

# The Necessity of Meditating on Scripture (Part One)

By Jay Wegter

## Why do we need to meditate on Scripture?

*Trust is the very heartbeat of our walk with God. Faith first connected us to God, now we are to daily live by faith in His Word (Col 2:6-7). We ‘feed’ this faith by meditating on Scripture.* There is no greater power for transforming our lives and moving us to spiritual maturity than meditating on Scripture. But, in our age of social networks and endless computer ‘apps’—the screen in front of us is gradually replacing the ‘screen’ of the mind’s eye. **Therefore, it is vitally important to recover the spiritual discipline of meditation on Scripture.** I recently asked a room full of Christian high school students if any of them meditated on the Word that week and if any were able to go one hour without any electronic stimuli, not one of them raised a hand!

The meaning of Scriptural meditation is succinctly captured by J. I. Packer: “[It is] the activity of calling to mind or thinking over and dwelling upon and applying to oneself the various things one knows about the works, ways, purposes, and promises of God.”<sup>i</sup>

**Scripture meditation is renewal of the mind by means of God’s Word**—meditating on Scripture is for every believer because each believer is called to a life of *transformation* by the Word (we’ve designated this, the ‘transformation mandate’). “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). Mind renewal involves renewing our commitment to obey the Lord in every area of our lives. **Trust in, and obedience to God’s truth transforms us.** When we trust God as He is revealed in the truth of His Word, we are desisting from doing things our way and from seeing things only from our own perspective.

**Meditating upon Scripture is a spiritual discipline.** It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God. **Meditation clears one’s mind and heart of distractions in order to gain a clear vision of God** and to let His truth make its full impact. Meditation brings God’s truth to bear on our daily decisions, therefore it is necessary in order for God’s truth to change and our mind, affections, and will.<sup>ii</sup>

By way of example: think about a sizzling Black Angus steak sitting in front of you. You can smell it, admire it, salivate for it; but it will not provide an iota of nutritional value unless you cut it up and chew it and swallow it. Even after you have finished the meal, the digestive juices in your system must break it down into essential amino acids. As enzymes continue the process, these amino acids in the steak are reduced to the molecular level so that they may be absorbed and assimilated through the semi-permeable membrane of the small intestine. **So also, there is ‘digestive work’ to be done in order to assimilate the spiritual nutrition of Scripture and ‘grow thereby’ (1 Pet 2:1-3).**

Meditation on the Word is an energetic spiritual discipline—we **‘chew the truth’** in order to digest it—this entails focus and concentration. Meditation often involves talking to oneself about God and what He requires. **It often means ‘arguing’ and reasoning oneself out of moods of doubt and unbelief and back into clear apprehensions of God’s holiness, love, power, and grace.** This is how

we ‘digest’ and ‘assimilate’ the Word. Ongoing meditation on Scripture changes our character; it is a mighty force for rectifying and reversing our natural slide into self-centered/self-focused thinking.<sup>iii</sup>

## What are the steps for meditating on the Word?

*What are the practical steps for meditating on the Word of God? Meditation is an extension of the application step of personal Bible study.* In meditation we ask additional questions of the text:

- *How does this passage ‘feed my faith’?*
- *How may I move into greater love of the truth as it is taught here?*
- *What changes are necessary for me to bring my life into conformity with God’s truth?*
- *How does this passage give me God’s way of seeing life?*
- *How does this passage help me ‘build a case’ for obedience and against disobedience?*
- *What errors, lies, and temptations are refuted by this text?*
- *What are the benefits of obedience and the consequences of disobedience?*

*Meditation on Scripture involves a determination to believe what God says and to do it.*

“Therefore, let us fear lest, while the promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (Heb 4:1-2). Many individuals who hear God’s Word and even read God’s Word do not *profit* from it because they do not respond to God’s Word with faith (Heb 4:2). **All genuine obedience springs from faith in God’s Word.** Meditation allows the Word to *feed our faith* and fasten God’s truth upon our understanding and affections.

*Meditation on Scripture is the cultivation of the love of the truth.* “Under the law it was an unclean beast that did not chew the cud; it is a corrupt heart that does not ‘chew [God’s] truth’ by meditation.”<sup>iv</sup> Only the person who has saving grace has joy in God’s truth. **The heart of a true believer functions as a *servant* of divine revelation—his heart and conscience are ‘captive’ to the Word of God.** By contrast, the unbeliever does not receive the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10). The natural man cannot delight in the commandments of God (Rom 8:5-8). Therefore in the heart of a natural man, no meditation on Scripture takes place.

