

Meditating on the Bible (28.8.13)¹

Introduction

For this final session I want to look at Bible meditation.

In many ways Bible meditation is the most important of the topics we have examined over the last month.

If you want a feel for how important it is, just consider some of the things the Bible says about meditation:

*Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; **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**. (Josh. 1:8)*

*Blessed is the one ... whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and **who meditates on his law day and night**.*

³ *That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which **yields its fruit** in season
and whose leaf **does not wither** –
whatever they do **prosper**. (Ps. 1:1-3)*

³⁴ *May **my meditation be pleasing to him**,
as I rejoice in the Lord. (Ps. 104:34)*

We're going to see that it is one of the main paths God has provided to pleasing Him,² to receiving life from God,³ to receiving light for our journeys,⁴ and to receiving revelation and understanding from God.⁵

This evening I can only give a taste of Biblical Meditation. I want to look at what meditation is and what it isn't, why we meditate, and how we meditate.

Then we're going to do some meditation and finally we'll consider what the Bible says are the fruits of meditation.

What is Meditation?

It's important that we understand what Biblical meditation is, and what it isn't.

First of all, let's think about what it isn't.

It's not transcendental or eastern meditation. It isn't letting your mind go blank, or looking inside yourself for the answers, or doing a regular breathing exercise to try and find peace. The Bible doesn't speak of

¹ For further reading see McAlpine, CM, *The Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Tonbridge, Eng.: Sovereign World, 2002) and Wyatt, S, *Bible Meditation* (pamphlet available).

² Ps. 104:34

³ John 6:63; Matt.4:3-4

⁴ Ps. 119:130; 105.

⁵ Compare Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 2:8-10, 3:1-3; and 1 Cor. 2:9-12

these types of meditation and I would strongly urge people not to be involved with them; at best they are unproductive and they can be spiritually dangerous.

It's also not Bible study as such. Bible study is really about getting knowledge about what is in the Bible. It's about being better informed in our heads about what the Bible teaches; at the end of the Bible study one knows more **about** God. We saw a bit of this as we did some Bible study with my Dad. At the end of our studying we tended to know a lot more about the things we were looking at. When done properly Bible study should lead to meditation but the two are not the same.

Bible meditation is a step beyond Bible study. Meditation does give knowledge but it also gives understanding, wisdom or insight both into God and into us.⁶

Meditation is when we sit down and prayerfully ponder or consider the words of a verse or passage of Scripture, allowing the Holy Spirit to take the words of the Bible and show us what they mean for our lives. We are spending time with a small passage of Scripture and asking God to teach us what it tells us about Him and what that means for us. To use a biblical image, we are chewing on the Word so that we can get out all the goodness it contains.⁷

To put it another way, it is taking the Word of God and asking Him not just to put it into our heads but into our hearts, to take it deep into us and to change our lives as a result. If we do this then the Bible becomes our food, nourishing us and giving us life.⁸

Why Do We Meditate?

The first question we're looking at is *why* do we meditate in the Bible? The most obvious answer is that, as we've just seen, God says that we should. But I think there are much better answers than that. We do not meditate on the Bible because we *ought* to but because we *want* to. There are so many reasons why we should want to meditate on the Bible, but here are just 3:

1. **It is how we come to know God better.** This is what life in Christ is, it is a lived experience of knowing God. Jesus said it Himself as He prayed for His disciples:

*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*⁹

It is as we come to the Bible and ponder it, chew it over, pray about it that we see Christ more clearly and come to an ever deeper knowledge of God.

⁶ Compare Dan. 11:32-33 and, in particular, the distinction between those who have knowledge ('the people') and those among the people who have not only knowledge but understanding (in the AV) / insight (NASB) / wisdom (NIV/ESV).

⁷ Compare Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 3:1-3; John 6:35; and Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 5:13-14; and 1 Pet. 2:12.

⁸ John 6:63.

⁹ John 17:3.

CH Spurgeon put it this way:

*'There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity...plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; to be lost in His immensity.'*¹⁰

Or as AW Tozer said:

*'We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God.'*¹¹

God wants to speak with us, He wants to make His ways known to us, to have us know Him better and better and better, and it is through considering His word and through prayer that He does it.

2. It is how we are changed to be more like Jesus. Listen to the words of Prov 4:

*My son, pay attention to what I say;
turn your ear to my words.*

²¹ *Do not let them out of your sight,
keep them within your heart;*

²² *for they are life to those who find them
and health to one's whole body.*

²³ *Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.*¹²

Or what about Rom. 12:2:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3. It is part of how we can understand the Word and receive God's guidance for our life:

Consider the words of Psalm 119: 130

*The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.*¹³

How do we Meditate?

So let's look at how we meditate. I'm going to look at both the preparation for meditation and how we do meditation itself.

