

**Basic Training Bible Ministries
Presents**

“Biblical Meditation Revisited”



“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in You.” Isaiah 26:3

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.” Psalm 19:14

**Deary, Idaho
November 19–20, 2022**

(Includes notes from)

“The Art of Biblical Meditation”

**Arkansas Conference
May 13–15, 2022
Hot Springs, Arkansas**

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Introduction

The discipline of biblical meditation is a greatly overlooked, and vastly undervalued spiritual discipline. Many biblical dictionaries and systematic theologies never even mention the topic. In this study, we will answer the questions: What is meditation? Why and how should we practice it? What are the spiritual and personal benefits of this discipline? And especially: What ought we to meditate about?

How many of you practice meditation? Few raise their hands, but in reality, we all meditate. Whatever we spend most of our time thinking about and dwelling on is meditation. We meditate on what we value, and on what is precious to us. The question is this: Is our meditation acceptable to God (Psalm 104:34)?

Let us consider two Psalms of David to begin our investigation.

Psalm 1: Some Benefits and Blessings of Biblical Meditation

The only one who ever fully lived out this Psalm was the Lord Jesus Christ. Just think of the peace, the poise, the majesty of His life!

1. Meditation on God’s Word will deliver us from spiritual inertia (**v. 1**). Note the opposite trajectory in the simple outline of the book of Ephesians (“Sit,” chapters 1–3; “Walk,” chapter 4–6:9; “Stand,” 6:9–24).
2. Meditation creates, and sustains, a delight in the Word of God (**v. 2**; Psa. 37:4).
3. Meditation opens the soul to the grace-provisions of God (**v. 3a**).
4. Meditation affects our personal conduct and service (**v. 3b**).
5. Meditation brings blessing from God (**vv. 1, 3c**).
6. Meditation places us under the protective hand of God (**v. 6**; Nahum 1:7).

Note: Martin Luther came to saving faith by meditating on Romans 1:17, *“The just shall live by faith.”* He wrote, “To meditate is to think persistently, deeply, and diligently ... It is best to meditate out loud.” He believed that God’s Word spoken audibly goes through the ears to enter into and penetrate the heart (Rom. 10:17).

Luther compared the act of meditation to the cow chewing its cud. In his commentary on Deuteronomy 14:1, Luther wrote: “To chew the cud, however, is to receive the word effectively and meditate with supreme diligence to that one does not permit it to go in one ear and out of the

other, but holds it firmly in the heart ...” (*The Kindled Heart—Luther on Meditation*, Lutheran Theological Journal, 1986, pp. 142–154).

Psalm 19: Two Valuable Topics for Meditation

It is always good to think on the works of God, as they relate to His revealed Word (Psa. 103:7).

1. The work of creation (vv. 1–6).
2. The Word of God (vv. 7–11).

Note that the value of meditating on the creation and the Creator is inner cleansing, spiritual liberation from sins, and communion with God (vv. 12–14). Meditation should engage us in total preoccupation as we read (eyes), speak (tongue), hear (ears), think (mind), and consider how to apply (body).

Now, with these appetizers, we can enter into **five areas of meditation** commanded in the New Testament:

1. Meditation on our Savior and our so-great salvation.
2. Meditation on our self in light of our salvation.
3. Meditation on biblical spirituality.
4. Meditation regarding our spiritual gift and ministry.
5. When is the wrong time for meditation, and why?

CLASS ONE

Meditation on the Savior and Our Salvation (Hebrews 3:1; 12:3)

The greatest object of our meditations ought to be the Person of Jesus Christ, seen in light of His glorious work in our salvation.

1. Meditation on His Person (Heb. 3:1 cf. 1 John 1:1–4).
 - a) The word “*consider*” is from *katanoeo* – to bear down with the mind, concentrate. For various words translated “*meditate*” see notes on pg.11–12.
 - b) It is a command to the readers to begin to do what they have failed to do thus far.
 - c) Jesus Christ is set forth as the focal point of our meditations—first, in His Person.
 - 1) “*Apostle*” speaks of His being sent from the Father, as an emissary from Heaven, to bring to us the good news of the offer of eternal life.
 - 2) “*High Priest*” reveals His work of redemption by the offering of Himself as the only acceptable sacrifice for our sins, and then of His current intercession for us at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:31–39).
 - d) Secondly, we see the effects of His work for us in two subordinate phrases.
 - 1) “*Holy brethren*” reminds us that we are sanctified, new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).
 - 2) “*Partakers of the heavenly calling*” reminds us of our eternal inheritance.
 - 3) If we back up to Hebrews 2:17–18 we read that because He is “*merciful and faithful*” He is “*able to aid those who are tempted.*” The word translated “aid” is

much more graphic in the original Greek, coming from *boetheo*, which pictures someone running to give help and deliverance to someone in distress.

2. Meditation on His work (Heb. 12:2–3).

As the argument of the epistle develops, the author moves from the supreme character of the deliverer to the glorious effects of His work. You can see this same theme in the songs of the redeemed as they magnify the majesty of the Lord (Rev. 4:8, 11), and then speak of His redemptive work (Rev. 5:9–10, 12–13).

- a) “*Looking*” is from *aphorao*, to look away from one thing and to another. It is a call to overcome the distractions of this present world, and to fix our eyes on Him who is invisible, as Moses did (Heb. 11:27).
- b) Once we take our eyes off of the things of this world, we are then able to “*consider Jesus*.” The verb *analogizomai* signifies a repetitious reckoning of the facts concerning the sufferings of our Lord on our behalf.
- c) As the “*author and finisher*” of our faith we consider Jesus as the only One who walked the path of faith perfectly from birth to death, as well as the origin and the completion of our faith. He is like the starter who fires the shot that begins our race, and the judge who waits at the end of the race to give us our reward. The race of the Christian is from the cross to the crown!

CLASS TWO

Meditation on Ourselves in Light of Salvation (Romans 6:11)

“*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Romans 6:11

1. In this verse, the verb “*reckon*” is from *logizomai* and is a present, middle, imperative. It is a command to be in continual focus and concentration regarding our spiritual condition in our relationship to God through Christ. Am I abiding in Christ daily (John 15:4).
2. The “*likewise*” refers back to the experience of Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection (vv. 9–10), and the spiritual application of that process to our own salvation.
3. The question or issue is this: Are we making progress in our own personal sanctification (Romans chapters 6–8)) as we ought to be?

Spiritual Dead Reckoning

“In navigation, dead reckoning is the process of calculating current position of some moving object by using a previously determined position, or fix, and then incorporating estimates of speed, heading direction, and course over elapsed time” – Wikipedia

1. In this analogy, the “*previously determined position*” is where we were in our lost and sinful condition (Rom. 5:6–10). We were:
 - a) “*without strength*” (5:6)—unable to save ourselves;
 - b) “*sinners*” (5:8)—under condemnation in Adam (5:12).
 - c) “*enemies*” (5:10)—hostile to God and His righteousness.

