

Auburn Baptist Church
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What is Biblical Meditation?

Psalm 1:1-3

"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."

Does reading the Bible daily feel like drudgery to you? Is it just one more thing on your "to-do" list for the day? Do you read it but feel like you don't really get anything out of it? Like, "Yeah, I've read that before. I agree with it. But now what?"

Most Christians have listened again and again to sermons and admonishments that they read the Bible for themselves. Yet according to statistics, less than 1/5 of American believers read Scripture daily. If spending time in God's Word is so important for spiritual growth, why aren't more people doing it? And how is it that when we do read, we often come away feeling just as spiritually unmoved as when we started?

I. What's Missing?

In our modern church culture, I think we are missing something important in our quiet times with God. It's something that is rarely if ever taught in our nation's churches today. Our Christian forefathers were well acquainted with it. And it's a Christian doctrine and command that today often gets pushed aside or ignored.

What is it? Well, it can be found in many passages of Scripture throughout the Bible. It's a teaching contained in a single word in the Bible that we often skip over or misinterpret. That word is *meditate* or *meditation*. Look again at **verse 2 of Psalm 1** that we just read. It says, **"...and on his law [the Word of God] he meditates day and night."**

Look also over at **Psalm 119:97**. The psalmist declares, **"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long."** And in **Joshua 1:8**, the Lord commands, **"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."**

There are many sermons written and spoken from pulpits across this country that use these verses to simply instruct believers to read their Bibles daily. But that is not all that they say. In fact, that is not primarily what they are telling us. I think it would be rather hard to read the Bible all day and night, every day. You sure wouldn't be able to get anything else done if that is all you did.

No, these verses are telling us to *meditate* on the Word of God day and night, every day of our lives. And there's a difference between reading and meditating. In fact, I am convinced that the reason why most people, if they read the Bible every day, come away from it spiritually unchanged or face it as a chore instead of a pleasure, is because we have forgotten how to meditate.

The Puritan pastor, Thomas Watson, spoke of this when he stated, "The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation."

II. What is Biblical Meditation?

So, if meditation is important to our spiritual life, what exactly is it? Biblical meditation is a Christian discipline that has been largely forgotten by the modern evangelical church. In fact, for most of us, when we hear the word "meditation" we immediately associate it with the practices of pagan Eastern religions. It is what most people think of today.

I went on the Internet the other day and did a search on the word "meditation" and the most common sites found were those that taught methods or techniques on how to meditate. These techniques included "emptying the mind," "focusing on a picture, object, your own breathing or body." They are intended as ways to calm and relax and get you to focus on yourself.

Dr. Charles Stanley even wrote about receiving a catalog in the mail selling meditation music. He wrote:

"It was not published by a Christian-oriented company and did not claim to have anything biblical in the content. I was interested in how the company recommended the music. The catalog used words like *serenity* and *tranquility* and admonished the reader to 'replace stress and tension as you absorb' the music. The catalog promised that the meditation music would not only 'soothe your soul but fill you with the energy that follows blissful complete relaxation.' It even told you how long it could take: 'two hundred and eight-six minutes total'" (*Handbook* 528-29).

Because of this New Age concentration on unbiblical meditation most Christians cast meditation into the forbidden category and refuse to accept it as any part of their faith. Unfortunately, to our great detriment, by doing so we also abandon Biblical meditation and its scriptural application. Biblical meditation actually has nothing to do with the modern concept of meditation.

There are two Hebrew words translated as meditation in the Old Testament. The first word is *haghl* which means, "to murmur, mutter, or speak to oneself." The second is *siyah*, which means, "to muse, consider, or be deep in thought." Put these two ideas together and we realize that Biblical meditation is not just the emptying of the mind. It's not just the reading of God's Word, either, though we tend to try to interpret it that way. Biblical meditation is focusing our mind on a passage of Scripture, speaking those ideas to ourselves, ruminating on them, and running them through our thoughts again and again in an attempt to understand and apply them in our lives.

Meditation also differs from prayer in that we are not precisely talking to God, but rather reflecting or thinking about Him, His Words, etc. And although it involves Scripture, in that we must read it before we can think about it, it is not just reading the Word of God and walking away.

Nor is it necessarily studying the Word either. This is where I can get into trouble. I can spend so much time trying to study and understand every little piece of information, that I forget my soul needs nourishment as much as my brain. In studying the Scripture, we break things down, look at word origins and meanings, compare Scripture to Scripture, etc. It can get very technically oriented. You can study what is written, what it stands for and never get around to meditating on it.

In meditating, you are mulling the words over in your mind, searching for understanding in how they apply to you. You are thinking about how the passage works in your life, trying to find a deeper understanding of God and how He works, etc. Biblical study deepens our knowledge. Meditation deepens our relationship and expands our spiritual growth. There needs to be a balance of both.

Also, I hope you can see the difference between Biblical meditation and the common contemporary meaning of meditation. Biblical meditation does not include emptying the mind of thoughts and feelings and focusing on ourselves. Instead it is filling the mind and thoughts with the truths of God and focusing on Him.

You can also see then, how meditating on God's Word day and night, every day as the Scripture commands is possible unlike reading it would be. Because meditating is not just reading, it is constantly thinking about and mulling the words and truths over in your mind. I like the example Pastor Lindy Axon used. He said:

"One could say that meditation is to the Word of God what digestion is to food. Food is of little use if we fail to digest it well. Doctors tell us that the digestion process that takes place after swallowing is not enough to process our food completely. If we want to maximize the nutritional benefit, we must first chew it well. Likewise, we must ponder the scripture, attempting to expand our understanding of it and consider how it applies to our own experience in order for it to provide us with the highest benefit."