The unregenerate man keeps God’s truth ‘confined to a small iron vault’ lest it be released to fill his life and have total sway, influence and dominion. By contrast, the believer’s heart is a sanctuary of God’s truth—Scripture *dominates exceptionally* in the life of the genuine believer.<sup>v</sup> “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, **and in His law he meditates both day and night.** And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers” (Ps 1:1-2).

## Meditation sets our focus on our true treasure

*Meditation on Scripture involves treasuring God’s Word in the heart (Ps 119:11).* Meditation is intentional; it involves both study and reflection upon the Word in such a way that we find our true riches

in the Lord. **By turning over the truth of God in our minds, it makes an indelible impression upon us**—it becomes ours. Because we live in an age of superficial religion, most folks have ‘borrowed convictions’—they have never made it a habit to treasure up God’s Word in their hearts. There is no short cut for gaining ‘first hand convictions’—they are the result of longing for the pure milk of the Word (1 Pet 2:2; 1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 2:15). The Psalmist said, “I will *meditate* upon Thy precepts; and regard Thy ways. I shall delight in Thy statutes; I shall not forget Thy Word” (Ps 119:15-16).

**Only when God’s Word is treasured in our hearts will it *put us to work* both in serving God and putting sin to death.** One must meditate upon Scripture if he is to be a *doer of the Word* (James 1:22-25). Our resolve to please God will only be realized if we continually familiarize ourselves with God’s truth so that it daily *informs* our affections and desires (Josh 1:8). People may argue about beliefs, but people will die for their convictions. **Scripture meditation builds life-transforming convictions which shape all of our daily decisions.**<sup>vi</sup>

## **Meditation is strategic in the battle for the mind**

*The contemplation of the truth is our primary weapon in the battle for the mind.* Meditation has a goal: to induce trust, loyalty, devotion, surrender, obedience, delight, and love to God; and, all the while deepening our knowledge of God, our love of His truth, and our conformity to it. **When believers meditate on Scripture, they are always about the business of weighing the temporal against the eternal**—therefore they are willing to suffer loss and deny themselves for the sake of Christ. Frequent meditation is required to do this *weighing* of heaven against the world; of weighing the value of knowing Christ versus earthly gain. The Apostle Paul models this habit of ‘weighing’ in Philippians 3:7-16—he shows us how to daily weigh the eternal against the temporal.<sup>vii</sup>

*When the saint meditates on the Word, he is anything but passive; he is busy building a case for obedience and tearing down the beginnings of any argument for distrust of God.* **Meditation moves the Word of God from the mind to the heart, from the academic to application.** It is a revitalizing spiritual discipline that we need to exercise daily. Because our lower natures are hostile to God’s gracious will, our minds need constant reorientation by the Holy Spirit.<sup>viii</sup>

“*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). “(1) ‘Speculations’ is the Greek *logismos*: ‘calculation, reasoning, reflection, thought’ and in this context it refers to **wrong thinking or reasoning** and is connected to those thinking processes and attitudes that usurp God’s viewpoint and stand against the knowledge of God and what that should do to and in our lives. (2) We see that Paul and his co-workers were committed to destroying and dealing with any such thinking in their lives. They saw this as essential because they regarded wrong thinking to be so **destructive to their ability to wage war against the enemy** and carry out God’s purpose as soldiers of the cross.

*The suggestion is that this is a daily battle, an ongoing process without which we are unable to obey and serve the Lord.* Paul uses a military term, ‘taking captive’ (*aichmalotizo*) plus the present tense which point to this as a continual struggle and warfare.<sup>ix</sup>

## **Meditation on the Word is how we draw close to the Lord**

*Meditation is necessary in order to enjoy the kind of intimacy and closeness to God to which we are called (Jn 15:4).* “Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (1 Jn 2:28). “*There are but two ways to draw near to God: by prayer and by meditation.*”<sup>x</sup> **Meditation is a necessary labor and a pleasurable discipline enabling the saint to take delight in God.** The reward of regular meditation is that we find God to be our chief treasure, to be trustworthy, and to be our highest good. Heart-warming communion with God is not possible apart from the Scripture practices of prayer, worship, and meditation. **Without these regular, Spirit-induced ‘heart-warmings’ at the hearth of Scripture, our fickle hearts will go in search of other lovers.**

*The three disciplines of prayer, worship, and meditation are closely related. Scripture meditation feeds and stimulates both prayer and worship.* Meditation is our contact point for communion with God, and it is the very essence of growth in our knowledge of God. **As we meditate upon the Word of God we are communing with the Lord.** Those who meditate upon Scripture are blessed with ‘divine disclosures’. God is pleased to manifest His presence where the true knowledge of Him is known, loved, proclaimed, adored, and exalted. “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him’” (Jn 14:21-23).

