

Introduction

Joshua was instructed of the Lord to meditate on all that the Lord Himself had commanded, to do so day and night, not simply as an exercise to make himself aware of what was right, but that he might also do it, that he might live according to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God and so experience His blessing upon him (Josh. 1:7,8). This is what marks the way of every godly soul, namely, his delighting in the law of the Lord, his commitment to reviewing it time and again in his mind, storing it up in his heart and doing so to the end that he might please the Lord, faithfully serve Him and taste of His goodness (Ps. 1:1-3).

I am sure that no true believer would ever doubt the usefulness of so meditating on the Word of God, and many may even wish to do so if only they knew how to begin and continue such a practice. However, while they may maintain a daily habit of reading their Bible, too many do not keep going through it until it goes through them, until it makes a lasting impression on their whole way of thinking and fundamentally transforms their behaviour. This article is written to provide the reader with some simple tips on meditation, to get him moving in the right direction, to encourage him to stay the course and witness the difference it makes. For further reading on this subject, I recommend *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* by David W. Saxton.

Ten Useful Tips to Help You Meditate on the Word of God

1. Start with a good translation of the Bible. A popular choice for some is the King James Version (KJV). I prefer the New King James Version (NKJV), because it is based on a reliable text, first of all, and, secondly, because it is in modern English which makes it far easier for most people to understand. Be aware that no translation of the Bible is perfect – the original writings in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek were inspired (God-breathed), and therefore inerrant – but we must accept the fact that all translations are subject to some degree of error. Nevertheless, there are some very good versions being sold today, and we may be confident that they serve effectively as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105).

2. If you have never read right through the Bible before, try to do it at least the first time in one year. There are such Bible reading programs available. This will give you an overview of the entire Bible, Old and New Testament, and I further recommend following a chronological reading program for this first time. It may seem strange reviewing the Book of Job between chapters 11 and 12 of Genesis, but reading the books of the Bible chronologically will help to establish in your own mind the historical order of events.

3. If you are already familiar with the Bible, on the other hand, and with the history of its recorded events, read but one passage of Holy Scripture at a time. A passage may cover more than just one chapter, but a single passage, however long or short it may be, is quite enough to make your focus for effective meditation. Read it over a few times; keep going through it, as I say, until it begins to go through you. (This, by the way, is good advice for preachers preparing a sermon. Never assume that your reading a passage once tells you everything you need to know in order to expound upon it to others. Keep reviewing the passage until it becomes crystal clear how it ought to be proclaimed. This does not preclude the appropriate use of other helpful material along the way, but the key to how to preach on any passage should be sought from the passage itself.)

4. Bathe your study of Holy Scripture in earnest prayer. The Bible is the Word of God, after all, and we all need the help of the Holy Spirit who gave us these writings in the first place (2 Tim. 3:16) to understand them aright, to be convicted by them, to store them up in our hearts and to live them out in our lives. Begin therefore by humbly seeking such help, continue by wholly committing yourself to the revealed will of God, and complete your study with glad adoration and thanksgiving to our gracious Father in heaven who has so intimately acquainted you with Him.

5. If any passage or verse is still beyond your capacity to grasp, or if it appears to contradict what you read elsewhere in the Bible, read it also from another reliable translation. This may clear up everything for you very quickly. For even further understanding, check out a reliable commentary. I recommend Matthew Henry, though there are scores of others, too. The commentaries of men are not infallible, remember, but the more faithful ones can give a wealth of information not otherwise available to the average reader.

6. As you read through the Bible, look for whatever it may be teaching you about the gospel, about the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The Old Testament is about the lost state of sinful people, the need for Christ to come into the world and His making substitutionary atonement on their behalf. The New Testament is about His having come, His being offered up on the cross and what He achieved for all who believe in Him. These are the things which are the focus and emphasis of the biblical message (1 Cor. 2:2), and we cannot learn too much about them. If an unbeliever fails to see these basic truths, even if he picks up on incidental events along the way, he has missed what the Holy Scriptures are really about; he remains in his sinful state, without hope and without God in the world.

7. In every passage you read, look as well for practical application. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from the inspired record to transform, not only my words and actions, but the very thoughts of my mind and the desires of my heart?" It is not enough to know what changes should be made, and how to go about doing so. It is imperative for the Christian, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to make those changes, to express a faith which works through love (Gal. 5:6), and to commit everything to our faithful Creator who judges righteously (1 Pet. 2:21-23). Good works are not the means of salvation, but they are the necessary end and convincing evidence of it (Eph. 2:8-10; Jas. 2:14-17).

8. This may vary from one person to the next, for not everyone has the same capacity to do this, but begin to look for certain verses which you commit to memory. Start with the ones that speak most powerfully to you, that help you in your walk with the Lord and to resist your besetting sins. From there, move on to other verses which will help you to encourage other believers and to evangelize unbelievers. The practical benefits of memorizing the Word of God are endless, and, when you are pondering in your heart any other passages of Holy Scripture, these are the verses that will come most readily to mind, that will help you to interpret what you read and stay focused with a zeal according to knowledge.

9. In addition to your own study of the Bible, sit regularly under the faithful proclamation of God's Word. If you have not already done so, look for a church where the pastor does not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. Such a pastor will warn sinners to flee the wrath to come, and he will give them every incentive to seek refuge in Christ; he will also be a pastor who urges the faithful to

grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Saviour. Like commentaries, preachers are not infallible. Nevertheless, God-honouring, Christ-centred and Spirit-filled preaching is what God uses to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ, to call unbelievers to Him and to equip believers unto every good work. Private meditation is never enough, in other words; to grow, blossom and be fruitful, meditation needs all the stimulation, formal instruction and encouragement of fellow believers that the Lord is pleased to provide through the ministry of a local church.

10. The Bible calls us as believers to stir up one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24,25). If we are to do that, we must clearly be so stirred up ourselves, and that requires a habit of meditation on our part, plunging into a deep and consistent contemplation of the things of God. Do we wish to be a blessing to others? Then we must know that same blessing ourselves and not depart from it (Acts 20:28). What a great argument this is, and a powerful incentive, for greater meditation on the Word of God: Not only will it make you more thankful for every blessing you have, believer, but it will also make you such a blessing to others, move you to glorify God in doing so and deepen your enjoyment of Him!

CONCLUSION

Meditation, like a cow chewing the cud, is continuing to chew on what has already been eaten in order to maximize the benefits of full digestion, and so to consume even more. It is not easy, however, and this is one exercise that Satan will do everything he possibly can to discourage you along the way in order to keep you from maintaining such a habit. Let me close, therefore, by offering you this final word of encouragement. Paul wrote of how the believer's inward man is being renewed day by day, while he looks not at the things which are seen and temporary, but at the things which are unseen and eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18). This is what biblical, Christ-centred meditation helps us to do. By focusing our attention on the unseen, on all the provisions that God has secured for His people in Christ, it gives us a peace that surpasses all understanding (Is. 26:3; Phil. 4:8,9), a joy that strengthens us to continue fighting the good fight of faith (Neh. 8:10), and a contentment to cheer us in the face of any adversity, knowing that we can do all things through Christ (Phil. 4:11-13) who keeps us through faith for that salvation which is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-12).