

MEDITATE: DAY AND NIGHT

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

Matthew 4.1

Jesus answered the first of Satan’s temptations with the Old Testament verse *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* Our Lord was quoting one of the oldest passages of Scripture, Deuteronomy 8.3.

Growing Christians have always been aware of the importance of knowing, learning and incorporating His Word in their lives. From the Old Testament to the New, the Scriptures have always been a source of strength, comfort and guidance. According to Jesus however, the Bible is so much more.

The Word is the source of life itself. I like the way one translation renders the passage in Deuteronomy that Jesus quoted, *“real life comes by feeding on every word of the Lord”* [The New Living Transla-

tion].

Just as we need to eat healthy foods to live, ingesting vitamins and minerals to build a strong body to fend off disease and sickness, so we need to digest God’s Word to fend off that which would corrupt or destroy our souls. Eating healthy foods gives our bodies energy and vibrancy; feeding on God’s Word gives our faith the energy and vibrancy that it needs to survive and thrive.

The truth is, we cannot survive if we do not regularly digest God’s Word. You can attend church, gather with your Christian friends and neighbors, do a lot of good things in the community, give generously to overseas missions, etc.... If you do not have a regular diet of Scripture though, your faith will die.

A recent Gallup poll found that 45 percent of Americans say that their personal views guide them more than God and religious teachings. How would you

answer that poll question? Are you more concerned about your way or God’s way?

Meditation is the process that exchanges our will for His. It tells us that His Word is of ultimate importance. May we say with the Psalmist (ch 119)

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I will keep it to the end.

34 Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law and observe it with my whole heart.

35 Lead me in the path of thy commandments, for I delight in it.

36 Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to gain!

37 Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; and give me life in thy ways.

38 Confirm to thy servant thy promise, which is for those who fear thee.

39 Turn away the reproach which I dread; for thy ordinances are good.

40 Behold, I long for thy precepts; in thy righteousness give me life!

JERRY +

IS MEDITATING ON GOD’S WORD IMPORTANT?

Look up and read the following verses. What do they say about the priority a believer should place on regular, biblical, meditation? What does each say about the effect God’s Word will have on the one who exercises this spiritual discipline?

+ Ephesians 6.10-18 + Joshua 1.7-9 + Psalm 1.1-3

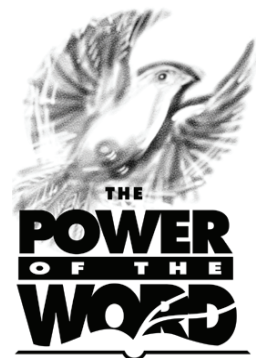
+ Second Timothy 3.14-17

Now check one of the following:

- Yes, I can see a benefit to meditating regularly on God’s Word.
- No, I cannot see a benefit to Scripture meditation.

How can the Scriptures make a real and profound effect in our lives?

The answer, of course, is meditation.



FOUR STEPS TO MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD

After all this talk about meditation, we finally get to the four steps that make this discipline a daily practice. Let me say at the outset that these are not *THE* four steps, as if they were taken from the Scriptures themselves, they are just my four steps. Without a doubt there are other ways and other people who might guide you differently.

The main instruction from Scripture is that *first*, we are to meditate; and *second*, the object of meditation is God's holy Word. I share these steps with you because they have been helpful in my spiritual walk. If they can be helpful to you, all the better.

FIRST, ask what this verse communicates to you. What does it teach you? How does it reproof, correct, or train you in righteousness? (see 2 Tim. 3.16)

Most people find a verse to meditate on as they read through their Bible or some devotional material. A verse sticks out as if God is speaking directly to you. This is when you want to work through the meditation process.

The point to remember is that God's Word isn't going to have any effect in your life if you don't see how it speaks to you. St. Paul told Timothy that Scripture is profitable (or beneficial) to the Christian because it has the power to teach, reproof,

correct and train. Of course it can also encourage, give hope, direction, etc... as well.

So ask the question: What is God saying to me? Let the passage of Scripture speak and be willing to listen.

SECOND, read it aloud, slowly, several times. Read the reference first, then the verse, then the reference gain.

The reason we do this is that repetition breeds familiarity. You will find yourself getting comfortable saying it as you repeat it. Don't forget to pray that the verse penetrate your heart.

THIRD, divide the verse into meaningful phrases, then meditate on the verse one phrase at a time.

Repeating it several times will also help you divide the verse into very small sections. This has two benefits. First, the words become more manageable, giving you the opportunity to meditate on them in easy to handle, small parts.

Second, when you divide it, every word will take on special meaning. The verse will take on more meaning and make your meditation more rich. Let me give you an example.

One of the verses I have worked on is First Timothy 1.5 "*whereas the aim of our charge is love that issues*

from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith." After saying it several times I discovered that good divisions would be:

- "*whereas*" teaches me that there is something contrary that was said in the previous verse. Paul describes Christians who were focused on the wrong thing. That makes me ponder if I'm focused on the right things. What does God want of me?

