

Here's a synopsis of what was said in Lesson 8: there is nothing mystical in meditation.

The Focus of Meditation

Meditation is mulling over God's word in our heart, and mind. We are trying to understand what God has said, what it means, and how it applies to us. *Meditation is "mirroring" God's word.* This means a number of things:

1. We meditate on how we look to God, considering the precious price that Christ paid to free us; we are *acknowledging* who we already are in Christ according to the truth of God's word (Rom 8:1-2; 12:5; Lk 12:8; Heb 13:15; 1Cor 1:4; 2Cor 2:14; 5:17-19).
2. We meditate on what it means have Christ in us, to enjoy the freedom of his righteousness; we are *visualizing* who we are meant to be as fully mature and fruitful believers, taking into account the descriptions of mature believers in God's word.¹
3. We are *resolving* to reflect God's eternal glory in the way that we think and live, adopting his will as our will (2Cor 3:18; Eph 6:6; 1Pet. 2:15; 4:2).
4. We are *choosing* to submit to God's Spirit who lives in us, and who works in us to will and to act according to God's good pleasure (Phil. 2:13; Rom 8:1-16).
5. We are *preparing* our hearts so that the seed of his word grows in good soil so that we flourish and become fruitful (Lk 8:5-15).

In other words, *meditation is considering how we intend to respond to what God has written.* It is preparing ourselves to demonstrate to God that we are taking to heart what he has said.

The Act of Meditation

As you can see, there is a lot of intellectual exercise involved in meditation. It is not a passive or merely contemplative activity at all. And yet it is not just intellectual either. We are becoming emotional about it. We are drawing our heart into the turmoil. When Peter had the vision of the unclean animals in the sheet (Ac 10:19) he pondered or thought about it. The Greek word used there is *enthumeomai*. Literally it means "impassioned." Peter was stirred up by it; his heart was pounding and his blood was racing as he considered it. Imagine the veins standing out on his forehead. And in that emotional turmoil, three messengers came from Cornelius. Peter was clearly prepared to hear from them, and excited to see what God had in mind. He was looking to see how the spiritual things he had been shown in his vision would be presented in the physical world. That's meditation.

Meditation is something active that we do; we are intentional and diligent about our study of God's word. But it is also something passive that is done to us, because God's Spirit is at work in us through God's word. The bible has an effect on us. It impacts how we think and how we behave as a consequence of reading and meditating on it. We are changed by the Word of God, which is why it does not return to God without fulfilling the purpose for which it was sent (Isa 55:10-11). It is a hammer which breaks up the stone of our heart (Jer 23:29). God's truth, contained in his Word, is what sanctifies us (Jn. 17:17).

¹ Christ and our elders are examples for us to imitate: Jn 13:15; 1Cor 10:6; 1Thess 1:6, 17; 2Thess 3:7-9; 1Tim 1:16; Heb 6:12; 13:7; Jam 5:19; 1Pet 2:21; We are to be examples ourselves: Phil 3:17; 1Tim 4:12; 1Cor. 4:16; 11:1; 1Thess 2:14;

Meditation is a means of spiritual growth and change, empowered by the Spirit, but acted out through our will. Change is the result of a series of conscious choices that we make during our meditation. We consider our great dependence on God to actually produce change in us, and to enable us to act out his will in the world (Matt 6:10; 1Jn 4:17).

In Eastern mysticism, meditation is cool and detached. It is an unemotional, even unthinking activity. That is not Christian meditation at all. Mary, in “pondering” all the things she had been told about Jesus (Lk 2:9), was gathering them together in her mind. That’s what the Greek word for ponder means here (*soombal*). A good translation might be that her head was swirling with all that she’d been told. She was trying to order them, to assemble them, to make sense of them in the context of her life and the life of her child. There were implications, ramifications that flowed from Jesus’ identity. Things needed to be done; preparations had to be made. Jesus’ actions, thoughts, and words had to be considered in light of who he was, and God’s purposes for him (recall his words in the temple at age 12, saying that it was his Father’s house – Lk 2:49).

This was no ordinary child. Nor are we an ordinary people. We “are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light.” We need to meditate on that, because it’s just too much to comprehend all at once. The words only hint at the ramifications flowing from such a statement about our identity in Christ.

The Practice of Meditation

In 1Tim 4:14-16 we read, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. *Practice* these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” The word used for “practice” here is the Greek *meletao*, which means to meditate or ponder. More specifically, it means to carefully attend to something, considering how to exercise or “practice” it in the way we live. Notice the other words Paul uses: devote, watch, and persist. Recall what I said about Peter, who was committed to seeing how God would present the truth in the physical world, and he was eager to do his part.

In Lk 21:14 we find the same word *meletao* used in a caution *not* to meditate. “But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds *not to meditate beforehand* how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.” *Don’t* mull it over. *Don’t* try to picture how you will respond in the heat of the moment. *Don’t* try to develop a pre-conceived speech to practice in your mind beforehand. Now reverse all those, and you’ve got a feel for meditation.

Meditation, Prayer, and Fasting

Meditation involves a number of activities and attitudes. It isn’t one thing. Sound familiar? That’s exactly what we said about prayer and about fasting. All three disciplines are linked. We

cannot separate them or parcel them out. To do any one of them, we must do all of them, even if we don't do them all simultaneously or sequentially. They facilitate one another either by preparing us for the others, or by acting out the others. Let's examine that a little deeper.