2. From that starting point, and the time of our salvation, we can estimate the “*speed ... direction, and course*” of our spiritual growth.
3. This meditation is but one of a three-part process laid out by Paul:
 - a) First comes biblical/doctrinal instruction and discipleship (Rom. 6:3–9. Note the repetition of the word “*know ... knowing.*”
 - b) Next comes “*reckoning*”, the habitual meditation and reflection on the truths learned and how they have changed our identity (Rom. 6:11). What we identify ourselves being is what we become conformed to (Rom. 5:10–21; 6:4–8; 12:1–2). This works both in the spiritual and in the physical realm, for blessing or cursing (Note all the emphasis on how one “*identifies*” and you can see that Satan realizes the power of identification).
 - c) Third, and finally, meditation on our identification with Christ leads to our daily presentation to God for Christ-like conduct (Rom. 6:12–23). The word “*present*” is from *paristemi*, meaning “to place near at hand, to make available for use.” It is a command for continual surrender to the Word of God and to His revealed will.
4. We ought to daily evaluate our spiritual growth based on where we were without Christ, and where we are in relation to His goal for our lives. Our destination is spiritual maturity and effective service to Him. “*Today*” is the only day we have to get there (Psalm 95:7b; Heb. 3:7, 15). Our motivation is the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–15), and our prospect is eternal reward (1 Cor. 3:10–15; 2 Tim. 4:7–8).

CLASS THREE

Meditation on Biblical Spirituality (Philippians 4:8).

*“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praise-worthy **meditate** on these things.”*

Philippians 4:8

1. The word for meditate here is again *logizomai*, and is also a present, middle, imperative.
2. This form of the verb indicates that we must habitually act upon ourselves (middle voice) in order to fulfill the command.
3. We must never forget that faith is objective, in that the power of faith is not produced by us, but by Him in whom we believe. Jesus Christ is the “working object” of our faith. The more we know Him, through His Word, the greater the power of our faith.

“... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection ...” (Phil. 3:10).

The Context Surrounding the Qualities

Note: “*These things*” include several things in the context, defined by the eight descriptive words of Philippians 4:

1. First of all, Paul’s emphasis is on mental attitude or “*this mind*” (Phil. 2:2; 3:15–16, 19).
2. Then, the potential of eternal reward, **v. 1** (5 crowns).

- a) The Unfading Crown (1 Cor. 9:25).
 - b) The Crown of Joy (Phil. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:19).
 - c) The Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:7–8).
 - d) The Crown of Life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10).
 - e) The Crown of Glory (1 Pet. 5:4).
3. The unity of the body, **vv. 2–3** (Eph. 4:1–6).
 4. Joy, gentleness, and peace, **vv. 4–9**. These are sequential in experience. They come from a deep reliance on the providential care of God (Psalm 107:9; 139:13–16). David’s prayer in Psalm 142 illustrates **vv. 6–7**. **We must enter into the “peace of God” (v. 7) by faith if we want the “God of peace” to be with us (v. 9).**
 5. The meditation of v. 8 contributes to the spiritual growth of vv. 11–13:
 - a) The “*I have learned*” phase, **v. 11**. This is active discipleship.
 - b) The “*I know how*” phase, **v. 12**. This speaks of skills mastered.
 - c) The “*I can do*” confidence, **v. 13**. This is the calm certainty that you are enabled and equipped to face all future possibilities.
 6. The reaping of what has been sown, **vv. 14–20**.
How interesting that chapter four begins with the prospect of eternal rewards (v. 1) and concludes with blessings and provisions in time (**v. 19**). This gives the full spectrum of the idea that we reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7–10).
 - a) We reap the same kind as we sow.
 - b) We reap much more than we sow.
 - c) We reap much later than we sow.
 7. The only way to reap God’s blessings in time, and rewards in eternity is by following the five daily disciplines of the Christian life.

CLASS FOUR

Meditation Regarding Our Gift and Ministry (1 Timothy 4:14–16)

The prior basis for meditating on our gift and ministry is meditation on the “*mystery of godliness*” (1 Tim. 3:16), which is worthy of much careful consideration.

“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.” 1 Timothy 4:15

1. Timothy is one of the three pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus).
2. However, contrary to popular opinion, whatever God requires of the Pastor regarding spiritual conduct, He requires of the individual believer (barring the function of the spiritual gift).
3. Once again, the context defines for us what “*these things*” refer to.

Meditating on Our Gift and Ministry

1. The word “*meditate*” here is from *meletao*, which means to attend to and cultivate. It is present, active, imperative, which again is a habitual dedication to mental focus and physical conduct.

2. To begin with, we must establish that every believer has **three ministries** (all 3 included in the three exhortations of Hebrews 10:22–24).
 - a) Priesthood.
As a believer-priest, we can represent ourselves directly to God and also intercede on behalf of others (Heb. 4:14–16; 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5–9).
 - b) Ambassadorship.
This has to do with our ministry of representing Christ by life and witness to those who are lost (2 Cor. 5:14–21; 1 Pet. 3:15).
 - c) Ministry.
This is directed toward fellow believers in the exercise of our spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). Each of us has a role of edifying others in the body.
3. To operate in the right place as a member of the Body, each believer is given a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10–11).
4. Paul urges Timothy to meditate specifically on five critical things in 1 Timothy 4:
 - a) His public example, **v. 12**,
 - b) His teaching ministry, **v. 13**,
 - c) The development and effectiveness of his gift, **v. 14**,
 - d) His visible progress in faith and conduct, **v. 15b**, and
 - e) To the pursuit of harmony in his life and teaching, **v. 16**.

Five daily disciplines of the Christian life

Each of the following is something we do daily for the body. We ought to take the same care for our souls:

1. Wash – (John 13:10; 1 John 1:9; Eph. 5:26).
2. Eat – (Matt. 4:4; 5:6).
3. Walk – (1 John 1:7; Gal. 5:16; 2 Cor. 5:7).
4. Work – (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12–13; Titus 2:14; 3:14).
5. Rest – (Matt. 11:28–30; Heb. 4:3, 9, 11).

CLASS FIVE

When Not to Meditate, and Why (Luke 21:14)

*“Therefore settle it in your hearts **not to meditate** beforehand on what you will answer ...”*

1. The word used here for “*meditate*” is *promeletao*—the same word as in 1 Timothy 4:15, but with the added prefix *pro*, meaning “in advance” or “ahead of time.”
2. The actual command is found in the phrase “*settle it in your hearts*,” the verb coming from *tithemi*, “to set or place.” It is an aorist, active, imperative referring to the time when they are facing persecution. It is a reference to that particular time.
 - a) It is a time for testimony, **v. 13**.
 - b) It is a time to rely on the Spirit for supernatural wisdom, **v. 15**.
 - c) It will be a time of betrayal, **vv. 16–17**.
 - d) It is a time to take control of our souls, **v. 19**. The verb *ptaomai* means to take possession of, or to acquire for yourself. To take command and control of our soul, by

means of spiritual endurance. Otherwise fear hands control over to Satan, who uses fear to take us captive (Heb. 2:14–15).

3. The question arises, if meditation is so often stressed in the Bible, why, in the critical moment of persecution, would the Lord tell us not to pre-meditate?

