

How to Meditate on the Word of God

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers” (Psalm 1:1-3).

The Bible promises that if we meditate on God’s Word, that we will have good success and that all that we do shall prosper. Yet in today’s church we hear so little about meditating on the Word. We often hear that we must *read* the Word or *study* the Word, but rarely does one hear that he must *meditate* on the Word of God.

A look at Scripture shows that God desires us to meditate on the Word more than study the Word.

The main verse from the KJV that people use to show the importance of studying the Bible is 2 Timothy 2:15, which says,

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

However, in most other translations, it says something like this:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (ESV)

Studying is important, and it has a place to play in meditation, but if you only have time for one or the other, choose meditation.

Let the words of my mouth and *the meditation of my heart* be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer” (Psalm 19:14, emphasis added).

What is meditation?

Biblical meditation is not the same as transcendental meditation, where one seeks to empty the mind. Biblical meditation leads one to fill the mind with thoughts of God from His Word.

One definition of meditation may be pondering over, contemplating, repeating and reviewing of the Scripture from every angle to best feed it into your spirit. Andrew Murray describes meditation as...

...holding the Word of God in the mind until it has affected every area of one’s life and character.

While Campbell McAlpine says:

Meditation is the devotional practice of pondering the words of a verse, or verses of Scripture, with a receptive heart, allowing the Holy Spirit to take the written Word and apply it as the living word to the inner being.

Selwyn Hughes, in his book *Getting the Best Out of the Bible*, opens up the various meanings of the Hebrew words translated *meditate*:

"...on his law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2).

The word used here is *hagah* which means to murmur (in pleasure), to ponder. Meditation is a pleasant 'murmuring' of Scripture to oneself.

"...for I meditate on your statutes" (Psalm 119:99).

The word used here is *sicah* which means to reflect with deep devotion; to contemplate. Meditation is the quiet contemplation of and reflection on Scripture.

"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight O Lord..." (Psalm 19:14).

The word used here is *higgayon* which means a musical notation, a murmuring sound. Meditation is a musical repetition of God's Word.

"Meditate upon these things..." (1 Timothy 4:15, KJV)

The word used here is *meletao* which means to ponder carefully with the mind; to muse upon. Meditation is careful and prayerful reviewing of the Scripture.

Mr. Hughes then goes on to describe the idea of meditation is similar to a cow chewing the cud. First, the cow gulps down the food. Later, she regurgitates it out of her stomach back into her mouth. She does this several times, so that the food is thoroughly digested and absorbed into the bloodstream. Mr. Hughes then says:

Rumination and meditation are parallel words. When a Christian takes a phrase or verse of Scripture and begins to meditate upon it, the power that is resident in God's Word is absorbed into one's inner being, producing spiritual energy and faith.

When and where should one meditate?

Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2 both state "day and night." We should always be meditating on the Word of God, as long as it doesn't interfere with our present work or activity.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 gives some further insight:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and *shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.* You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (emphasis added).

When you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you get up...all are good opportunities to meditate on the Word. Driving to work or school, standing in line, during lunch (if you're by yourself), during breaks. Almost anytime is a good time to meditate.

How to meditate?

There are various methods of meditation. In this little study, we'll just touch on them. You'll need to explore and experiment with each one for yourself.

1. *Ask God for enlightenment.* As you read the Word, and as you begin meditating, ask God to open His Word up to you. Pray that your mind may be renewed, and ask Him for insight into how His Word should be applied in your life, business and relationships.
2. *Record your thoughts.* Simply put, what does the verse say to you? How does it apply to your life? How does it shed light on another portion of Scripture or truth that you already know? Sometimes pen and paper can make all the difference in the world of what you get out of a passage of Scripture.
3. *Emphasize each word of the verse.* Think about what each word means and how the meaning changes with each emphasis. For example,

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind... This is a command to be obeyed. I am not to do something, and I am to do something.

Do not be **conformed** to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind... I am not to be conformed, shaped or molded to what this world thinks is right or wrong. I'm not to allow outside pressures to shape me, whether it be the culture, family, friends, peers, co-workers, the education system, or television.

Do not be conformed **to this world**, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind... I'm not to be like the world. In many ways, what the world loves, I'm to hate, and what the world hates, I'm to love.

4. *Memorize the verse.* Get the Word into you so that you can recall it during the day. Practice letting the verse go out of consciousness, then bring it back.
5. *Analyze the verse.* How does the verse apply to me, and how do I perform it? Does the verse contain teaching, reproof, correction, or training in righteousness (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17)? Do I see Jesus Christ in the verse?

A couple of methods to analyze a verse are the COMB and SPECK methods.

