

Meditate on These Things

Meditate: (v) to focus one's thoughts on; to reflect or ponder over.

*Meditation about
Meditation*

No. 4

Meditation about Meditation

There are 15 passages regarding meditation by the Psalmists. However, the only passage even suggestive of a command is by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:15. While not commanded in the Old Testament, it is assuredly suggested as a really good idea.

Psalm 19.14: 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 143.5: I remember the days of old; I meditate on all your works; I ponder on the work of your hands.

Psalm 1.2: But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

In 1 Timothy 4:15, Paul encourages us to meditate or think on whatsoever things are true, honorable, commendable, just, pure, lovely, excellent, worthy of praise.

So here is an admonition with two points of focus: what to do (meditate) and what to meditate about (God's word and plan for us).

Paul adds that these things which they had learned, received, heard, and seen in him they should do, and the God of peace would be with them. And we thus see one place to which meditation takes us, the peace promised us by Christ.

So, what is meditation? It seems we hear a lot about prayer and supplication, but little about meditation. As it turns out it is a kind of prayer, but is of a higher nature than a petition. Meditation is the putting aside of the cares of the world and ourselves to focus upon God.

Man has made attempts to practice meditation, but his focus has always been flawed. Aristotle thought this was the kind of activity the gods were perpetually engaged in. However, he felt contemplation was its own reward, and that it produces no result beyond the actual act of contemplation (more true than he realized).

In the 1950's, Maharishi Yogi introduced Transcendental Meditation in America which survives today. However, it involves techniques separate from God, and is concerned with internal calmness and freedom from stress. Focus entirely on self with no attention to moral values.

I read of a divinity student assigned the task of reading the book of Job and write of his thoughts. Coming across Job 2:9 he saw the startling statement: "Then his wife said to him, 'Do you persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.'" There is quite a lot worth commenting on here, but the student said, "From this verse we can tell that Job had a wife." No meditation here!

The focus returns to God in bible examples.

On one occasion, Isaac sought seclusion when he "went out to meditate in the field at eventide" (Genesis 26:63). (As a side exercise, read the hymn "Walking Alone at Eve" by Will Slater).

Phillip found Nathaniel and told him they had found the Messiah of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:48, 49). Skeptical, Nathaniel went with Phillip to meet Jesus. When Jesus stated Nathaniel was an Israelite without deceit, he asked, "How do you know me [that]?" Jesus revealed to Nathaniel that He had seen him in the privacy of a fig tree. Nathaniel exclaimed, "You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel." I just have to wonder why Jesus said this to him, and why it was such an "a-ha" moment for Nathaniel.

We are not told in the scripture what Nathaniel was doing there but he was apparently alone by his own choosing. Perhaps he was meditating on Psalm 32:2 "Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." His immediate response to Jesus' revelation indicates that he felt in being alone only God could have known about his solitude and thoughts. This suggests that Nathaniel was meditating on the word of God and thus in tune with his

Lord. We read in Psalm 139:2 "You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off (from a distance)."

These instances stir our curiosity about meditation, its merit and its relationship to prayer

This requires us to use our will to submit to His will. We use our will to make resolutions to bring us closer to the throne of God. We can do so by suspending for the time being the outward struggle against worldly forces in order to experience the inward realization of the presence of God. We must first seek to be alone.

We will discover that meditation involves more our listening than our talking. The Psalmist wrote in 4:4, "Stand in awe and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still."

Meditation helps us to maintain the proper perspective. When we are busy it seems harder to keep our priorities straight. By meditating

we see ourselves as we really are, and not as we think we are. We are thus afforded an opportunity to engage in genuine self-examination.

Alone, we are face to face with reality. No one is there for us to impress. Our soul is laid bare and open in the presence of the eternal God.

Meditation is a time for digesting God's law by calling into service our memory, our intellect and our will. In our study of the Bible we often soak up factual knowledge, but sometimes fail to make the proper application to our daily lives. We may read a bible account so fast and with a vague familiarity that we miss the way the story develops and aims to surprise us. The difference between reading and meditating is like the difference between knowledge and communication. When we meditate, we want to commune with God.

Thus, we use our memory of past lessons and readings to recall God's blessings and His infinite goodness. We use our intellect to recall what we

have learned about His life, truth, and love. By our will we strive to follow Jesus' instructions: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

This is something Jesus tried to lead His disciples into doing although He was disappointed several times. Consider the events recorded in Matthew 15:38-16:12, and the parallel account given by Mark in chapter 8:9-21. Jesus had just finished the feeding of the 4000, and He and the disciples got into a boat and went to Dalmanutha on the west side of the Sea of Galilee.

