

Going Deeper: Meditating on One Passage of Scripture

Steve Midgley

INTRODUCTION

*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.*

Psalms 1:1-2

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.

Joshua 1:8

By... meditation, I intend the thoughts of some subject spiritual and divine, with the fixing, forcing, and ordering of our thoughts about it, with a design to affect our own hearts and souls with the matter of it... In meditation our principal aim is the affecting of our own hearts and minds with love, delight and [humility]

John Owen, *Spiritual Mindedness*

Meditation must enter the door of understanding, the door of the heart and affections, and the door of practical living

Edmund Calamy

It is not he that reads most; but he that meditates most, that will prove the choicest, sweetest, wisest, and strongest Christian.

Thomas Brooks

1. Much misunderstood

2. Long established

3. Sorely missed

If we pray without meditation our own communion with God becomes poor and distant

Edmund Clowney, *Christian Meditation*

A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation, the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost.

Thomas Watson

A personal note

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

...how it differs from Bible study

As the Bee that dwells and abides upon the flower, to suck out all the sweetness that is in the flower; so to meditate upon God and Christ, and the Sacrament, it is to dwell upon God, and the Sacrament, to suck out all the sweetness we can in the things we meditate upon

Edmund Calamy, *The Art of Christian Meditation*

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:17-19, NIV

THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

...how it leads us to prosper

The tree is no mere channel, piping water unchanged from one place to another, but a living organism which absorbs it, to produce in due course something new and delightful, proper to its kind and to its time.

Kidner, *Psalms commentary*

A man that is a stranger to meditation is a stranger to himself.

Thomas Manton

...how it stirs our imagination

Meditation is the form of thought that is appropriate to revealed mystery. If the mystery were not revealed, thought would not be possible. Then the voiding of our minds might be appropriate. But if God's revelation were a simple matter of fact, the intensity of meditation might seem foolish. Meditation is demanded by the revelation of wonders that go beyond our ability comprehend.

Edmund Clowney, *Christian Meditation*

...how it shapes our affections

Study is the finding out of a truth, meditation is the spiritual improvement of a truth; the one searcheth for the vein of gold, the other digs out the gold. Study is like a winter sun that hath little warmth and influence: meditation... melts the heart when it is frozen, and makes it drop into tears of love. Thomas Watson

If we settle for mere speculations and mental notions about Christ as doctrine, we shall find no transforming power or efficacy communicated unto us thereby. But when, under the conduct of spiritual light, our affections do cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, our minds fill up with thoughts and delight in him—then virtue [change in character] will proceed from him to purify us, increase our holiness, strengthen our graces, and to fill us sometimes with joy unspeakable and full of glory John Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*

THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

...how it relates to prayer

Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the word and prayer, and hath respect to both. The word feedeth meditation, and meditation feedeth prayer; we must hear that we be not erroneous, and meditate that we be not barren. These duties must always go hand in hand; meditation must follow hearing and precede prayer. Thomas Manton

Prayer fastens meditation upon the soul; prayer is a tying a knot at the end of meditation that it doth not slip; pray that God will keep those holy meditations in your mind for ever, that the savour of them may abide upon your hearts. Thomas Watson

A WORKED EXERCISE

Read Psalm 23

Read and re-read the psalm with the aim of arriving at one particular truth in the psalm that stands out for you.

Meditate on the psalm

Take whatever truth has stood out to you and speak of it to yourself; turn it over and over in your mind; look at it from a variety of angles; relate it to various aspects of your own life and situation; allow your imagination to take the pictorial language of the psalm and fill it with all the richness of the imagery; In short, seek to be the bee that sucks all the sweetness out of this particular flower.

Prayer

Now turn these things into prayer (take about 2 minutes praying through each of the three stages below)

1. Praise God for this truth; adore him and give him glory that this thing is true of him; speak to him of how wonderful it is that he is such a God.
2. Confess to God some of the ways that you live as if this were not true; admit the hardness of heart that leaves you doubting him so much of the time; see if you can identify some of the false things you believe instead and ask his forgiveness for believing these lies and so doubting his character and his word.
3. Ask him to help you turn from falsehood to believe this truth more fully; ask him to show you all the ways that your life would be different if this truth were engraved onto your heart and soul; ask him to help you see some very specific ways that you should live differently even this day because of this truth that he has spoken to you.

FURTHER READING

Edmund Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, (widely available online)

Edmund Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, Regent College Publishing 2002

Tim Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, Hodder and Stoughton 2014

Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, (widely available online)

J I Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: finding our way from duty to delight*, IVP 2006