

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 4 - Meditation

April 7, 2024

#### Additional Teaching Notes

Richard Foster wrote, "Our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in "muchness" and "manyness" he will reset satisfied... Though it may sound strange to modern ears, we should without shame enroll as apprentices in the school of contemplative prayer."

Donald Whitney wrote, "One sad feature of our modern culture is that meditation has become identified more with nonChristian systems of thought than with biblical Christianity...yoga, transcendental meditation, relaxation therapy, New Age Movement.... We must remember that meditation is both commanded by God and modeled by the Godly in Scripture."

Adele Calhoun wrote, "Meditation runs counter to our busy culture, where speed reading, first impressions and skimming are as deep as we go. In meditation we gaze at something or someone long and longingly. We seek the treasure and truth of what we see."

What are the first images that come to your mind when you think of meditation?

Do you feel comfortable and confident to meditate?

Do you ever feel that meditation is too difficult, complicated or weird? Why?

#### What is Meditation

MEDITATION: The act of calling to mind some supposition, pondering

upon it, and correlating it to one's own life. The Hebrew words for meditation primarily were derived from two separate roots. The first (hagah) literally means "to utter in a low sound." The word is used to denote the growling of a lion or the cooing of a dove. Therefore it has been suggested that, in ancient Hebrew meditation, Scripture frequently was recited in a low murmur. The second root word (siach) has the basic meaning of "to be occupied with," or "concerned about." Thus meditation is the repetitious going over of a matter in one's mind because it is the chief concern of life.

Listening to God's word, reflecting on God's works, rehearsing God's deeds, ruminating on God's law ... in each case there is stress upon changed behavior as a result of our encounter with the living God.

Deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer. Meditation goes beyond hearing, reading, studying, and even memorizing as a means of taking in God's Word.

Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind (and our lives) with God and detach ourselves from the confusion around us. This allows us to focus on God and obtain an inner wholeness and an ordered life. Jesus made a habit of withdrawing to a lonely place (Matthew 14:13) in order to be with God. (see Matt. 4: 1-11; 14:23; Mark 1:35; 6:31; Luke 6:12, etc.) What did Jesus do time after time in those deserted hills?

Meditation is not reading, but reading can stimulate meditation.

Meditation is simple. No specific surroundings are necessary. No special instruction is really needed. Of course these things can be added and can influence an effective time, but by itself meditation does not demand any kind of outward set up.

Meditation is practical. It is a matter of allowing your mind to soak in the word of God ... saturate your attitude and spirit with God's wisdom. It can make a great difference in the things you say, write, think, and experience during the day. Meditation is the one thing that can sufficiently redirect our lives so that we can deal with human life successfully ...Meditation sends us into our ordinary world with greater perspective and balance. When we delight in God's Word we think about it, that is, we meditate on it, at times all throughout the day and night. The result of such meditation is stability, fruitfulness, perseverance, and prosperity.

Meditation sets spiritual life in motion. There is no opening prayer and closing prayer. There is no "bring us back again at the next appointed time." For the things that we learn in our time with God will color our day. We will see God at work in the corners of our lives.

Meditation is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word. Jesus is alive and among us as our Priest to forgive us, our Prophet to teach us, our King to rule us, our Shepherd to guide us. "Whereas the study of Scripture centers on exegesis, the meditation of Scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage. The written Word becomes a living word addressed to you. This is not a time for technical studies, or analysis, or even the gathering of material to share with others. Set aside all tendencies toward arrogance and with a humble heart receive the word addressed to you." (Foster in Celebration of Discipline)

Perhaps the major hope of meditation is to be sure that we have not clouded our reception with God. Our interests are not usually geared to the quiet or the subtle. We live in a loud world and the loudest voice has us. That is, unless we discovered through experience the life-change that can be brought about in this sacred hour. Perhaps we hear from God in a hundred inadvertent ways, but when do we ever purposefully stop our exciting lives to give God our undivided attention? Meditation answers that question.

## The Purpose of Meditation

In meditation we are growing into a familiar friendship with Jesus. What happens in meditation is that we create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart... We who have turned our lives over to Christ need to know how very much he longs to eat with us, to commune with us. We seek for our desires and aspirations to be more and more conformed to his way.