A Time to Keep Silent and a Time to Speak

“*A time to keep silence, and a time to speak ...*” (Eccl. 3:7b)

1. Here is a worthwhile quote from the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:
“Jesus instructed His followers not to waste their time meditating their anticipated defense before their persecutors. Such confrontations are so versatile and unpredictable that undue pre-occupation with them only increases one’s anxiety and reduces one’s effectiveness in the task at hand. To meet such a crisis Jesus promised special wisdom in speech from the Holy Spirit.”
2. We all need to bear in mind that Paul has stated that ... “*All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*” (2 Tim. 3:12).
3. Since we are living in a time of increasing persecution in the United States of America, we all need to prepare for such times. It is already illegal to openly practice, or speak out regarding, our Christian faith in this country. There are already many Christians in prison for speaking out boldly and clearly regarding truth, morality, and sin.
4. We actually have an example of this command in action in the life of Peter (Acts 12:1–19).
 - a) James has already been put to death by Herod (vv. 1–2).
 - b) On seeing that this pleased the Jews (religious leaders), Herod then arrested and put Peter in prison (vv. 3–4).
 - c) Since this was on Passover, wouldn’t Peter have been remembering the warning of Jesus in John 21:18–19?
 - d) Yet, we find Peter sleeping so soundly that the delivering angel has to strike him to wake him up (vv. 5–7)!
 - e) All the church was praying (vv. 5, 12), but Peter is sleeping.
 - f) I believe the point to be this: If we study, meditate, pray, and serve faithfully day by day, when the persecution comes, we can rest in the perfect will of God as to the outcome. Some, like James, will die. Others, like Peter, will be delivered. In each case, it is according to the perfect plan of God for each believer, as to how He wants them to glorify Him.

Summary: Meditation Revisited

So important is the study and practice of meditation that we ought to develop the habit of meditating on meditation. What is meditation? How is it to be conducted? How can we learn to practice fruitful and effective meditation? The following passages are presented, with a few brief notes, to answer these questions. These include the total number of references in Strong’s Concordance where “meditate” or “meditation” occurs in the English Bible:

1. **Genesis 24:63** – Meditation is a means of divine guidance.
Isaac goes out to the field in the evening to meditate. This is similar to Adam and Eve meeting with the Lord in the evening (Gen. 3:8). What do you suppose he was meditating about? Then it is that Rebekah comes to him!
2. **Joshua 1:8** – Meditation strengthens obedience and brings blessing.
The Lord commands Joshua to meditate in the Book of the Law day and night (see Psalm 1:2), and to observe and do all that is written, so that his way might prosper.
3. **Psalm 1:2** – The discipline of meditation is a defense against evil.
What we set our heart on we tend to pursue. The craving for fellowship with God will inevitably lead to immersion in His Word.
4. **Psalm 5:1** – Meditation is an aid to prayer and communion with God.
The Holy Spirit uses God’s Word to investigate and expose the very thoughts and intents of our heart (Heb. 4:12–13).
5. **Psalm 19:14** – Honest meditation is a means to purifying the heart and mind.
Look at the context. In vv. 1–6, we find meditating on creation (environmental meditation), then from vv. 7–11 we have meditation on revelation, God’s Word. The result is the cleansing of the inner man.
6. **Psalm 49:3** – The discipline of meditation equips us to speak wisdom and give counsel to those around us. The wisest counsel deals with life’s greatest question: “Where will you spend eternity?”
7. **Psalm 63:6** – David’s thirst for God (vv. 1, 7) led him to meditations in the waking hours of the night.
How easy it is for us to waste precious hours in worry or anxiety, when the time could be spent taking refuge under the shadow of His wings.
8. **Psalm 77:6, 12** – Meditation is a diligent search, an inventory of the soul, in remembering who God is, and what He has done for us—the mighty works and ways of God.
9. **Psalm 104:34** – Meditation is a means of singing from the heart in praise of God’s providences and provisions of grace to us. In this Psalm, David contemplates creation (vv. 1–5), the flood (vv. 6–9), nature (vv. 10–18), the heavens (vv. 19–23), and God’s provisions for man and beast (vv. 24–32). While some meditations have a single focus, others consider the vast scope of the wonderful work of God.

Note: References to meditation throughout **Psalm 119** are especially helpful, because each comes under a different “file” of the Hebrew alphabet. The Hebrews taught their children the alphabet by linking each letter to a different tangible idea, based on the appearance of the letter. See my book, *Psalm 119—The Diary of a Captive*—for further detail on this method.

10. **Psalm 119:15** – The author finds in meditation a means of both purifying the life and also bringing rejoicing to the heart. This section (vv. 9–16) is the *Beth* file, speaking of a house and home, a place of security, fellowship, and love.
11. **Psalm 119:23** – By meditation, the author had discovered the many layers and depths of the Word of God. In Psalm 119:1–8, seven different words describe the Word of God (“law,” “testimonies,” “ways,” “precepts,” “statutes,” “commandments,” “judgments”). How fitting that here, in vv. 17–24, we have the *Gimel* file. The letter *Gimel* pictures a camel, the symbol of abundant supply. Just as the camel trains brought precious goods from afar, so God’s Word brings to us the treasures of God’s storehouse in Heaven.
12. **Psalm 119:48** – Meditation provides a defense against false accusations. This is the *Waw* file—a symbol of security and stability. The letter *waw* looked like a tent peg, which secured the tent from the desert winds (see Isa. 33:20). Our security and stability is in the Lord, and His finished work. But we do not experience that stability unless we draw from the deep well of His promises by meditation (vv. 42, 45–46).
13. **Psalm 119:78** – Meditation can be a source of strength in persecution. In vv. 73–80, we have the *Yod* file. The letter *Yod* looks like a cupped hand and represents the hand of a workman producing something. Here, God is shown at work in our lives to bring about the finished product, according to His will. The Psalmist speaks of being afflicted by God (v. 75; see Heb. 12:3–11) and abused by men (v. 78), yet he knows that it will all work toward making him effective in strengthening and blessing others who also suffer (vv. 74, 79).
14. **Psalm 119:97, 99** – Diligent meditation is to the soul what cool, clear water is to the thirsty body (Psalm 63:1). The letter *Mem* is the symbol of water, in this case, living water (John 4:10). In a time of trial and suffering by his enemies (v. 98), God’s Word brings refreshment to the soul, in the form of understanding (vv. 99, 100, 104). It is by this understanding that he is refreshed and enabled to endure hardship and affliction.
15. **Psalm 119:148** – It is by means of the discipline of meditation that the Holy Spirit brings to our minds past things we have learned. The letter *Qoph* looks like the back of the head in profile. This represents memory, reflection—what we dwell on in our mind. It is what Paul speaks of in Philippians 4:8–9. Jesus said, “*However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth ...*” (John 16:13). However, the recall ministry of the Holy Spirit requires our cooperation by means of meditation. Here, the author is crying out (vv. 145–146) in early morning and in the night (vv. 147–148) for inner revival (v. 149), which will lead to deliverance in time of trouble.
16. **Psalm 143:5** – It is good, in times of trial, to meditate on God’s past deliverances. Here, David, in the face of overwhelming persecution (vv. 3–4), cries out to God for deliverance. The main focus of his request is for God’s guidance in the way he should go (vv. 7–10; see Prov. 3:5–6). When we read the persecution Psalms of David, and we find them speaking to where we are in life, we should be encouraged that God is taking us through the same school of discipline that David went through.

