

SETTING THE STAGE: WHY MEDITATE?

A BIGGER PICTURE

Let's start off by thinking through a few questions:

What is the Christian life all about? Check the items below that you think apply:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going to church every Sunday | <input type="checkbox"/> Being involved in ministry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading your Bible every day | <input type="checkbox"/> Telling people about Jesus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Praying every day | <input type="checkbox"/> Becoming like Jesus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developing personal disciplines such as Scripture memory, fasting, prayer, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> Other things: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tithing | _____ |

When a person experiences failure in his or her life, what would you tell them is the answer to overcoming? Again, select as many options as you think apply.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read specific passages in the Bible that deal with the specific issue | <input type="checkbox"/> Find accountability partner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pray more | <input type="checkbox"/> Join a support group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memorize more Scripture and quote it when being tempted | <input type="checkbox"/> Other things: _____ |
| | _____ |

Now, this next question is more personal. When you experience failure in your life, what is your response?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Become discouraged | <input type="checkbox"/> Try harder to develop personal disciplines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make a list of things to do or not do next time | <input type="checkbox"/> Other things: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make excuses or rationalize: "Oh well, we're all human." | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give up: "I'm sick of trying. I don't think this works for me." | _____ |

Again, what is the Christian life all about? Take time to think through your answer. At the core of your being, what do you think defines a successful Christian life? What's the point of being a Christian? What's the point of being saved? We tend to gloss over these questions with good but cliché answers. Before reading any further, take 5-10 minutes to process through these questions. Write your honest, gut-reaction answers on the lines below.

THERE'S A PROBLEM

God has a very specific desire for your Christian life. And, you will notice that wherever God has something specific in mind, the enemy fabricates a counterfeit in order to distract us. You could call this counterfeit “pseudo-Christianity,” or better yet, it is known as “religion.” “Religion” may look good on the outside. It may do all the right things and say all the right things. It may go to church every Sunday, read the Bible every day, go on mission trips, and pass out tracts. It may even be involved in full-time ministry. Most of all it is BUSY—busy doing “good things” for God. However, religion masquerades as the “abundant Christian life,” assuming that the busier one is, the more abundance the person must be experiencing. But religion is dead. Don't be shocked when you read that. Being “busy for God” was not God's intention for the Christian life. If this is how we define the “abundant Christian life,” we have miserably failed and missed the mark.

And how about you? What about failure in your own life? You know, the hidden habits that you try so hard to overcome. The one thing you determine each time will never happen again, only to fail again and

feel more stuck than ever. All the busy, religious doings and activities haven't helped. (It is worthwhile to note that this is often the point at which many give up on the Christian life, saying, "It doesn't work." They got busy trying to do things for God, trying to improve themselves, and instead seemed only to be met with dismal failure. Therefore, they faced the choice to either to go on faking Christianity or give up on it altogether.)

We typically don't discover God's intention for us until we get desperate. You see, a desperate person realizes that he needs something outside of himself. He asks, seeks, knocks, and searches until he finds. Until we get desperate, we usually keep looking within ourselves, assuming that if we just try harder, we'll get there eventually. As bad as this predicament sounds, there's hope—desperation is just the place God wants us!

THE LIFE YOU WERE MEANT TO LIVE

God's desire for your Christian life is intimacy with Him. He wants to walk face-to-face with you every day of your life. This is the life you were meant to live! This is why "busyness for God" is dead and empty. It is working *for* Him apart from having a relationship *with* Him! **At its heart, the Christian life is about you walking with God, depending on Him, and allowing Him to change you and form His Son in you.** You can *improve* yourself, but you can't *change* yourself: only God can. And He does it by replacing your life with the life of His Son. The Christian life is an abiding life—a life that survives only when connected to the Life Source—Jesus Christ. Christianity only works when you are drawing life from Christ Himself every day.

In short, the Christian life is

- about FORMATION, not information.
- about DEPENDENCE, not performance.
- a WALK, not a work.