- "*the aim of our charge is love*" The goal of our mission and life is love. I do a great deal of things and try to work hard at everything that I need to accomplish. But how much of it is motivated by love? Paul reminds me that love needs to be front and center of all I do. This is the goal of my mission at work, at home and while amongst my friends and neighbors. This phrase helps me take a moment and evaluate how much of what I do aligns with God's goal for my actions.

- "*that issues from a pure heart*"

Love is defined and described many ways. True love, according to Paul will issue (or come) from a heart that is pure. Is my heart clean? Are my motives blameless? If not, I need to confess that to the Lord and let Him work with my heart.



2 Timothy 3.16-17

¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,
¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

(continued on page 4)



Psalm 1.1-3

1 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; 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, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q. Using the method on page 2, will I be able to remember verses a few months later, especially as I get a few more passages under my belt?

A. It doesn't matter if we remember the verses. Maybe thinking of it this way will help: I can't remember every meal I had in the past month, but I do know that eating them was beneficial to my body. I know that because I know the chef—my loving wife. When she prepares our supper, she thinks about a well balanced, nutritious meal. But, when pressed, I can't even remember what I had two weeks ago.

We need to remember the purpose of this discipline is feeding our minds, hearts and souls. The goal is not the memorization of many verses, though some will be able to accomplish that through this method. The goal is meditation, which is slightly different from memorization. Meditation means to inwardly digest, to reflect and ruminate. This can happen even if it is difficult for you to remember, word for word, the verse some time later. Don't be concerned about memorizing at this point.

Q. What about time commitment?

A. Once you start the process, meditation happens immediately. You can do it

almost anytime—almost anywhere (while doing dishes, taking a walk, riding in the car...). Meditation can take place in just a few moments each time you have nothing else pressing to think about. You'll be amazed how often these openings occur and how often the verse will come to your mind.

Q. What do you say to someone who feels too young or too old to try this?

A. Once you keep in mind that the goal is not memorization, you'll discover no one is too young or old. This is something everyone can do. In fact, meditation is a discipline all Christians are commanded to practice.

Q. Isn't meditation something Buddhists, the New Age and other Eastern religions do?

A. Some religions practice a form of meditation that is very different from the meditation the Scriptures call believers to practice. In Eastern religions, meditation is the process of emptying one's mind in order to lose consciousness of everything in and around them. Christian meditation on the other hand, fills the mind with the Word of God so that one becomes conscious of Him and His will for our lives. Christian meditation takes the Word that we place in our minds and puts

it in our hearts so that it has the ability to transform us from the inside out. I like to put it simply this way: from mind to heart; from heart to the way we live our lives.

Q. What are some Bible verses with which you recommend beginning?

A. Each verse you work on needs to speak to you in some way (see step 1 on page 3). Here is a list of possible verses :

- Psalm 51.10
- Psalm 143.10
- Proverbs 3.5-6
- Matthew 6.33
- John 15.7
- Romans 12.1 (& 2)
- 2 Corinthians 5.17
- Galatians 2.20
- Galatians 5.13
- Philippians 1.6
- Philippians 4.8
- First Peter 5.6 &/or 7

Meditation is:

Listening to God's Word,
 Reflecting on God's Word,
 Ruminating on God's Word.



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Nine Questions to Ask While Meditating on the Word

Is there any:

Sin to confess?

Promise to claim?

Attitude to change?

Command to keep?

Example to follow?

Prayer to pray?

Error to avoid?

Truth to believe?

Thanksgiving to offer up?

4 STEPS, CONTINUED ...

•“a good conscience”
Now I need to evaluate my conscience. Is it good? Would Jesus be pleased with the way I live my life? True love also issues from a good conscience.

•“and a sincere faith.” Not everyone has a sincere faith. Some use their faith and their religion for purposes that have nothing to do with their relationship with God. The Pharisees are a good example. They had the form of religion but deny the power of it (2 Timothy 3.5). A sincere faith is powerful because it is sensitive to the things to which God is sensitive.

FINALLY, journal your thoughts – then review, review and review.

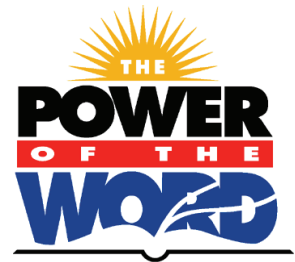
Always keep your journal handy and write down your thoughts and prayers, not just in this step, but throughout all four. What you write now will bring you encouragement long into the future.

Another helpful thing to do is write out your verse, phrase by phrase, on a number of index cards. When you are done, carry one in your pocket or purse; place one on your bathroom mirror, your refrigerator, your car dash, your desk at work or wherever you will be exposed to

it often. Seeing the card will remind you of all the things God told you during the first three steps.

When you see the card, repeat the verse, pray that God would help you apply its lessons to your life. Find several times every day where you can spend a minute or two of quiet reflection. God does His best work on our hearts in moments of silence and solitude. You can find that kind of time while driving in the car, taking a walk, sitting at the table with coffee, etc....

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.
(Colossians 3.16)



The Bible:

Read it,
Mark it,
Learn it
and

Inwardly Digest it.