17. **Isaiah 33:18** – Meditation can take our eyes off the fears of this life and turn them to the promise of His kingdom.

Historically, Israel had endured many “terrors” because of their sins (vv. 14, 18–19). They had been dispersed by Assyria and Babylon. Those who remained in their sins would suffer eternal condemnation (v. 14). Yet, the eternal perspective of those who believe is an eternal kingdom under the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 20–24). Compare this section to Hebrews 12:22–24.

18. **Luke 21:14** – There is a time to rest in faith, and not to meditate, but to rely solely on the Holy Spirit. In Mark, the word for meditate is *promerimnao*, a word that means “to be anxious beforehand.” In Luke, the word is *promeletao*, meaning to meditate or plan out ahead of time.

Point: If we meditate as a daily discipline, when persecution or affliction comes, we should rest in faith that God is in control. One example here is Peter in prison (Acts 12:1–19); he was sound asleep when the angel came to wake him, not pacing his cell in anxiety.

19. **Philippians 4:8** – What we dwell on in our souls is what we will become in our lives.

Here, the word meditate is *logizomai*. This word is used 41 times in the New Testament and means “to impute or place to one’s account” (Rom. 4:6 8; Gal. 3:6), “to reckon as true” (Rom. 6:11; 8:18).

20. To these we can add **Romans 6:11** (“*reckon*”) and **Hebrews 3:1** and **12:3** (“*consider*”). In the Romans passage, we are commanded to count as true what the Bible says about our redemption and reconciliation (Rom. 5:6–6:10). In both passages in Hebrews, we are to consider Jesus, first in regard to His unique Person as the God-Man, and then in regard to His finished work on the cross, and what that means for our present life and eternal future.

The Art of Biblical Meditation

Hot Springs, Arkansas

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Introduction

As we will see, the only man who ever lived a life of perfect peace was the Lord Jesus Christ. We will also discover how His constant meditation on the Word of God was the basis of His spiritual power. His mind was stayed on the presence and power of His heavenly Father.

The means of keeping the mind stayed, or fixed, on the Lord is called “meditation.” But what is meditation? Why is there so little information on this topic? Have you ever read a book on biblical meditation? Or heard a message on the topic?

To illustrate the absence of interest in the exercise of biblical meditation, there appears to be a great dearth of information on this topic in most Bible handbooks, theological dictionaries, and even in volumes on systematic theology!

The goal of this study is to define what biblical meditation is, and how it relates to the other disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and fasting. We cannot learn the valuable discipline of meditation until we know what it is and how it is done.

Definition: “Meditate/meditation”

“Meditate—akin to the Greek *medesthai*, care for, think of ... to reflect upon, or consider ... to observe intently ... to engage in thought or contemplation,” The New Century Dictionary.

“Meditate—to reflect deeply ... to spend time in the spiritual exercise of thinking about some religious theme,” New Websters Dictionary.

Meditation has been compared to the cow or the camel, which, after eating its fill, will bring up the “cud” to chew on, over and over again. This process is called “rumination,” which has the secondary definition of thinking deeply on a given topic. Rumination is a synonym of the word meditation.

Meditate

Hebrew:

1. *Hagah* (Josh. 1:8; Psalm 1:2)— “to murmur, ponder, speak, study, utter.”
2. *Hagiyg* (Psalm 5:1)— “murmur, meditate, muse upon.”
3. *Siyach* (Psalm 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 148)— “to converse with oneself, commune, muse, speak, pray.”

Greek:

1. *Meletao* (1 Tim. 4:15)— “to take care of, from *melo*, to be of interest, concern.”
2. *Logizomai* (Phil. 4:8)— “to consider, reckon, take into account.”
3. *Analogizomai* (Heb. 12:3)— “to reckon, count, consider, over and over.”

4. *Katanoeo* (Heb. 3:1)— “to bear down with the mind, to fix the mind on, attention and continuous observation.”

Our goal in these studies is to learn first of all, what is biblical meditation? We also need to know why we ought to make time for meditation. Finally, it is essential to learn how to be effective in it, so as to realize all of its many benefits.

A quick word of clarification is necessary. Biblical meditation is as far removed as the East from the West, or light from dark, from Eastern meditation. Whereas the goal of Eastern meditation (Buddhist/Yoga, etc.) is to empty the mind and create a void, the object of biblical meditation is to fill and saturate the mind with the Word of God and biblical/spiritual truth.

CLASS ONE

The Example of Meditation in the Psalms

Psalm One—The Righteous Man

Here we see the discipline of the man called “*The righteous*” in v. 6. He does not draw gradually nearer and nearer to the “*counsel ... path ... seat*” if the sinful. Note the relation of “*walks ... stands ... sits*” with ...

*“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.
You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of
Them when you **sit** in your house, when you **walk** by the way, when
You lie down, and when you **rise up.**” Deuteronomy 6:6–7*

These words also remind us of Paul’s outline of Ephesians:

1. Seated (chapters 1–3),
2. Walking (chapters 4–6:9), and
3. Standing (chapter 6:10–20).

In Psalm 1, the progression is negative: going from walking, to standing, to sitting. It reveals a downward spiritual progression. The picture is of a man who, walking through the marketplace, stops to hear the aimless discussion of worthless men, and then sits down to join in their folly.

However, in both Deuteronomy 6:6–7 and in Ephesians (Eph. 2:6; 4:1; 6:14), this progression is reversed—from sit to walk to stand—indicating gradual and consistent spiritual progress.

The Righteous Man

The only person ever to fulfill vv. 1–3 of Psalm 1 completely is the Lord Jesus Christ. This Psalm reveals to us the inner life of our Lord, whose mind was fixed on the Word of God throughout His entire life.

The word “*delight*” (*chephets*) speaks of intense desire for that which is of utmost value. This reminds us of Psalm 37:4, “*Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.*” Here, the word “*delight*” (*anag*) suggests the joy and pleasure of intimate embrace.

Here, we begin to see not only the value of biblical meditation, but also the reason why our failure to learn this discipline has led to such a loss of genuine love for God, and for many, a dry and theologically accurate but unsatisfying spiritual experience. We know and believe objectively in the facts of the faith, but find little personal exhilaration in our relationship to God through Jesus Christ. We have left our first love!

So desirable is the Word of God to the righteous man that he meditates in it day and night. It is a source of constant delight, comfort, instruction, and joy. The five spiritual benefits of disciplined meditation are easily seen:

1. The word “*planted*” suggests, first of all, stability.
2. Then the “*rivers of living water*” speak of never-ending supply.
3. From this fresh, daily supply comes a life of fruitfulness. The phrase “*in its season*” indicates the right time for fruit. This man is in step with the will and purpose of God.
4. In time of trouble, or spiritual drought, he is not adversely affected. He has inner reserves, from the faithful supply of his roots, driven deep into the “*rivers*” of God. This is what Jesus spoke of, “*as the Scripture has said ...*” John 7:38.
5. His life prospers with the blessings of God upon it. And we know that God blesses His own, that they might be a blessing to others.