They no sooner landed than the Pharisees came and began to argue with Him, seeking a sign from heaven, to test Him. After a short exchange, Jesus and the disciples got back in the boat and left to go the east side of the Sea of Galilee. As they started out, the disciples began to concern themselves that they had only one loaf of bread.

Jesus, still thinking about the hardness of the Pharisees, warns the disciples to "beware of the

leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." Seems like the "apples and oranges" discussion here. They think he is referring to the problem having enough bread. What is their failing, and how does Jesus address this problem of miscommunication?

Jesus says to them, "Why do you not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" By his questioning they remember how many were fed on two occasions (5000 and 4000), and how many baskets of fragments were gathered each time. "Do you not yet understand?", Jesus asks. Jesus is calling on them to think (or meditate) on the feeding miracles.

They had not connected the multiplication of the loaves and fishes with the promise of God that he will provide our daily bread through His love and power.

You see, their problem was that they had not meditated on the miracles performed by Jesus. They had not called into use all their memory (manna in the wilderness), intellect (God's

promises), and will (to do His will) to see the real conclusion called for by the miracles.

Matthew tells us in 16:12, "Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Mark does not give that much credit to the disciples. They should have understood.

They were concerned about having only one loaf of bread, and could not comprehend that they had the "Bread of Life" in the boat with them.

A failure in understanding and insight results from a failure to fully embrace the ways of God. In fact, theirs is a failure to trust God!

Study, ponder, meditate, think on these things, and other such admonitions are found throughout the bible, along with practical exercises such as the disciples received on the boat ride across the Sea of Galilee.

We can use some help in our endeavors to learn meditation. We need wisdom. Wisdom simply

put is the ability to see the whole of God's creation as God would have us see it. So it involves (1) revelation, and it involves (2) being given eyes to see, and it involves (3) developing wise habits of reading Scripture which will allow us to discern "God's breath" in it: its inspiration and the ways we can apply it to ourselves.

To do this, let us turn to the book of James, the New Testament book most concerned with wisdom. At its beginning, James offers the following advice: "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you" (James 1:5). This seems simple enough, and who would not then ask for it and . . . become wise? There must be a catch. In fact the catch is stated immediately, so it hardly counts as fine print. Here it is: "But ask in faith, never doubting" (James 1:6) since the one who doubts is nothing less than double-minded and unstable in every way.

Oddly enough, there has been confusion and doubt itself to explain this passage. I think the answer lies in understanding what wisdom is. There is a lot of background information which is relevant here to do with the concept of wisdom in the Old Testament.

Proverbs chapters 1 through 9 are valuable to us in our quest to become wise. There is a piling on of words that tell us what wisdom is: knowledge; instruction; insight, righteousness, justice, equity, prudence, discretion, understanding.

In chapter 8:22-31 wisdom is personified as an active presence and power in the full scope of God's eternal purpose which he summed up "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:10). The personification of wisdom here is significant because many scholars say it becomes fully personified in Jesus Himself in the New Testament.

Please read Proverbs 8:22-31, then consider: (Colossians 2:2,3) "to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of

Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Ephesians 1:17 "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,"

Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13, "For who has known the mind of God so as to instruct Him?" (Answer: nobody), and then he adds, "But we have the mind of Christ." We cannot know the entirety of what Jesus said as all he said was not written down. Yet, He says we know everything (1 John 2:20). What this means is that Christ can be in us, that His very mentality comes to dominate ours. Paul asks, "Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We may have a measure of the Spirit of Christ. The central purpose of the gospel is that Christ may be formed in us (Galatians 4:19) and that He may dwell in our hearts (Ephesians 3:17). We don't know it all, but He promises that further

revelation (understanding) merely awaits our ability to listen. (John 16:12).

So, we know that wisdom is from God. We also understand that Jesus "is wisdom." We can now understand where meditation takes us:

Into the mind of Christ, and we see that our quest to be wise is the same as our quest to be like Jesus.

Wisdom, life, cleanness from sin, these are all gifts of the God who is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). This is the God who gave us birth by the word of truth (James 1:18). This word of truth is the same word which is elsewhere called the word of life, the Word of God.

To be wise, then, is to know that any insight we have is from God, and that any time we see with wise eyes these eyes were the gift of God.

Wisdom is not a cheap option, and according to Proverbs 4:7 it will cost all we have. "Whatever you get, get it."

The wisdom to be Christ-like.

The wisdom to see the whole of God's creation as God wants us to see it.

The wisdom to read the bible as God would have us read it, with open and wise eyes.