

Psalm 1

Meditation for the Inflexible

When we hear “meditation” our minds naturally think of eastern religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, or even western yoga. Perhaps that is why Christians ignore this essential spiritual discipline. Regardless, eastern mysticism is not what the Bible means by meditation.

I still remember the busiest time of my life. It was the spring semester of 2008 when I was still in seminary. Taking 15 hours at the master’s level, I was also a newly wed whose wife had become pregnant, served as a youth pastor 90 minutes away, and worked a full-time job. At this job, my boss had been fired requiring more responsibility and hours. On top of it all, I was raising money for a mission trip to Africa.

I have vowed to never be that busy again. The problem is, however, Americans love being busy. We fill our schedules with work, entertainment, family, friends, and an endless honey-do list. Even when COVID first hit, one could stand on their porch and hear the echoes of chainsaws and hammers in the distance. Busyness is an American virtue.

Busyness might be one of the greatest detriments to our spiritual walk. We all have good intentions, but don’t believe we have the time. Related to busyness, another detriment to our spiritual walk is distraction. When was the last time you got alone with God? When was the last time you considered, deeply, the things of God? When was the last time you reflected and applied the gospel to your life? When was the last time you muted the car radio, turned off the television, and put down the phone to meditate on the things of God?

Fasting does not seem to be the discipline Americans fear the most, it is the discipline of meditation. Nevertheless, Scripture consistently exhorts us to meditate (see Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-2; Psalm 119:15, 78, 23, 48, 97, and 99). It is modeled by Isaac in Genesis 24:63, David in Psalm 63:6, the psalmist in Psalm 119:148, and Jesus in Matthew 14:3a.

Before exploring what biblical meditation is, perhaps we should pause and consider what it is not. First, it is not a form of eastern mysticism. In such worldviews, meditation is about emptying oneself. The Bible counsels the opposite. Don’t empty your mind but fill your soul with the truths of the gospel. We are not trying to escape the material universe, but encounter the living God. Furthermore, biblical meditation is not merely subjective. It is not about focusing on our feelings, intuition, exercise, detachment, manipulation, or some breathing techniques to get what we want from God or a deeper sense of ourselves. Meditation is not about the self, but on focusing exclusively on the triune God.

So, what is it? **First, it is silence and solitude.** The Bible encourages music, but not noise. Too often, we turn music (and other digital devices) as background noise. Throughout Scripture, the saints choose solitude (like Jesus throughout the Gospels). The Bible even portrays silence as a form of worship (Revelation 8:1). Try sitting alone quietly for 5 minutes without your phone. Have we confused distraction with productivity? Are we able to get alone with our Maker?

Secondly, **meditation draws our attention on the divine.** We first meditation on Scripture. Many read the Bible, but few meditate on it. It would be better to meditate on short passages than skimming larger portions of Scripture. Beginning today, choose a portion of Scripture and spend a week or more reading and meditating on that passage (consider Ephesians 1:3-14; Psalm 145; or Revelation 5).

We can also **meditate on the gospel itself.** Meditate on what the gospel is and who you are in Christ. Confess your sin in prayer all while rejoicing in the God of your salvation. Contemplate the depth of God's love for a sinner like you. We can then meditate on the attributes of God as well as the Person of Christ. The attributes of God include his sovereignty, providence, immutability (i.e., his unchangeableness), grace, love, holiness, etc. The Person of Christ includes his humanity, deity, his work as mediator, comforter, redeemer, savior, etc. There is more than enough to contemplate here.

Finally, **meditation is incomplete without prayer.** Just as prayer and fasting are often associated together in Scripture, so too we should combine Scripture and meditation with prayer. I recommend learning to pray the Bible beginning with the Psalms.

In his book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Don Whitney wrote:

Besides a bellows on a fire, meditation can also be compared to lingering by a fire. Imagine that you've been outside on an icy day and then come inside where there's a hot, crackling fire in the fireplace. As you walk toward it, you are very cold. You stretch out your hands to the fire and rub them together briskly during the two seconds it takes to walk past the glow and the warmth. When you reach the other side of the room, you realize, *I'm still cold.* Is there something wrong with you? Are you just a second-class 'warmer-upper'? No, the problem isn't you; it's your method. You didn't stay by the fire. If you want to get warm, you have to linger by the fire until it warms your skin, then your muscles, then your bones until you are fully warm.