This kind of relationship with God, however, requires effort. Any relationship does. In our fast-paced culture where we are all about instant gratification, we don't like to be told that something will take time and effort. We all have something called the "flesh" or "self-life" that wants to "pick and choose" and make up our own version of Christianity. We don't like to be told that we will have to let go of things we like, certain relationships we want or have, and things we would rather be doing in order to make this relationship with God work. But that is just the way it is. Luke 9:24 says it well: "For whosoever will save his life [the self-life and all its pursuits and preferences] shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it." It takes time and effort to know God. This is not referencing empty busyness but, rather, *a conscious choice and effort to turn aside from other things in order to get to know Him.*

THE CHANNEL FOR RELATIONSHIP

So, how do we start this relationship? If you're a typical Christian, the obvious "read your Bible and pray more" will probably be your automatic answer. But let's dig through our cliché answers and make sure we get to the root. The Christian life is about abiding: living in Christ and letting Him live in you. While Bible-reading and prayer are key activities in a relationship with God, even they can become empty surface actions if they are not rooted in something deeper.

The "something deeper" we are talking about begins somewhere deeper—in an unseen part of our being: our mind. The mind is the place where thoughts are introduced to us, the doorway where we reject or welcome ideas. The mind is the entryway where opinions come in, and the place where beliefs take up residence and become part of our life. It has been profoundly stated that "what has your mind has your heart, and what has your heart has your life." A deep, life-changing relationship with God begins with our minds. God doesn't change us from the outside in; He works change in us from the inside out. He gets inside us using the hidden place of our minds. And this is where the concept of meditating comes in.



When the word *meditation* is used in our society today, we usually think of Eastern meditation, which involves quieting one's self, emptying the mind, breathing deeply, and so on. Many promote this discipline as a means of de-stressing, finding inner peace, or discovering your "inner goodness." However, meditation is actually something much more practical than this stereotypical picture. Webster's 1828 dictionary defines meditation this way:

MED'ITATE, v.i. [Latin *meditor*.]

1. To dwell on any thing in thought; to contemplate; to study; to turn or revolve any subject in the mind;
2. To intend; to have in contemplation.

The definition as a transitive verb is:

3. To plan by revolving in the mind; to contrive; to intend;
4. To think on; to revolve in the mind.

Think about it. Based on the dictionary definition, you are always meditating! Whether you are subconsciously letting your mind wander or consciously pondering deeply, something is always on your mind. Most of

our time is spent meditating on seemingly “harmless” things: relationships, sports, things we need to buy, etc. It is key to realize that **what you think on is what you will become**. Our meditations can have a positive and negative effect on our lives. For an extreme example, consider an Olympic athlete. He spends countless hours dreaming of his sport. His life is consumed with training and preparing. Day and night he eats, sleeps, and dreams of the event he is training for. His “meditations” have literally defined his life.

So, let’s shift gears here: why meditate on Scripture? For the most part, we as Christians are good at *reading* the Bible. We know a lot of facts and perhaps have even memorized a lot of verses. However, the problem here is that we have a lot of truth in our heads that hasn’t made its way into our hearts. Unless it does so, it cannot become part of our life and behavior. This is why we see little true change in our lives—while we have read and memorized truth—we haven’t allowed the truth to transform our lives!

Now, in contrast to the stereotypical Eastern meditation, the emphasis of Biblical meditation is not the emptying of our minds, but rather filling our minds and hearts with the truth. Biblical meditation is allowing God’s truth to enter and “take up residence” in our thoughts. The Hebrew word for meditate means “to murmur.” Literally, it’s something you speak softly to yourself. It implies intently focusing on something, visualizing it in your mind, imagining what it means. Meditation is different from reading or memorizing God’s Word, because meditating allows you to internalize the truth that you have read or memorized.

It needs to be stated here that simply the *act* of meditating is not where the power lies. If you are not careful, this can become just another empty action. **Meditation becomes a channel for relationship**

as you consciously take time to be with God and to know Him through

His Word! When you spend time with God through meditating on His Word, you are allowing His truth to change the way you think. His thoughts will actually replace your thoughts! Through the process of meditation, we learn to walk in God’s light and allow Him to form His Son in us. As you meditate, the Lord will expose lies you have believed and show you His truth.