According to **Psalm 49:3**, the ability to speak wisdom to others comes from understanding gained through meditation:

*“My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation
of my heart shall give understanding.”*

The Meditative Life of Jesus Anticipated

In **Psalm 22**, we see a reference to our Lord’s faith-rest from birth (vv. 9–10), and how this devotion and meditation sustained Him on the cross. In a later session, we will see how effective this habit and discipline of constant meditation was in the life of our Lord.

Although none of us will attain to the perfect standard of Psalm 1:1–3, yet it is recorded for our instruction, and to the degree that we do attain, we will surely experience the stability and blessing that is promised here. Is it not amazing that with such promises to those who learn the discipline of meditation, our Bible handbooks and theological works are mostly silent on the discipline of biblical meditation?

Time Out for Meditation

“Meditation takes time. The word “**Selah**” is used 71 times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk. It comes from *Shelah*, meaning “rest.” This is a musical mark denoting a pause,

during which the singers ceased to sing and only the instruments were heard. It is a call to calm reflection on the preceding words. In **Psalm 9:16** it follows the word “meditation” (*higgaion*). The *Selah* reminds us that the Psalm requires a peaceful and meditative soul which can apprehend what the Holy Spirit propounds,” (Fausset’s Bible Dictionary).

There is a pattern that emerges as we study the use of “Selah” in the Psalms, that should be a guide to us in our own spiritual struggles and personal lives. Above all, it teaches us to take the time necessary for thoughtful meditation.

Example One: Psalm 3:2, 4 and 8

Note that in the first two verses we see great personal need. The “Selah” encourages us to ponder on this common condition. Then, in vv. 3–4 we see the assurance of divine intervention. Now, the “Selah” urges us to reflect on the goodness and grace of God, based on His promises. Verses 5–6 reveal the condition of faith-rest arising from David’s confidence in God. Finally, in vv. 7–8, he prays for final deliverance, and again “Selah” calls us to ponder on the sure deliverance of God.

Example Two: Psalm 32:4, 5, and 7

The pattern here is essentially the same as seen in the previous Psalm.

1. In vv. 1–2 we have the blessedness of forgiveness stated, then the spiritual need of the sinful soul. We are called to consider this woeful condition.
2. David’s confession of sin, and God’s mercy and faithfulness to forgive in v. 5, is worthy of deep reflection and meditation (1 Cor. 11:31; 1 John 1:9).
3. Then, vv. 6–7 call on all who find themselves overwhelmed with sins to seek this way of deliverance. The “*godly*” are not those who are sinless, but rather those who quickly confess their sins, and then seek divine guidance and instruction for living (vv. 8–10).

Example Three: Psalm 77:3, 9, and 15

This Psalm is by Asaph, who was a Levite (1 Chron. 6:39), a prophet/seer (2 Chron. 29:30), and a singer (Neh. 12:46). Again, we see the pattern of need expressed (vv. 1–3), then of meditation on the deliverance of God (vv. 4–9), and then of assurance of God’s intervention.

Example Four: Habakkuk 3:3, 9, and 12

In the closing prayer of Habakkuk, we again see the pattern already established. First comes the expression of great need (vv. 1–3), followed by God’s gracious response (vv. 4–9), followed by the rejoicing of hope (vv. 10–19, “*Selah*” coming in v. 13). It is worth taking note that the key verse of Habakkuk (Hab. 2:4) is developed through the entire book, in the face of great calamity, and yet “faith-rest” is found in the end (3:16–19). The principle is that if we learn to tremble before God in humble submission, we will triumph in the face of all calamities!

Principle:

The clear pattern revealed by these Psalms is that in time of great spiritual need, we must focus and meditate on the grace/mercy of God, as expressed in the promises of His Word. “Selah” is a call to enter into the faith-rest life, by means of the acknowledgement of our need, followed by meditation on God’s character and promises as evidenced in the scriptural record, and in our own experience, resulting in the strengthening of the soul to begin singing songs of deliverance and hope, even before we see the outward evidence of it.

CLASS TWO

Methods of Meditation/Details

From what we have seen in session one, meditation can take the form of a personal catechism in the soul, where our need poses a question to which meditation on God’s Word and prayer bring the answer.

This has been called “the faith-rest drill” and “the faith-rest rationale.” It is a spiritual exercise by which we rely on the recall ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13) to remind us of God’s mighty deliverances throughout history and in our own lives. From this spiritual “rear-view mirror” we gain assurance of what God will continue to do in the future for us.

A Formula for Meditation

The use of acronym can be valuable in developing the discipline of meditation. Consider some examples of the use of acronyms:

1. Medical Acronym
As first responders in Australia, we were taught DRABC: Danger? Responsiveness?
Airway? Breathing? Circulation?
2. Military Acronym
SMEAC: Situation? Mission? Execution? Administration/logistics?
Command/control?

The use of mentally posing questions, then reflecting on the right answers, is a form of personal, spiritual catechism.

The Method of Dr. James Gray

The author of the little volume, *How to Master the English Bible*, learned his method from, as he says, “a layman” with whom he came into contact at a Bible conference. He writes, “I saw something in his Christian life to which I was a comparative stranger—a peace, a rest, a joy, a kind of spiritual poise I knew little about.”

Upon asking the man his spiritual secret, he was amazed to find that the gentleman was in the habit of reading books of the Bible in a single sitting, and continuing to read them, until he could grasp the central theme of the book, and its logical argument through from beginning to end.

“I saw for the first time that a book of Scripture is a complete discussion of a single subject; I felt the force of the book as a whole, and I understood the different parts in the light of the whole as I had never understood them when reading them by themselves” (p. 20).

His recommendation is to start with the idea of the whole book, then to look for the individual parts. He uses the illustration of beginning with a telescope to view the world around us, before progressing to the microscope. Only as we understand the whole of a book can we appreciate its separate parts. This he calls “the synthetic method” of Bible study, synthesis being the opposite of analysis. In the repeated reading of Bible books, much fodder is provided for serious meditation.

Dr. Harry Ironsides Questions

Information

1. What is the principal subject?
2. What are the leading lessons?
3. What is the key verse?
4. Who are the principal persons?
5. What is the teaching about Christ?

Application

1. What example to follow?
2. What error to avoid?
3. What command to obey?
4. What promise to claim?
5. What prayer to pray?

An Example from the Lakota Sioux

Joseph M. Marshall III was raised by his grandparents, because his family was too large for his father to feed them all. He has written a number of books, including *Walking with Grandfather*, in which he remembers some of the lessons he learned growing up under his grandfather’s tutelage.

In one of his books, which one I don’t recall, he tells of being sent out onto a hill, to sit and observe everything that happened during the day. When he returned in the evening, his grandfather asked him what he saw.

“I saw a hawk,” he said. “What kind of hawk?” asked grandfather. After admitting he did not know, the grandfather said, “What did he look like?” “How did he fly?” “What was he doing?” By the end of the session, he had learned the markings that identify the hawk, what his habits were, and why the hawk did what he did. While not written from a Christian position, this is an illustration of guided meditation.