¹⁰ Spurgeon, C.H., *The Immutability of God*, Spurgeon's Sermons Vol. 1 (1855) <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons01.txt>> [accessed 28/8/13].

¹¹ Tozer, A.W., *That Incredible Christian: How Heaven's Children Live on Earth* (CampHill, PA: WingSpread, 2007), p. 46.

¹² Prov. 4:20-23

¹³ Compare Dan. 11:32-33 and, in particular, the distinction between those who have knowledge ('the people') and those among the people who have not only knowledge but understanding (in the AV) / insight (NASB) / wisdom (NIV/ESV).

Preparation for Meditation

When we come to meditate on the Scriptures we are considering God's word, praying about it, and asking His Spirit to speak His will to us through them. We are coming to God and asking Him to reveal Himself to us and to reveal His will through His word, taken by His Spirit.¹⁴

We are not trying to apply our natural mind and ability to the Bible to bottom out what it says. Our minds are important. God works in and through them. He doesn't bypass your mind. But we are looking for revelation of what He wants to say to us and not simply what we can naturally understand.

There are also some practical steps we can take to make us ready to meditate:

1. Be awake and at rest.¹⁵ The Psalmist says 'Be still and know that I am God'. We need to pause what else we're doing, quieten down and focus on God.
2. Be repentant.¹⁶ If we want to hear from God and to be heard by Him, we need to check if there's anything we need to say sorry for or put right. Before starting meditation I would always take a minute to ask God to bring to my mind anything that I have done that I need to say sorry for and put right with Him. Then I can carry on.
3. Be humble.¹⁷ Acknowledge to God that we don't deserve anything from Him. We're not coming because we are worth Him feeding but because He longs to give us food.
4. Be hungry. We need to desire God and desire to feed on His word. If we're not hungry then we won't want to eat. If you find yourself in this position, ask God to make you hungry.
5. Be dependent on the Holy Spirit. We're not trying to write an academic treatise or explain to God how well we can understand the Bible. We're coming, acknowledging that we cannot understand and apply His word without His revelation, and asking Him to show us what it means for us.

Doing Meditation

So once we've got ourselves ready, what do we actually do?

First, getting started.

- It is almost always best to meditate through a book rather than picking verses from different bits of the Bible.

¹⁴ John 16:13-14; 1 Cor. 2:6-16.

¹⁵ Isaiah 30:15; Ps 46:10.

¹⁶ Ps. 66: 18; 1 John 1: 8-9.

¹⁷ 1 Pet. 5:5-6.

- The best way to choose a book is to pray about it. However, don't start with something that is very difficult to see Jesus in. The whole Bible speaks about Christ.¹⁸ But He is most clearly seen in the New Testament. I would suggest that Mark or Luke would be a good place to start.
- Aim to meditate for 15 – 20 minutes a day. That's long enough to really start to get to application but short enough that it doesn't become too much of a burden.

Then what?

- Get yourself ready (see above).
- Start with a paragraph of Scripture. That's usually between 2 and 6 verses.
- Read it through to yourself slowly a few times. As you read, think about what the verses are saying and ask God to bring something to your attention.
- If, as you read, one or two verses, or a phrase, really begins to stand out from the rest, focus in on that. Be praying and asking the Lord what this speaks about Him and what that means for your life.
- If you find yourself following a particular line of thought about the passage or about your life, pursue that and ask God what that means for you.
- You might want to make notes if that helps you to think clearly or to come back to later.
- Then respond to what God has shown you. Pray and thank Him for His word, praise Him for what you have seen about Him, and respond if He has shown you something about yourself.

Then do something about it!

Fruits of Meditation

I'm going to leave space for people to ask questions in a minute. But before we do, I want to leave you with a taste of some of the promised results of meditation.

Let's look at Psalm 1. There are lots of promises about meditation in the Bible, but this Psalm contains 5 of them.

- Happiness or blessing (Ps. 1: 1).
- Fruitfulness (Ps. 1: 3).

¹⁸ Luke 24:27.

- Particularly the fruit of the Spirit. You find that as the Word is taken and applied to your heart, as God begins to prune back your old nature and you respond to His direction, the fruit of the Spirit becomes more and more evident in your life.
- Freshness in your walk with God (Ps. 1: 3). You do not wither because you are constantly nurtured by God.
- Prosperity (Ps. 1: 3). God can supply our material needs. If you need something you should not be afraid to ask for it. But that is not mainly what this is talking about. The Bible is chiefly concerned with treasure and prosperity in heaven. It means that in whatever you do you will prosper spiritually. You will continue on with God and in His work and find that His treasure is yours.
- Perseverance (Ps. 1: 4). You will find that you are able to stand in trials and storms because you are rooted in a living relationship with the rock of Jesus and in His Word.¹⁹

¹⁹ Matt. 7:24-27.