**By the mind-renewing power of meditation we submit our minds to the mind of God.** We are lifted above subjectivism (moods and feelings) to concrete thoughts of God. The effect is always to humble us as we contemplate God’s greatness and glory against our sinfulness and smallness. Meditation teaches us to think in the presence of God (Ps 19:14) and to think God’s thoughts: “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

*Whatever occupies the mind and heart will engage the will. Thoughts and deeds follow affections. Meditation ‘unites the heart’ and equips the believer to navigate by means of Scripture (Ps 86:11-12).* **There is no way to pass victoriously through this world of seductive idols without meditation** (Ps 119:9-16). We may tell ourselves that we please God because our lives conform outwardly to His moral commands: but the real evidence in the soul of the saint is meditation (Ps 1:1-3). Our love to God is evidenced there first. “*Blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear*” (Matt 13:16). The meditating saint uses these faculties planted at regeneration (the new birth) for the purpose of meditation (1 Cor 2:10-16). The godly man or woman meditates so that praising God and telling of all His works is a spontaneous activity (Ps 145:1-7).

**Our spiritual battles are primarily at the level of ‘spiritual seeing’—seeing our true treasure in Christ.** Meditation on the Word *unifies* our Christian experience so that we do not divide our lives into ‘spiritual’ compartments, and idolatrous compartments. This unity of life experience through Scripture meditation means that *your pleasure will be a measure of your treasure.*<sup>xi</sup> In Scripture meditation we practice occupying our minds on things above: “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col 3:1-2).

*When the believer meditates on the Word, he literally preaches to himself the will of God; the wonders of God; the ways of God; and the works of God; and the Gospel of God.* Maturing Christians meditate upon Scripture—this involves building a case *for* obedience and building a case *against* disobedience. **Here is the great difference between merely reading Scripture and actually meditating upon God’s Word. Scripture constantly joins divine commands to the benefits of obedience.** “*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked*” (Ps 1:1). And Scripture spells out the consequences of disobedience. “*He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm*” (Prov 13:20). Through Scripture meditation, we learn to love the truth in order to be conformed to it (Rom 12:1-2).

***The Christian worldview is incredibly demanding.*** We must know the reasons for self-denial, for daily taking up our cross—our usefulness in the Kingdom of God depends upon it. Central to our ‘cross-bearing’ is the role which Scripture meditation plays in our sanctification—the growing believer learns to mentally *wrestle and argue* through the commands of Scripture. This incorporates an aggressive faith which engages in discerning good from evil (Heb 5:14).

How necessary this spiritual discipline is in our information-saturated culture—for the believer has to wade through much ‘misinformation’. Discernment built upon Scripture is vital for our victory over the world. Scripture meditation constantly deepens our trust in God instead of relying upon our own natural reasoning about things:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
And do not lean on your own understanding.  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He will make your paths straight.  
Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.  
It will be healing to your body  
And refreshment to your bones (Prov 3:5-8).

Endnotes:

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<sup>i</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, IVP, 1975, pp. 18-19

<sup>ii</sup> See the excellent work, *Communion with God*, by John Owen (Banner of Truth Trust)

<sup>iii</sup> See also the fine work on Meditation, *Thought of God*, by Maurice Roberts (Banner of Truth Trust)

<sup>iv</sup> In terms of the believer’s relation to Scripture, see Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*

<sup>v</sup> Irfon Hughes, “Sermons on the Parable of the Soils,” Family Camp, Prescott Pines, AZ, 1995

<sup>vi</sup> Dr. Carl Stevens, “Worldview Discussions,” Aarau, Switzerland

<sup>vii</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, pp. 374-375

<sup>viii</sup> Peter Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture*, p. 31

<sup>ix</sup> “*Biblical Meditation*,” *Study By: J. Hampton Keathley, III*, [www. http://bible.org/article/biblical-meditation](http://bible.org/article/biblical-meditation)

<sup>x</sup> William G. T. Shedd

<sup>xi</sup> John Piper