The Time and Place of Meditation

You'd think that meditation requires withdrawal from our surroundings, in the style of fasting. It can. But it also means publicly attending to what we've concluded in private. Because meditation is many things, such as pondering, watching, and responding, it takes place at various times, and in various places.

Joshua's Meditations

Joshua commanded us to meditate on God's word day and night (Joshua 1:8). Now consider Joshua on the battlefield. Was he meditating when he led the armies of Israel against their enemies? In a sense, yes. But not in the sense of drawing apart, or pondering. He had already done that before he took to the field. Convinced by his meditations, he was acting out the truth of what God had promised about delivering his enemies into his hand.

David's Meditations

David said that he meditated on God's word day and night (Ps 1:2). Does that mean that he meditated instead of doing his kingly duties? No, not instead of, but in preparation for doing them. And in doing his duties, he acted in consideration of what he meditated upon.

When David had the opportunity to take Saul's life in the cave (1Sam 24:10), he did not act rashly, even though implored by his men who said that God had given Saul into his hands. David had meditated on the possibility beforehand, and he considered that God ordained Saul to be king. Thus he chose to allow God to remove Saul, and not to act on that impulse himself. And so, in the heat of the moment, despite provocation and prompting, David was able to act according to God's will, and not according to the desires of his own flesh.

It was not always so, as in the case of Bathsheba. But for the most part, David was a man after God's own heart. He was content to do God's will. But what does a man do if he is presented with a beautiful woman bathing naked in front of him? What does a woman do when a man tries to seduce her? This is especially tempting if it's a hidden desire of their heart. How do we meditate on this before such a temptation occurs, without inflaming our desire?

Knowing that his heart is deceitful above all things (Jer 17:9) David prayed in Ps 26:1-2, "Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind." The chronology of the Psalms as they relate to events in David's life is unclear, but I suspect that David wrote this before the temptation of Bathsheba. The circumstance was brought to David at his own request to test his heart and mind. I suspect that, although David wrote it and considered it, he really didn't meditate on it. He was unprepared for the depravity that rose up within him. Even afterwards, David couldn't see it, or wouldn't see it, until the prophet Nathan told him a story of

lust and depravity (2Sam 12:1-14). Then David recognized himself in the story. God's word, brought to him by Nathan, is held up like a mirror before him. And that's meditation.

In response to this revelation, shocked, humiliated, and dismayed by the fact that he is not who he thought he was, David writes this lamentation in Ps 51:

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.*

This too is meditation. First there is the mirror of who we are, and then there is the realization of who we are meant to be in God's sight. And finally, there is the commitment to bridge the gap. All of this is meditation. David wrote of his commitment to God in Ps 26 in the privacy of his chambers, as he meditated on a life well-lived. But David didn't realize the extent of his continuing depravity while he was in his private chamber. He had to be publicly exposed and humiliated. He was confronted by truth in the reality of his everyday life, in the physical circumstances of his world. In despair, frightened by what had been revealed, David retreated once again to his private chamber to write his lament, and his pledge in Ps 51.

If all of this also sounds familiar, it is because this is the process of journaling. It begins in fasting, prayer, and meditation in the morning as we come into God's pasture through Christ our Gate. Then we go out of the pasture and into the world. In the reality of our daily circumstances, all of which God brings to us, the content of our heart is revealed. The venom spews from our lips (Matt 15:18), and the corruption of our flesh is exposed for all to see (Rom 7:15-19). At mid-day we review our morning, and we prepare for the afternoon. It drives us to our knees as we consider our ways in the sight of God, and under the scrutiny of his word. At the close of the day, we ponder and meditate on our day. We confess our sin and receive forgiveness. And then we commit to change. Intentionally and thoughtfully, we reconcile our day against God's truth. We record in our journal the result of our evening meditations. Thus we have prayerfully meditated on God's word morning, noon, and night (Dan 6:10). We can now sleep peacefully, having a clear conscience before God and man (Ac 24:16).

The meditation exercise which follows has no easy answers, and what we see in the mirror may be troubling to the soul. The truth is not found in these pieces to the puzzle, but in the overall framework of Scripture, which is the redemptive message of the Gospel. Wrestle with it.

An Exercise in Meditation – Faith and Works

Joh 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not **obey** the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Joh 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and **believes** him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Is God's wrath removed by belief, or by obedience? _____

James 2:14-17 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

How is obedience related to belief? _____

Joh 15:6,10 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you keep my commandments, you will **abide** in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Joh 6:56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood **abides** in me, and I in him.

Joh 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The **words** that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

How do I abide in Christ? _____

Is my salvation dependent on my obedience? _____

Joh 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (See also Rom 15:5-6; 1Pet 2:12; Phil 1:27)

What purpose does my obedience serve? _____

Ro 8:9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

1Co 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

If I have trouble understanding God's word, am I saved? _____

Why or why not? _____

1Jo 1:10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1Jn 2:4-6 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1Jo 5:10 Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.

Who is a liar? _____

How can I admit that I am a sinner, and that I do not keep Christ's commandments or walk in the same way in which he walked, and yet claim that I know Christ and that I believe the testimony of God concerning his Son? **Am I a liar?**

Am I saved? _____ How do I prove it? _____

1 Cor 12:3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. NIV

Rom 10:9 If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. NIV