Dr. William Luck’s Study Method

I had the privilege of meeting and hearing Dr. Luck, then professor of Bible and Theology at Moody Bible Institute, at a pastors’ conference years ago in Fort Wayne, Indiana. With all his scholarship and learning, when he was asked by one of the pastors about his study method, he gave a very simple answer:

1. Passage—What is being taught in the context?
2. Principle—What is the primary lesson to be learned?
3. Practice—How do I apply this truth to my life?

How often we find that great wisdom and power come in simple ways!

The Risley Method (Matthew 6:9–13)

A successful Boeing engineer turned farmer, Bill Risley left everything with his family to become missionaries in Mexico. In seeking God’s guidance as to what to do and where to go, they used the method I heard him present at Tucson Bible Church one Sunday.

For one month, each member of the family sought a place of solitude every morning and prayed and meditated on the Lord’s Prayer. Here was the method they used:

1. *“Our Father who is in heaven”*— What does the Scripture teach me about God as my heavenly Father?
2. *“Hallowed be Thy Name”*— What brings glory to His name? How can I bring glory to His name? What is the Spirit leading me to do that will glorify His name?
3. *“Your kingdom come”*— Am I really looking and living for His coming kingdom? How can I live more expectantly?
4. *“Your will be done, on Earth as in Heaven”*— What is your will for me? For my family? Am I doing His will to the best of my knowledge?
5. *“Give us this day our daily bread”*— Am I trusting for His provision this day? Am I content with His provision today?
6. *“Forgive us our debts”*— For what do I need forgiveness? Have I confessed my sins to God? Do I accept His forgiveness?
7. *“As we forgive our debtors”*— Have I forgiven those who have wronged me? If not, how can I do it genuinely?
8. *“As we forgive our debtors”*— Have I forgiven those who have wronged or hurt me?
9. *“Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil”*— Do I take the way of escape that He provides? Do I flee from temptation?
10. *“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen”*— Am I living for His kingdom, or for myself? How can I be more kingdom focused?

Meditating on the prayers of great saints could use the same method. Consider the Prayer of Jabez (1 Chron. 4:10) or that of Daniel confessing the sins of his nation (Daniel chapter 9). Contrary to the work on Jabez’ prayer by Bruce Wilkinson, there is no value whatever in rote repetition of any given prayer. But to meditate on these prayers, and consider the spirit in which they are offered, the truth of the things requested, and the trust in God that they present, could be of great value.

Six Little Words

*“I have six little friends.
They taught me all I knew.
Their names are what, and when, and where
and why, and how, and who.”* – Longfellow

Consider the use of these six little words in examining a passage:

1. Ephesians 2:1–10

- a) **What** is the topic? See vv. 5–6 (New birth/regeneration).
- b) **When** is the time factor? See vv. 1, 5b, and 8 (moment of salvation). Also add v. 7, eternity future.
- c) **Where?** Not an issue here.
- d) **Why?** See vv. 4–5 (His great love ... mercy ... grace. Note the order; first the source, then the withholding of judgment, finally the provision of blessings).
- e) **How?** v. 5, “*Alive together with Christ*” (spiritual union/baptism of the Holy Spirit).
- f) **Who?** There is the “*you*” (v. 1, Gentile believers), then the “*we*” (v. 3, Jewish believers), and then the “*us*” (vv. 4, 6, and 7, Body of Christ).

2. Hebrews 6:1–8

Serious Bible study is like the work of an investigator. We are to “follow the evidence,” not jump to preconceived conclusions.

- a) **What?** “*Let us go on to perfection*” (v. 1).
- b) **When?** “*If God permits*” (v. 3).
- c) **Where?** Applies to all believers in all places, but especially these Jewish believers living in the shadow of 70 A.D.
- d) **Why?**
 - 1) Because they had stalled in their spiritual growth (context, Heb. 5:11–14).
 - 2) Because delay could cross the point of no return, “*it is impossible.*”
- e) **How?** Leave behind the basics (v. 1); move on from milk to strong meat (advanced teaching—context, Heb. 5:14).
- f) **Who?** Those of verses 5:12–4 are the same as those of 6:4–5: believers in danger of apostasy, loss of blessings in time and rewards in eternity (vv. 7–8)

Words for “the Word” (Psalm 119:1–8)

It is often worthwhile to use a concordance and an English dictionary to evaluate in detail the meanings of words having similar meanings with subtle differences.

1. “*Law of the Lord*” (v. 1).
2. “*His testimonies*” (v. 2).
3. “*His ways*” (v. 3).
4. “*Your precepts*” (v. 4).
5. “*Your statutes*” (v. 5).
6. “*Your commandments*” (v. 6).
7. “*Your righteous judgments*” (v. 7).

CLASS THREE

A Time and Place for Meditation

*“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” Psalm 91:1*

The “*secret place*,” from the Hebrew *sathar*, speaks of a place of refuge, where one is hidden, isolated from the outside world. Meditation requires solitude, quiet, and freedom from distraction. There must be time for contemplation. This is one of the most difficult requirements in our busy generation. Satan knows what he is doing, loading us down with obligations, distractions, and entertainments! The challenge we face in this modern world is to shut out the enticements of this age.

“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” Matthew 6:6

It has often been said, “idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” However, it is often just as true that busy hands distract the mind from the quiet contemplation of God and His Word. Here, Jesus identifies the “*secret place*” as the place of meeting with God in private, in the throne room of God (Heb. 4:16; 10:19–22). This is the key to abiding in Christ (John 15:4).

“Be still, and know that I am God ... The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” Psalm 46:10a, 11

When we were kids, growing up on the ranch in Kansas, we would each look for a “secret place,” where we could go, and no one would find us. It might be the top of a haystack, a cubby in the bushes, a corner of the tool shed, etc. Once it was discovered, we had to find a new one.

Our secret place provided a place of refuge when things were going bad, a place to be quiet and think, or cry, and even for childlike prayers. I could not imagine growing up without a secret place. In fact, I have them to this day, though they are not so secret. We all need a place to go and reflect, meditate, and pray—where we can be alone with our thoughts and with God.

Habakkuk’s Watchtower

“I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected.” Habakkuk 2:1

We have already seen how the format of the little book of Habakkuk is built around the word “Selah” in our first study. This is an astounding and instructive verse, as we see the prophet going into his “secret place.” There are things, both implied and declared, that are of great value to us here.

1. First, what is implied is that Habakkuk had a “secret place,” a place of prayer and meditation, where he spoke to the Lord, reflected on His Word, and awaited His answers.
2. Next, when Habakkuk prayed, he fully expected God to answer! Not only that, but he was willing to wait for the answer to come.
3. Also of great interest is that he knows up front that his complaint in chapter one is deserving of correction. Consider 1:1–4, 12–17 in this regard.