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GETTING REALLY PRACTICAL: HOW TO MEDITATE

Where do we start with actually meditating on Scripture? It can be helpful to start by answering the questions: What? When? Where? And how?

What do you meditate on? It's easy to sit down with every intention of meditating but spend the next 20 minutes trying to decide what to meditate on! Select a verse or passage beforehand. Consider taking just one verse and meditating on that for an entire week.

For this course, we have preselected a passage for you. As you will see in the Rise Up Challenge, you will take one or two verses from John 15 each week and meditate on them.

When should you meditate? Take every opportunity you can to meditate throughout the day: when you wake up in the morning, when you're driving to work, when you're brushing your teeth, as you go to sleep at night! However, don't just limit this to a few pockets of time here and there. Make meditating on Scripture a priority! Set a time each day that you can prayerfully reflect and meditate on a specific verse. You might try taking an extended time first thing in the morning, or during your lunch break, or right before going to bed at night.

Lots of people ask if it is better to meditate in little chunks throughout the day or in one large chunk of time all at once. What's the answer? BOTH! It is critical to learn to turn your thoughts to the Lord throughout the day. Think about it: our minds wander all the time. It is so easy to daydream, fantasize, and let empty things consume our thinking. This is why meditating on God's Word throughout the day is such a good thing!

"So," you may ask, "If that's the case, what's the point of meditating for a large chunk of time?" Think about meditation like this: how well do you get to know someone if you greet them in the hallway a few times a day versus if you were to go out to coffee with them for an hour a day? The difference would be huge! Deep relationships take time to develop. There are things God can only share with us if we take an extended period time to hear from Him.

Where do you meditate for an extended length of time? Really, you can do this anywhere! Try selecting a spot that is free from distraction, such as a quiet room or a spot outdoors. If you get sleepy while sitting still, then go for a walk!

How do you meditate? Ok, you have your verse, you've set aside time, and you're in a quiet place. Now what? What do you actually do within this time frame? Here are some ideas:

- As you are thinking about what the verse says, reflect on what the Holy Spirit is saying to you specifically.
- Try repeating the verse a few times, each time emphasizing a different word. What are some key words that stand out to you?
- Paraphrase the verse.
- Picture the verse in your mind. Use your imagination to visualize what it is saying.
- Say the verse in the first person, personalizing it for yourself.
- Pray the Scripture back to God. Pray it for other people.

There's no particular formula for this process. You are to internalize truth and BE WITH GOD. Remember, the goal of meditation should not be to get insights. It's been said before, "It's not about insights; it's about intimacy." Rather than focusing on information *about* God, our focus should be on spending time with God and listening to what He has to say.

GEORGE MUELLER: A TESTIMONY FROM HISTORY

George Mueller was a Christian evangelist who lived in the nineteenth century. He founded orphanages in Bristol, England, caring for more than 100,000 orphans during his lifetime. He was a man of prayer and a man of faith in God. The following words are taken from his book, Autobiography of George Mueller (emphasis added):

I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished.

For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit.

The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words 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 very 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 it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer. When thus I have been for a while making 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 first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is, to obtain food for his inner man. As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man. Now what is the 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 runs through a pipe, but **considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.** When we pray, we speak to God.

How different, when the soul is refreshed and made happy early in the morning, from what it is when, without spiritual preparation, the service, the trials, and the temptations of the day come upon one!

This testimony from George Mueller reveals so well that when we meditate on Scripture, we are eating God's bread—the Bread of Life. Meditation is receiving (eating and digesting) the Word of God and not spitting it out or regurgitating it later, but letting it remain and abide in us. If the Word is allowed to remain, then it gives life to our soul. (Just like physical food can only energize and enliven our body if it remains in us.) Meditating on God's Word is like that—eating and letting God's truth digest within us. We don't necessarily see right away the effects of the food we eat right away, yet we are sustained and energized by that food. So it is also with the Bread of God. John 6 talks about this fact: those who receive God's bread (eat of Him) live because of Him!

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. . . . As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me" (John 6:51, 57).