COMB is partially studying the verse, looking for:

C: Context
O: Other related Scriptures
M: Meaning of Words
B: Background

While SPECK asks:

Is there a **sin** for me to avoid?
Is there a **promise** to claim? A **praise** to give? A **prayer** to pray?
Is there an **example** for me to follow?
Is there a **command** for me to obey?

Is there **knowledge** for me to learn, especially about God the Father, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit?

6. *Personalize the verse.* Put yourself in the verse. List all the ways you can use this verse. Be specific. How does the verse speak to a present need? How does the verse apply to your life?
7. *Visualize the verse.* Visualize the store in the passages, but also imagine the results in your own life as you begin to apply this verse. If you are reading a story from the Gospels or elsewhere, picture what is happening: What noises are there? What smells? What is the weather like? What is the attitude of the people? How do you react to what is being said? For example, on the Sermon on the Mount, was Jesus sitting down, standing up, moving around? How big was the crowd? Was it just a handful of people, a few hundred or a few thousand? (Listening to a Bible on tape may help with visualizing.)
8. *Paraphrase the verse.* Rewrite the verse in your own words. Apply it to your present circumstances. Try using as few words as possible.
9. *Sing the verse.* Either sing the words directly, or make up words that fit the verse, and maybe what you've learned or how it applies to your present situation. Use it to praise God and to encourage yourself. Write a song about the story in the passage.
10. *Vocalize the verse.* Pray the verse back to God, asking Him to give you more light on the verse, and to help you put it into practice. Share what you've learned with others. Think "out loud," confessing the Word to yourself, God, and the devil. "Preach" the Word (even if no one else hears you). Think how you would explain the verse to someone else. Throughout the day, talk the verse to yourself, God, the devil, and others. Deuteronomy 6, that we looked at earlier, specifically mentions teaching the Word to our children.
11. *Ask questions.* Along with the COMB and SPECK above, ask Who, What, Where, When, Why, How. Write down and think about any other questions that may come to mind.

What to meditate on

One question that arises is what to meditate on. Of course, a verse-by-verse meditation of the Bible would be ideal, but it's not always the most practical. If you are using a Bible reading plan, such as reading the Bible through in a year or a few months, to meditate on each and every verse would consume all of your time. Listed here are four ways to find passages to meditate on:

1. *Just meditate.* Instead of reading through the Bible in a short amount of time (a few months or a year), just read a few verses every day and meditate on them, slowly progressing through the Bible. You may want to choose a specific book, work through it, then choose another book until you've completed the Bible. You may want to start in Matthew, and read-mediate your way through the New Testament, or begin in Genesis, and go through the whole Bible...no matter how long it may take you. Even 10 years would be a wise investment.
2. *Choose a passage.* If you have a daily reading plan, such as reading through the Bible in a year, choose a passage that is not connected to your daily reading plan.

For example, your daily reading plan may include some Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms and a Proverb, but you decide to meditate on Philippians.

3. *Select verses from the day's reading.* Another method is that while you are reading from your plan, you mark verse that speak to you or jump out at you. After you finish reading, you come back and select one or two verses and meditate on them for that day.
4. *Meditate with friends.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together*, suggested that everyone in a Christian community read the same passage every day in their private readings. He said to choose one passage, about 15 verses long, and meditate on it for a week. Every day for a week, meditate on the same 15 verses. You can do something similar with friends.

Say for example that you choose to go through Colossians together. The NIV breaks Colossians into 8 sections, plus the two introductory verses. You and your friends could choose to read one section per week, then get together once a week to discuss what God has shown you.

- **Week 1:** Colossians 1:1-14, *Thanksgiving and Prayer*, plus the introductory verses.
- **Week 2:** Colossians 1:15-23, *The Supremacy of Christ*.
- **Week 3:** Colossians 1:24-2:5, *Paul's Labor for the Church*.

Other helps to meditation

Some other helps are to find cross-references, look up the original languages, read other Bible versions, and understand the meaning of the verse in its context.

In some cases, you may want to submit your meditations to a friend or someone in spiritual authority. The results of your meditations **MUST** line up with the Word of God. As God begins to show you new things, be careful of pride. Do not become puffed up by the things He shows you.

So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Confess the Word that you've been meditating on before you go to sleep and as soon as you wake up in the morning.

The ideas and quotes in this study were taken from:
Selwyn Hughes, Getting the Best Out of the Bible
Lavonne Masters, Memorize and Meditate
The Navigators Scripture Memory Course: Topical Memory System
Word Magazine

The Bible Version used is the English Standard Version.

www.smithworks.org/stephen