Regarding the discipline of meditation, two valuable things stand out in this verse. These are: the need for solitude, and an attitude of quiet expectation. *“I will stand my watch”* gives us the picture of a watchman on the wall. His task is to be alert, to be vigilant, to watch for any sign of movement on the horizon that would signal either approaching danger or the arrival of a messenger. He could not be distracted, or lose interest, or sleep. His task was a lonely and a demanding one. The word *“stand”* is *amad*, and means “to remain, abide, to stay put.” *“Watch”* is *mishmereth*, meaning “to act as a sentry, to man the observation post.”

Further, the phrase *“And set myself on the rampart”* suggests a place of solitude and isolation. High up on the walls of ancient cities there were watchtowers placed strategically, both for visibility of the horizon, and for isolation from the busy city life below. We need to learn to find our place of solitude if we are to learn the discipline of meditation. The word *“rampart”* is *matsuwr*, and speaks of “a stronghold, a watchtower, or a hemmed-in place.” It is the “secret place of the Most High.”

The Solitude of the Savior

*“Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight,
He went out and departed to a solitary place;
And there He prayed.”* Mark 1:35 (See also Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12).

No doubt from His childhood, Jesus had developed the habit of seeking isolation and solitude, to be alone with His Father. As we have seen from Psalm 1, Jesus is the only perfect man, who was always meditating on the Word of God, day and night.

Isaac in Isolation

*“Now Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he dwelt
in the South. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the
evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and there,
the camels were coming.”* Genesis 24:62–63

It is of interest to note where Isaac is. *“Beer Lahai Roi”* was named by Hagar, in Genesis 16:13–14, when the Angel of the Lord appeared to her. She said, *“You are the God Who sees,”* the idea encapsulating both God’s pre-vision (omniscience), and His pro-vision (omnipotence). He sees our need, and supplies for them in advance, in His perfect plan.

What do you suppose Isaac was meditating on? Probably the same thing he was meditating on ever since Abraham sent his steward to find him a wife. And here, at this point and place, in the isolated field, Rebekah comes to him! Isaac continued to live in this place after the death of Abraham (Gen. 25:11).

The Fiddler on the Roof

In the tenth chapter of Acts, we read of Peter’s vision on the roof-top, that opened the way of the Gospel to the Gentiles. In Acts 10:9–16, we read that Peter was hungry, waiting for the mid-day

meal to be prepared. While he waited, he used the time to meditate and to pray. Some of life's greatest insights often come to us when we are least expecting them!

The vision God gave to Peter was revolutionary to him. So much so that he ironically responded, "Not so, Lord" which shows that we can say "Lord, Lord" but still not do what Jesus commands us to do (Luke 6:46). We might call this "fiddling around with God's commands." At that point, Peter was the "fiddler on the roof!"

This vision and command prepared Peter to go to the house of Cornelius and lead many souls into the kingdom. How tragic that later, at the church in Antioch, Peter forgot the lesson, "What God has cleansed you must not call common" (Acts 10:15), for he fell back into his old Jewish way of thinking, and dishonored the Gentile believers and violated God's command for equality in the Gospel (Gal. 2:11–21).

Point: In both the case of Isaac and of Peter, God used their meditation/prayer, combined with immediate circumstance, to teach and to guide them in the way to go.

CLASS FOUR

Environmental Meditation

Great benefit can be had from careful consideration of the works of God in creation, which reveal much of His character and His ways.

The Witness of Creation (Psalm 19)

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork ..." Psalm 19:1

According to vv. 2–4, there is a "language," or a "message" being communicated by creation every moment of every day. Paul uses this as an argument for Israel's inescapable guilt at having rejected her Messiah.

"But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'" Romans 10:18

It is fascinating that the Psalm includes the figure of the Sun, coming out as a bridegroom from his chamber (vv. 5–6), a common figure for the appearance of the Messiah of Israel.

The Psalm moves logically from the consideration of the creation to the revelation of the Word of God (vv. 7–11)—from the general to the specific. The end result of this contemplation is the conscious need to seek cleansing from sins, and both enlightenment and enablement for greater obedience.

Paul follows this pattern in Ephesians, as he contemplates the marvelous work of God in our salvation (Eph. 1:1–14), and then prays for illumination (Eph. 1:15–23) and, after further reflection on God's redemptive work (Eph. 2:1–3:13), he again prays for divine enablement to live as we ought to live (Eph. 3:14–21).

In Romans 1:18–32, Paul declares that the witness of creation is so powerful that the Gentiles are “*without excuse*” for turning from the true God to the worship of idols. And again, in Romans 8:16–22, Paul shows that creation itself is groaning in anticipation of the final redemption of the sons of God. Think how much can be learned by meditating on the wonders of creation! As pointed out above, in Romans 10:18, failure to heed the message of creation is sufficient cause for establishing guilt before God.

Lessons from the Field (Matthew 6:25–34)

In His parables, Jesus often used creation to teach important spiritual truths. These lessons no doubt came from His own consideration of the natural world during His times of meditation.

In Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus uses the birds of the air and the flowers of the field to teach us to trust in the faithful provision of our heavenly Father, and to overcome worry and anxiety. The word “*Look*” or “*consider*” in v. 26 is *emblepo*, and means “to look straight at, to carefully consider.” We could even say, “meditate on.” Then in v. 28 He says, “*Consider the lilies of the field.*” The word is *katamathete* comes from the word for the disciples learning, intensified by the preposition, implying intense focus. Again, this word implies meditation. In both cases the use of the ingressive aorist imperative commands us to begin doing something we have failed to do.

From Jesus’ many parables from the fields we see that by carefully observing and meditating on creation we can learn deep lessons about God and His ways.

Another example of the value of meditating on the environment is found in Proverbs 8:22–36. Here, “*wisdom*” is speaking, and after recounting the many wonderful works of creation (v. 22–31), declares the blessing that is available to those who meditate on it.

“Now therefore, listen to me, my children. For blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates ...” (Prov. 8: 32–34).

CLASS FIVE

Fasting/Prayer/Power and Meditation (Habakkuk 2:1; Matthew 5:6—Power)

As we saw in lesson one, the greatest example of the discipline of meditation comes from our Lord Jesus Christ. In His practice, there was a natural mingling of the disciplines of fasting, prayer, and meditation. These three are mutually complimentary to each other.

When, in Psalm 1:2, we read the promise, “*He shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper,*” we are presented with the outward evidence of a life of great spiritual stability and power.

When Power Is Lacking (Matthew 17:14–21)

The crux of this section is that the disciples could not do (v. 16) something that they fully expected to be able to do (v. 19). “*They could not ... why could we not ...*” They were perplexed by their spiritual weakness. How often we pride ourselves on our knowledge of Scripture or our ability to discuss theological issues, yet when put to the test in life, we fail miserably.

Power Given but Not Sustained (Matthew 10:1)

In the context of this verse, it is helpful to go back and read Matthew 9:35–38. Jesus urged the disciples to “*pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest*” (v. 38). Based on the fact that Jesus then sends these disciples out to labor, I take it that they responded to His urging, and prayed for workers to be sent.

