suggestion I want to give is for you to pray the passage upon which you are meditating. Turn it into a prayer and say it back to God.

If it is some command of God, talk to the LORD about it and tell Him that you realize that this is His will for your life. Tell Him that you want to obey Him

and that you intend to obey Him and then ask Him to direct your ways so that you *do* live out this command in your daily life.

If it is a historical event upon which you are meditating, pray to the LORD about that event. Ask God to help you to learn from the example of those about whom you have been reading. Then tell Him what is going to be changed in your life because of what He has revealed to you from this passage.

If it is a parable, tell God what you intend to do differently because you have thought calmly and deeply about this teaching.

Pray this portion of the Bible back to God.

6. **Probe it** – Study it. Read the passage in different translations of the Bible.

Use a study Bible to stimulate your thinking about the text. A study Bible is an edition of the Bible that includes commentary notes to help explain the text. They will also provide cross-references so you can look up other passages of Scripture that are about the same topic or with similar wording. Often a study Bible will have references to historical or archaeological evidence that helps to clarify or illustrate what you are reading. There are several very good ones that have been published in various translations. The Life Application Bible has proven to be especially popular and the Thompson Chain Reference Bible is a trusted and proven study Bible. If you would like to see and review some good study Bibles, I have some in my office you can look at.

You might want to purchase a good commentary and read what scholars have to say about the passage you are considering. Some of the best commentaries are now available on CD-ROM for use on a computer...or you can still buy the bound copies. Christian Book Distributors (CBD) is an excellent source for a wide variety of commentaries at very affordable prices. Plus we have some commentaries in our church library so you can check them out and use them at no charge.

The point is, whatever tools you select, probe deeper than just the surface meaning of the text and think more deeply than merely the first ideas that leap to your mind.

CONCLUSION:

When your mind wanders, where does it go? (I often wonder that about my mind...where HAS it gone?!?) When your thoughts wander, where do they usually go? Fantasies about wealth, fame or power? Dreams of schemes, revenge or retaliation? Plots and plans to hatch? Just think how much more blessed your life could be if you were to meditate on

God's Word day and night. If your first thoughts in the morning were about what God says, if your recurring thoughts during the day were about God's Word, if your last thoughts at night were God's thoughts, just think what a blessing you would receive. And just think what a blessing you would become.

I pray that you will resolve to read your Bible because it is important that you get into the Word. But I also pray that you will give "continuous calm thought" to what you have read so that not only are you getting into the Word, the Word is getting into you.

INVITATION: *"Ancient Words"*