

Scripture Meditation

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When we consider the spiritual disciplines, I'd like to consider a discipline that I believe is vital to our spiritual health, referred to often in Scripture, and rarely spoken of today: Scripture meditation.

Some people can get a little nervous when a pastor starts to talk about meditation. Unfortunately, some pagan groups have taken that word and used it to refer to the dangerous practice of transcendental meditation. Scripture meditation is nothing like transcendental meditation. In fact, in several ways they are diametrically opposed.

First of all, worldly transcendental meditation requires one to empty his mind. The goal is to get the person to a state "beyond thought." There is no purposeful thinking involved. In a sense, the mind is disconnected. It is completely passive.

If we search the Scriptures, we find no exhortation to empty the mind, no instruction to disengage one's thinking. Instead, Scripture speaks of meditation as filling the mind with one thing – Scripture. One of my favorite verses is 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 good success.* Clearly, meditation can't be the absence of thinking. Rather it is focused thinking on God's Law.

Ephesians 6 tells us to put on the full armor of God. The reason for this is that we are engaged in a war with an unseen enemy, *spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*. This passage commands the believer to *gird your loins with truth...and take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*. When we empty our minds of everything, as is done in transcendental meditation, we are laying aside that truth and relinquishing the sword of the Spirit. Of course, that leaves us open to attack from the demonic forces mentioned in that chapter. This is precisely why, this brand of meditation is so dangerous.

Second, transcendental meditation is done twice a day, for 15-20 minutes, in the absence of any other activity. On the other hand, numerous times Scripture speaks of meditation as being done day and night, such as the verse above in Joshua. Psalm 119:97 says, *Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.* Likewise, in Psalm 63:6 we read, *When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.* Of course, this is poetic language. It is doubtful that the writer meditated on the Word 24 hours a day. The point is that it was his common practice to meditate on God and His word throughout the day and night.

I personally find that the best time to meditate on the Word is while I'm in the car, getting dressed, mowing the lawn, or doing some other menial task that does not require my absolute attention. If you try transcendental meditation that way, you could end up dead!

Third, transcendental meditation is completely self-focused, or self-centered. One web site (I'd rather not advertise it here) says this kind of meditation "allows your mind to settle inward, beyond thought, to experience the silent reservoir of energy, creativity and intelligence found within everyone." The benefits listed on the same site are all self-focused and man-centered.

Scripture meditation, on the other hand, is completely God-focused. In Psalm 63:6, referenced above, the psalmist says, "*I meditate on You...*" God and His Word are the total focus of this spiritual discipline. In Scripture meditation, we think God's thoughts, not our own. We desire to comprehend what He has said (Ps 119:15), what He has done (Ps 119:27), who He Himself is (Ps 145:5).

Not only are God, His work, and His Word the focus of our meditation, but He is also the motive for our meditation. *May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD* (Ps 104:34). Our meditation is ultimately an act of worship done for Him alone. I don't meditate to "maximize my own potential", but simply to enjoy Him and please Him.

Psalm 1:1-3 shows a connection between the meditation of Scripture and the living of a godly life. *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.* The godly man is the one who avoids the evil, shaping influence of the world and focuses his life, day and night, on the Word. He is like a tree planted by streams of water. In other words, by filling his mind and attention with the Word of God, he is plugged into the source of spiritual fruit. He is wise. He is mature. He is steadfast. He prospers in every way.

Scripture memory and bible study are how we put God's Word into our heads and hearts. Scripture meditation is how we work God's Word into our thinking, our attitudes, our affections, and our actions. It is a discipline in the truest sense of the word, but if you will take the time and effort to do it, you will reap tremendous rewards.

In a previous Sunday, I advocated meditating on Scripture throughout the day as taught in Psalm 1. I mentioned my meditating on four words in Psalm 23:1 throughout one night—"Yahweh is my shepherd." It occurred to me that some might wonder what that even means. "Do you just say those four words over and over?!" So I wanted to give a brief description of a method I use to meditate. I hope you find it helpful.

Christian meditation is not like other kinds of meditation where one *empties* the mind of everything, which might happen if we simply repeated a set of words over and over like a mantra. Rather, in biblical meditation we seek to *fill* our minds with godly thoughts from the

Word. In the case of the first four words of Psalm 23, my goal is to plumb the depths of its meaning and think of as many implications/applications as I can.

There are numerous ways to do this, but one of the simplest is to think through each word and the role it plays in the sentence or passage. (This assumes I understand the passage and have rightly interpreted the verse in question. Psalm 23 is quite straightforward and so this method is feasible. The same method might be more cumbersome with something like Revelation 17:6.)

I usually first pray that the Holy Spirit will help me by guiding my thoughts/meditation (John 16:13). In this case, I started with the last word in the phrase and worked my way backward. The following is a brief representation of some of my thoughts:

Yahweh is my shepherd. By His grace, He called me, I knew His voice, and I followed Him (John 10:3). He knows my name. He is a good shepherd who goes before me and lays down His life for me (John 10:4, 11). When I stray, He brings me back (Isa 53:6). When I'm threatened, He protects (Psa 23:4). When I sleep, He watches over me (Psa 121:4). Though I am loath to feed myself, He makes me lie down in green pastures (Psa 23:2). Though I am ever fearful, He leads me beside still waters (Psa 23:2). He is gentle and lowly, making every provision for my care (Matt 11:29-30; Psa 23:1).

Yahweh is my shepherd. He is not far away, an object of my envy; but His own blood has brought me near (Eph 2:11-13). He is not tentatively or temporarily mine; rather, His own Spirit resides inside me as a seal of permanency (Eph 1:13-14). Further, His being mine is a function of my being His; I've been given to Him by the Father, and He'll never let me go (John 6:37; 10:27-29). He will never leave me, nor let me leave Him (Matt 28:20; Rom 8:35-29; Heb 13:5).

Yahweh is my shepherd. It is not merely that He was at one time my shepherd, for even now He watches and serves me (Heb 7:25). Nor is it that He is my shepherd only in my *best* moments, for He is mine by grace through faith, not according to works (Eph 2:8-9). Nor is it that He is my shepherd only in my *worst* moments, for even my good works are gifts of His hand (Eph 2:10). Nor is that He *will be* my shepherd if certain conditions are met by me, for all the conditions necessary for our eternal bond have been met by Him (Heb 10:10-14). In all seasons of my faith, in all conditions of my soul, high and low, rich and poor, He is and always will be my shepherd.

Yahweh is my shepherd. Not money, home, or creature comforts (Matt 6:19-20). Not health, talents, education, planning, or study (Rom 8:20-23). Not my wife, friends, family; not my critics, nor my admirers (Prov 29:25). Not my hobbies, diversions, or legitimate temporal joys (1 Tim 6:17). None of these things watch over me, guide me, sustain me, protect me, or restore my soul. Rather, Yahweh is my shepherd and does these things. Yahweh, the Creator God in the person of His Son, the Good Shepherd, whose Spirit is so close as to reside in me (John 1:3; 14:17). All-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present (Eph 3:20-21; Col 2:3; Psa 139:7-10). Merciful

and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Exo 34:6; Psa 86:15).

This line of meditation led me naturally to think and feel the next line of Psalm 23:1, "*I shall not want.*" A valuable next step would be to then walk through the present issues of my life and the lives of those around me and look at them through the lens of this meditation.

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The more Scripture we have hidden in our hearts the more valuable this practice will be. Memorization makes meditation possible no matter where we are or what we are doing. It also enables on-the-go cross-referencing that will make our meditation even richer.