There are people who read the Bible and can even recite it, but who really know nothing of its power. They don't put it to use in their own lives or know how to apply it when in certain situations. They read the Bible diligently, but in a legalistic way that benefits no one. The great 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon wrote:

"Instead of putting facts into the [wine] press of meditation, and fermenting them until they can draw out inferences, they leave them to rot and perish. They extract none of the sweet juice of wisdom from the precious fruits of the vine-tree. A man who reads only a tenth part as much, but who takes the grapes ... that he

gathers, and squeezes them by meditation, will learn more in a week than your pendant will in a year, because he muses on what he reads."

Not too long ago the Christian publishing industry came out with those Bibles that are divided into daily readings so that you can read the entire Bible in one year. The concept and intention to get people reading the word every day is a good one. Reading your Bible every day is a must. Meditating on the Bible every day is better. In fact, you may read and meditate on the same small passage of Scripture for days or weeks or more. Don't ever feel like you have to read through the Bible in one year. There's too much in there. You'll probably miss most of it or forget what you've read if you try to cram so much in your mind in so short a period of time.

III. What are the Benefits of Meditating on God's Word?

So now that we know what Biblical meditation is, let's look at some of the benefits of it. Other than being exhorted to do so in Scripture, why should we meditate on God's Word? I bet many of you could come up with some very good reasons. But I want us to look at **Psalm 119:97-105** to get some very specific rewards or benefits of biblical meditation as listed in Scripture itself.

Psalm 119:97-105, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. [98] Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. [99] I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. [100] I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. [101] I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. [102] I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. [103] How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! [104] I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore, I hate every wrong path. [105] Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

Wow! Did you catch all of them in there? There are so many rewards or benefits listed just in these few Scriptures. Let's see if you can pick them out.

Look at **verse 98**. What reward is mentioned there? Wisdom.

How about **verse 99**? Insight.

Verse 100? Understanding.

Verses 101 and 102? Obedience/Direct teaching from God (through His Spirit).

What about in **verse 103**? A delight in and a greater hunger for God's Word.

Verse 104? Understanding or discernment (knowing right from wrong).

And **verse 105**? Guidance.

Or what about the passage we read in **Joshua 1:8**, where the Lord commands, "**Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful**"? What is the reward or benefit of meditation listed there? Prosperity and success.

And I could name a few more. Like the development of a quiet spirit, the fact that our view of God enlarges so that we can begin to see Him as He really is. We can gain an increased

sensitivity to God, His voice, His will, His work in the world around us and in our own individual lives.

What Christian wouldn't want these things? In fact, they are all signs of spiritual growth and maturity. They are fruits that develop from spending time in the presence of God. Yet how many Christians actually practice biblical meditation? Very few.

So that tells us right there why we have such a large number of shallow, infantile Christians in our churches today. That tells us why the church at large has lost its power and its voice in many cultural arenas. It tells us why more people don't take Christianity seriously. People are more likely to spend time watching TV, working on the computer, or trying to empty their minds in yoga classes than they are to spend time meditating on, contemplating, and chewing over God's Word.

IV. Challenge

I've brought this topic of mediation to our attention today because it has been a problem in my own life.

There are times when I've read Scripture and felt absolutely nothing. Of course emotion doesn't necessarily mean anything, but I could walk away from the Bible and ten minutes later not even be able to tell you what I read. I'm terrible at Bible memorization, but then again, I don't spend the time necessary to actually memorize and internalize it. And I think that meditating on the Word of God is what could make all the difference.

I've read Scripture. I've studied it. I believe it. I teach it. I do my best to obey it. And yet in many cases I haven't internalized it. Like a cow that chews on its cud, I need to go over the same passage again and again and again until I completely digest it and understand what God is trying to tell me through it.

I want to challenge you as I am challenging myself, that if you don't already, to start meditating on God's Word today. May I suggest you find a small passage of Scripture, maybe a favorite verse, maybe a short portion of a psalm, whatever, find a small passage of Scripture to mediate on this week. Just choose one. Not one for each day. Just one for the entire week.

Read it carefully over and over again. Many times a day - day after day. Think about it. Ask yourself or God questions about it. Things like:

What is God trying to tell me in this passage?

What do I understand and what don't I understand?

How does this verse apply to my life right now?

Have I seen evidence of this verse in my life in the past or in someone else's life?

Is God promising me something here or instructing me to do something?

Am I being obedient to this passage of Scripture?

Is there something in my life (sin) that is keeping me from doing or not doing what God says?

You may even want to have a journal or paper handy to write down other thoughts or questions you have while you meditate. Maybe even write out the passage at the top of the page.

Then pray about the verse. Talk to God about it. Ask Him your questions. And then listen for His answer. It may come quickly. It may take all week. It may take much longer, in which case, continue to meditate on the passage even after the week is up.

And even when your quiet time with God each morning is over, continue to mediate, to think about, to repeat the passage in your mind, to contemplate it's meaning and importance and application in your life all day long. Don't let that passage get too far from your thoughts. Let it be the last thing you read and think about before you turn off the light at night.

This is what I'm going to do this week, and I challenge you to do the same. I'm excited to see what God may have in store for us as we begin meditating on His precious Word as we were meant to.

Sermon Sources

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