Scriptures that speak of meditation include Joshua 1:7 , Psalm 1:1-3, Psalm 19:13-14, Psalm 48:9-10, Psalm 77:11-13, Psalm 104:33-34, Psalm 119, Psalm 145:4-6 Psalm 143:4-6.

## Meditation Requires Sitting Still

I need to sit still so that I will be able to search my heart with honesty. "In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah" (Psalm 4:4)

I need to sit still so that I can perceive His guidance. "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." (Psalm 23:2-3)

I need to sit still so I can observe the victorious reign of God in a broken war-torn world, and seek refuge in Him alone. "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah." (Psalm 46:9-11)

Simple physical exercises like stretching, sitting comfortably and breathing deeply can help us pay attention, listen deeply and even curb our distractibility.

We've all become excellent multi-taskers. With just a lower level of acceptable quality, quantity can be increased significantly. This works in some settings, but not in the kingdom. Modern believers cannot accept meditation because it seems that there should be something else going on also. To sit and quietly contemplate our life in God seems like such a waste.

### Preparing to Meditate

We learn to meditate by meditating. A time to meditate is good, but we are aiming for the ability to meditate whenever we have opportunity. A place to meditate. Find a place that is quiet and free from interruption. No phone. No distractions.

### Forms of Meditation

Meditation upon Scripture – the central reference point by which all other forms of meditation are kept in proper perspective. This is the process of internalizing and personalizing the passage. Do not rush over Bible passages superficially – this reflects our internal state of hurry. Dietrich Bonhoeffer recommended spending a whole week on a single text. Take a single event or parable, or a few verses or even a single word and allow it to take root in you.

Donald Whitney in his book "Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life" recommends this format for meditating on Scripture:

Select an appropriate passage. "Verses that conspicuously relate to your concerns and personal needs are clearly targets for meditation."

Repeat in different ways ... turn it around like a diamond to see every facet. Think deeply about each word in the passage.

Rewrite it in your own words.

Look for applications of the text. Like chewing without swallowing, so meditation is incomplete without some type of application.

Pray through the text. Psalm 119:18 "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

Don't rush – take time. It is better to understand a small amount of Scripture and meditate on it than to read an extensive section without meditation. Choose to read less in order to have more time with the text.

Another format for meditation is Re-collection or "Centering Down" – a time to become still, to enter into the recreating silence, to allow the fragmentation of our minds to become centered. Collecting all that which worries us, handing it over to God, and then receiving his replacements e.g. give up pride, receive humility.

Meditation upon the Creation. Focus on the created order ... the trees, a flower, the creatures of the earth. The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). Let these lead you to a calm spirit.

Do not be discouraged if in the beginning your meditations have little meaning to you. There is a progression in the spiritual life, and it is wise to have some experience with lesser peaks before trying to tackle the Mt. Everest of the soul.

Another method for meditation:

During the week try and find time (about 20-30 mins.) to practice meditation.

Open your Bible to the chosen Bible reading. Leave it open in front of you.

Enter into God's presence in prayer, asking that His Spirit will bring His word to life for you. Slow down.

Consciously slow down your breathing; breathe deeper, more gently, invite the Holy Spirit into your life. With every deep breath in say, "I breathe in the Holy Spirit", with every deep breath out say, "I breathe out the Love of God". Allow the Holy Spirit to penetrate every part of your being. Picture that happening.

Now read the scripture passage slowly. (Do not analyze or study it.) Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you what He wants.

When a word or phrase "lights up" or "rings a bell", put your bible down. Concentrate on God's word to you by repeating it (gently, not mechanically). Do not force any response/emotion; allow the Holy Spirit to work.

As you become aware of the impression (feeling/attitude) God's word has made on you, respond to God in prayer, or in silence if you wish. Be with Christ, bask in His love.

As distractions set in, close your prayer off in whatever way you want (you may wish to say the Lord's Prayer).

Another suggested form of Meditation - Reading the Psalms as follows:

Read the Psalms – one per week, three times per day

Once through the lens of OT

Once through lens of Jesus

Once as personal prayer.

Some questions to ask of yourself for meditation:

Is purposeful meditation on the word of God a regular practice in your life?

I think we can see that this practice goes beyond reading, beyond lesson preparation, beyond commentary.

Do you have some specific practices that aid you in meditating on the Word?

Is life too fast to even consider taking time to do this?

Do we let the reading of devotional material take the place of reading the Scriptures?

Do you couple meditation with journaling?