

## Spiritual Disciplines: Meditation and Memorization

January 20, 2013

This is the third sermon in this series on spiritual disciplines. We are looking at the practice of Jesus and His followers through the ages, as well as the exhortation of Scripture, to see what we can do to increasingly mature in our Christian life. When we look at the church today and throughout much of church history, we find very few living in the power of the Holy Spirit, walking with the Lord, and making disciples in the faith. Perhaps it is our over reliance on grace and our underestimating the power of the flesh. (Romans 6:1, Matthew 26:41)

The Apostle Paul wrote in a way that disturbs us modern Christians that think we have our systematic theology all squared away. He does not just rest in the grace he has received, ticket to heaven in hand, now to just enjoy the rest of his life until God welcomed him home. Listen to his declaration in the sufficiency of Christ, while at the same time knowing it demands his all. <sup>8</sup> *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* Philippians 3:8-14 (ESV)

Paul knew his righteousness was through his faith in Christ, not his works or keeping the Law. But he goes on to say that he hasn't obtained all the results of his faith, such as knowing the power of resurrection, sharing in Christ's sufferings, and being perfected. Have any of us? So what does he do about not yet obtaining the results of his faith? He forgets what is behind. He strains forward to that goal and presses toward it. That is what the disciplines are about. They don't earn us anything, but because of our faith we exercise ourselves unto godliness to obtain all that faith has for us. So little of Christ is evident in Christians because we don't press on to know Him and experience the results of our faith.

Paul had seen others start in the faith and even become laborers for the kingdom of God only to later see them go back to living for the world. (2 Timothy 4:10) Paul wanted

**Commented [notes1]: Romans 6:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

**Commented [notes2]: Matthew 26:41 (ESV)**

<sup>41</sup> Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

**Commented [notes3]: 2 Timothy 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

to be sure that would not be his fate. He didn't underestimate the power of his flesh. His motivation to give it his all each and every day is his love for Christ. The disciplines keep that love alive and vibrant. (Romans 15:30) Are you as concerned for your future? Do you know your own weaknesses? What are you doing about it? (Luke 21:36)

We've already looked at the importance of daily and continual prayer and the study of the Word. Meditation is that tool that ties study of the Word and Prayer together. I'm not referring to the meditation of mindlessness. That can be dangerous! I'm referring to meditation on the Scriptures. For years I have started my day with a time of prayer and then the Scriptures or the Scriptures first and then prayer, wondering which way was most helpful. Recently I believe I found the answer.

I learned this from George Mueller. He was an Englishman with immense faith. He ran an orphanage that housed up to 2000 of London's orphans. He also supported many mission works. What was unique about Mueller is that he never asked anyone for support. He believed that if he asked the Father in faith for the provision for the things that God had called him to, he would surely receive what he asked. He took Jesus quite literally when Jesus said, "Ask and you shall receive." (Matthew 7:7) God was always faithful to answer his prayers. His biography is a treasure that every Christian should read. (George Mueller of Bristol by Pierson)

In 1841 he told of a change in his prayer life. This is a rather lengthy quote, but I found it so helpful, I wanted to share it in its entirety with you. *Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer after having dressed in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing was to give myself to the reading of God's Word, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.*

*I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words of the Lord's blessing upon His precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God, searching as it were into every verse to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.*

*The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less to prayer. When thus I have been for a while making*

**Commented [notes4]: Romans 15:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,

**Commented [notes5]: Luke 21:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

**Commented [notes6]: Matthew 7:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

*confession or intercession or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. The result of this is that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart.*

*The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer... But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour on my knees before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then really began to pray."*

I know I can relate to this difficulty of the wandering mind. Can any of you? Mueller is giving us the solution he found, to let his meditation on the Word lead him into prayer. Continuing with the quote -

*"I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend ... about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word. It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point. . . . And yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is to obtain food for his inner man.*

*Now what is food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water passes through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it and applying it to our hearts.*

*When we pray we speak to God. Now prayer... requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season therefore when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the Word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us. We may therefore profitably meditate with God's blessing though we are ever so weak spiritually; nay, the weaker we are, the more we need meditation for the strengthening of our inner man. Thus*

*there is far less to be feared from wandering of mind than if we give ourselves to prayer without having had time previously for meditation.*

*I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow believers to ponder this matter. By the blessing of God, I ascribe to this mode the help and strength which I have had from God to pass in peace through deeper trials, in various ways, than I have ever had before; and having now above fourteen years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it."<sup>1</sup>*

Mueller has described how meditating on the Word prompts prayer of the kind we discussed last week, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. But this is not just prayer from what may be on our mind, but prayer directed by meditation on Scriptures. This kind of meditation is not just intellectual but turns into action and direction that we take to God as we apply the Word of God to our life. He blends in the silence I spoke of to hear what the Holy Spirit would bring to mind (Habakkuk 2:20) and how He would apply the passage to life.