Along with the commission to proclaim the Good News, “*He gave them power over unclean spirits*” (Matt. 10:1). This included the power “*to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.*” Yet, when put to the test in Matthew 17:14–21, they were unable either to cast out the demon or to heal the afflicted boy. Jesus identifies their spiritual impotence as coming from two causes: lack of faith, and lack of spiritual discipline (prayer and fasting). In other words, the power given to them was lacking due to their failure to sustain it.

The Tell-Tale Absence (Mark 2:18–22)

In Mark 2, we learn that Jesus’ disciples did not fast. When those who questioned Jesus said, “*Why do ... your disciples ... not fast,*” it implies that they knew that Jesus Himself did fast.

Jesus excuses the lack of fasting on the part of His disciples, based on the wedding analogy. They were like the friends of the bridegroom, who were celebrating with Him before the wedding. This was not a time for fasting, but rather for feasting. It may be, however, that what the disciples had a right to do, was not necessarily the most beneficial thing to do. We do know that later, the Apostle Paul tells us that he was often exercised in fasting, sometimes by choice, and other times out of necessity (2 Cor. 11:27).

What Jesus Did in the Wilderness (Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1)

Mark tells us that “*The Spirit drove Him into the wilderness*” (Mark 1:12). The word is *ekballo*, and the historic, present tense is used. It means to be “cast out,” as if we are viewing the action in progress. Luke says, “*Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit ... was led by the Spirit into the wilderness*” (Luke 4:1). These statements are entirely compatible, for the leading of the Spirit—to those who are filled by His presence and purpose—is entirely compelling. How often we are driven, contrary to our natural inclinations, to a challenging spiritual encounter.

Both Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus’ temptations lasted for the full forty days, but only Mark records that Jesus “*was with the wild beasts; and angels ministered to Him.*” What does one do for forty days when in total isolation, surrounded by dangers both physical and spiritual?

Certainly, you would fast and pray. But the unspoken exercise is that one would spend a great deal of time in meditation on God's Word!

How can we know this for sure? Do we have biblical grounds for making this statement? I believe we do, based on Jesus' response to the first temptation. When the devil said, "*If (first class condition) you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread,*" what was Jesus' immediate response? "*It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'*" (Matt. 4:4). He was meditating on God's Word the whole time.

What the Wilderness Did for Jesus (Luke 4:1–2, 14, 18–21)

Luke records for us a beautiful progression in the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. It is one that ought to be an example for each of us.

1. First of all, Jesus was **filled** with (by means of/under the control of) the Holy Spirit (v. 1a).
2. Because of this, the Spirit **led** Jesus into the wilderness, to accomplish the will of God (v. 1b).
3. Again, Luke tells us that for forty days Jesus was tempted/tried by the devil. The three temptations we have recorded are only the last three. During this time the Spirit no doubt **guided** the meditations of Jesus (v. 2).
4. Following His victory in the temptations, Jesus comes out of the wilderness **empowered** by the Spirit (v. 14). The exercise of prayer, fasting, meditation, and obedience resulted in maximized spiritual power.
5. Jesus then returned to Nazareth, to proclaim that the Spirit **anointed** him for the purpose of His public ministry (vv. 18–19).

What we see in this progression is the fulfillment of what we began with in Psalm 1, as a prophetic anticipation of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The Command to Meditate

Did you know that we are commanded in the New Testament to be diligent in meditation? This may come as a surprise to many, but we are commanded to devote ourselves to times of meditation. Let me conclude with just four prominent passages (emphasis added):

Meditate on the Meaning of Holiness

*"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is anything praiseworthy **meditate** on these things." Philippians 4:8*

The word translated "*meditate*" in this verse is **logizomai**. The present, middle, imperative indicates that we are to always be acting upon ourselves, motivating ourselves, to be diligent in meditating on these things. How many times have we read this verse without ever obeying it?

The word *logizomai*, when used of God's work, is translated "account" and "impute," as in the act of imputing righteousness to Abraham and to us (Rom. 4:3, 9, 24). God actively places the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our eternal account. However, when used of our "reckoning," it speaks not of us making something real, but of our taking into account what God has done. In this sense, the word is translated "reckon" in Romans 6:11 regarding what God has done in our regeneration.

In **Romans 8:18**, Paul uses it of his own contemplation regarding creation (vv. 18–25), and how he gains strength and comfort from this meditation.

Meditate on the Purpose of Our Life

*"Till I come give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.
Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by
prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.
Meditate on these things, give yourself entirely to them, that
Your progress may be evident to all." 1 Timothy 4:12–15*

Here, Paul uses the word *meletao*, which means "to exercise care, to cultivate, and to be painfully attentive about these things." Again, it is in the imperative mood—a command to Timothy and to us all. This word is also used by Jesus in His instruction to the disciples regarding how to meet persecution, "do not ... premeditate what you will speak" (Mark 13:11). I believe the point Jesus made here is, "meditate on God's Word, and what you should say will be clear."

Meditate on the Person of Our Lord

*"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider
the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus Christ." Hebrews 3:1*

The word "consider" here is *katanoeo*, a word that means "to bear down with the mind, to concentrate, or to meditate." The aorist imperative could be taken as an ingressive aorist—to begin doing something we have not been doing. This best fits the tenor of the authors' challenge to these Hebrew believers, who were drifting and stalled in their spiritual growth (Heb. 2:1; 5:11–14). If we find ourselves to be "dry" and unsatisfied in our spiritual life, the cause very well may be our failure to take seriously the call and command to serious meditation.

This call to meditation is specifically directed to the earthly ministry of our Lord. As an "Apostle," He was commissioned by the Father and sent to Earth to purchase our so great salvation. Then, following His resurrection, He becomes our "High Priest" seated at the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110:1–4; Heb. 5:5–10; 7:20–21, etc.) How often have we spent time in the contemplation of how Jesus' earthly work has led to and resulted in His present intercessory ministry on our behalf?

If we look at **Romans 8:28–39** we see that the finished, earthly work of the Lord Jesus has secured His present High-Priestly ministry, which is the basis for this victorious hymn of praise!

Meditate on His Finished Work

*“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us ...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ... For **consider** Him, who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” Hebrews 12:3*

The word “*consider*” is from *analogizomai*, a strengthened form of the same word used in Philippians 4:8 above. Here, the preposition *ana* is added, which emphasizes repetition. The idea is to add up the facts, to count them over and over, to repeatedly consider them. The ingressive, aorist, imperative is a command to begin doing something we have been failing to do. What a focus for our meditation: to think deeply about the opposition Jesus’ faced throughout His earthly life, and how He persevered in the face of it all, so as to become the source and the securer of our faith! As the “*author and finisher of our faith*,” we are reminded that not only is He the “*alpha and omega*” of the created order (Rev. 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13), but He is also the beginning and end of the new creation, which includes all who believe in Him (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1–3). As Paul exultantly proclaims in Romans 11:36,

*“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things;
to whom be glory forever. Amen.”*

These four simple examples remind us why meditation is necessary, and why we should take the time, find a place, and discipline ourselves to the effort and the art of biblical meditation.

I urge each one of you, as I challenge myself, let us not disobey these commands, which are for our own good, blessing, and benefit. Let us learn the art and the discipline of biblical meditation. Let us learn to dwell in the Secret Place of the Most High!