

MEDITATION as a Means of Study

by Jim Wilson

I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. (Psalm 119:11)

There is a kind of Bible study that goes beyond reading, memorization, group Bible studies, looking up Old Testament references in their context, and doing subject studies. Meditation is more mystical and practical. That may sound like a contradiction.

Let me tell you what meditation is not. It is not looking for some deeper, hidden meaning. It is not looking for a codified arrangement of the text or numerology. And it is not saying that the plain meaning of the text that we got from our previous reading and studying is not the right meaning. We probably got the right meaning, and we can repeat it back. We know the text!

What, then, is this kind of Bible study? Well, it is not our understanding of the text; it is *where* we understand it. Do we understand it in our heads, or do we understand it in our hearts? Most study ends up in head knowledge. In other words, if we were given a lab examination on what we had studied, we might not do as well as we would do in a written exam.

If we study Matthew 5:38-48, we might come up with the right answers on our paper. Would we do as well if we were put into a laboratory with evil people who sued us, hit us, forced miles upon us, asked us for money, and borrowed from us? In addition, they were our enemies and persecuted us. When I go into this kind of a lab, I must have all of this head knowledge transferred to my heart. My actions—planned and unplanned—come from there, not from my head.

Having this knowledge in my heart makes it practical. This is where I want to store all of this good stuff so that when I overflow, good stuff comes out. Here are three teachings from the gospels that describe this practicality, good and bad.

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. (Matt. 12:34-35)

“Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.” ... He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.” (Mark 7:15, 20-23)

A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. (Luke 6:45)

Transferring this cognitive true knowledge to my heart is a mystical event. It is not done by concentration or a hard study. Early in my Christian life, I memorized a lot of Scripture verses. I knew them word for word, with their references. They were in my head, and I could call them up at any time. It did not occur to me, nor to others, that I was not living out these Scriptures. I am not sure how many years it was before I got suspicious, but it was at least three. It was one thing for my brain to overflow and spout Scripture. It was another thing entirely for my heart to overflow. I thought that memorizing Scripture was hiding His word in my heart. It was not—it was hiding His word in my *head*. In other words, I might be able to pass a written test. It was a sure thing that I would not pass the lab test.

I thank God that neither test is given, since we have been saved by grace.

After we have been saved by grace, we are to be careful to do good works. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10). These good works, whether they be the fruit of the Spirit or physical actions and words, are works that come from our hearts. We are in the lab all of the time. Let’s look at a few biblical examples.

He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:12-14)

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. (Phil. 2:14-16)

But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. (Matt. 5:39-42)

Each of these texts has imperatives in it. Look at them again. What do they say? Do you understand them? Are they clear? You may have other questions. If your question are like these—“What does it mean?” “Where do you draw the line?” “You mean I cannot invite my parents?” “How rich?” “Suppose he is wrong!” “Suppose he is evil!”—then you probably understand in your head and certainly do not understand with your heart. To understand with your head, ask this question: “Is it clear?”

To begin to understand with your heart, ask this question of yourself: “True or false?” If you answer, “True!” then do not say “but...” After you say, “True!” praise God with thanksgiving. When you thank God for these commands, you will begin to hide the Word in your heart.

How do you continue? Soak in these Scriptures, muse, meditate on them so that you begin to pray about the lame and the blind, your enemies, and evil people. Confess anything in your heart that is hindering willing heart obedience to the commands. Then begin to anticipate, long for, and pray for an opportunity to obey without conditions.

If you do not understand the previous paragraphs, and you are a Christian, something is very wrong. It may be that you are too comfortable in your evangelical church. You realize that if you

suddenly obeyed these commands from the heart, you would be out of step with your evangelical friends. In other words, you do not want to be godly or holy if it means being different from the rest of the saints.

Meditation does not take study. It takes prayerful, willing submission to the text. That is why and how it can be done all of the time.

This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

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.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
That yields its fruit in its season,
And its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
(Psalm 1:1-3)

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