One of my favorite verses on meditation is God's word to Joshua. <sup>8</sup> *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. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* Joshua 1:8 (ESV) And that brings us to our next discipline, memorization. If the Word is to be in our mouth and mind throughout the day we will need to memorize portions of it. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) Two weeks ago you saw how easy that can be as we memorized Colossians 4:2a and 1Thessalonians 5:17.

Like all the disciplines, memorization can be viewed as drudgery. That is how the enemy of your soul wants you to see it, and that is really what it is when we do it out of religious duty. We need a different frame of mind. If this is the living and enduring word of God (1Peter 1:23), God's gift to us to guide us through life, His love letter to us, portions of it will speak to your heart in ways you never want to forget. Those are the verses to memorize so you can bring them to mind.

Many of you found the blessing of memorizing Philippians 4:4-8 and have applied it to many situations since, discovering the peace of God that guards your hearts and minds through difficulty. It may have taken discipline to memorize it, but the blessing from having it in your heart and mind far outweighs the effort. That is true with all the disciplines. They take effort. They are an exercise, but the blessing is more than worth it.

**Commented [notes7]:** 13. Taken from Spiritual Secrets of George Muller, © 1985 by Roger Steer. American rights granted by Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60189. Pages 60-62,

Whitney, Donald S. (2012-01-05). Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life with Bonus Content (Pilgrimage Growth Guide) (p. 82). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

**Commented [notes8]: Habakkuk 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."

**Commented [notes9]: Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

**Commented [notes10]: Colossians 4:2a (NIV)**

<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer,

**Commented [notes11]: 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing,

**Commented [notes12]: 1 Peter 1:23 (NIV)**

<sup>23</sup> For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

**Commented [notes13]: Philippians 4:4-8 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

<sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

<sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Memorize those verses that speak to your heart. A system to keep and review those verses is essential. Reviewing is as important as the initial memorization, for without it you will not retain it. Some use 3x5 cards, others a small spiral binder, and others card stock on a binder ring. Personally, I found that memorizing chapters avoids the clutter and makes it easier to review. Sure, it takes longer, but your verse is in context and if you plan to stay consistent with it, you will find it easier in the long run. Even if you just memorize one verse a month, in a year you could have a chapter or a couple of Psalms memorized. First find a chapter that really speaks to you. Set a goal and set aside some time to **invest in the treasure that will never perish.** (1Peter 1:23) Right after your time of meditation is a good time and then briefly before you sleep. Sometimes you'll even have an opportunity during the day. The Word is something you *can* take to heaven with you, for it endures forever!

The Psalmist said the word hidden in your heart will keep you from sin. (Psalm 119:11) He said it was worth more than thousands of pieces of gold and silver. (Psalm 119:72) It will be there when you need to share it with someone that is struggling.

Remember when someone quoted a verse to you and how it spoke to your heart? There is power in the Word. Jesus quoted from memory when he was tempted by the Devil. (Luke 4:4) He quoted it when tested by the Pharisees. (Matthew 21:16) He referred to it when He taught the multitudes. (Matthew 11:10) This means He had to have spent time memorizing it. I don't believe He automatically knew it all, for the Scriptures tell us He grew in wisdom and in stature and found favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52)

It boils down to our conviction about the Bible and our response to the grace of God. Are we going to be like Paul who pressed on toward the goal of Christlikeness, who strained forward to lay hold of that for which Christ had taken hold of him? Or are we going to take the grace of God for granted and underestimate the power of our flesh to lead us subtly away from Jesus? **Are we straining for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ,** desiring to experience the power of resurrection in our calling, or are we satisfied to slide into eternity with a record of mediocrity?

These disciplines help to keep us on track and help us grow into all that God has for us. I can't count the times they have turned me from going down a destructive path. They will do the same for you if you will exercise them in your own life. (Psalm 107:43) Let the love of Christ motivate you as it did the Apostle Paul to experience the fullness of your salvation through exercising these spiritual disciplines.

#### Questions

- 1 Why was Paul so driven?
- 2 Should we be so disciplined? Why?

#### Commented [notes14]: 1 Peter 1:23 (NIV)

<sup>23</sup> For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

#### Commented [notes15]: Psalm 119:11 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

#### Commented [notes16]: Psalm 119:72 (ESV)

<sup>72</sup> The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

#### Commented [notes17]: Luke 4:4 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

#### Commented [notes18]: Matthew 21:16 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?"

#### Commented [notes19]: Matthew 11:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'

#### Commented [notes20]: Luke 2:52 (ESV)

<sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

#### Commented [notes21]: Psalm 107:43 (NIV)

<sup>43</sup> Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.

- 3 Who was George Mueller?
- 4 What lesson helped his prayer life?
- 5 Why does he recommend it?
- 6 What did God tell Joshua to do to be successful and prosperous?
- 7 Why should we memorize Scripture?
- 8 What do we gain from it?
- 9 What are some ways to memorize?
- 10 Is the effort worth it?