

MEDITATION

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I have been reading the Bible daily for over 50 years. In that time I have used many Bible reading schemes and read many books of Bible reading notes. Most of these I found helpful and spiritually enriching. But there were times when the best of notes did nothing for me. Times of serious illness or spiritual despondency called for more than the comments of even Ryle or Spurgeon. These were times when I needed to be alone with God. Don't misunderstand me daily notes are great and every Christian should use them, but there are times when nothing seems to touch the soul and the temptation is to pack in reading the Bible altogether. It is for those times that this is written.

The Bible is the word of God and we need to let God speak to us. We need to let our minds soak in the scriptures and to meditate on the words. It is very easy for a Christian to go through his routine of daily prayer and Bible reading and know nothing of the presence of God. The very routine blinds us to the reality of God. This book of selected Bible passages asks nothing more than that you give half an hour each day to reading the scriptures and meditating on them.

There can be no greater advice given to a person than that in verse 10 of psalm 46: 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Stillness is a rare commodity in the life of many Christians. We seem to equate activity with spirituality.

We think that the more we do for the church and the

more meetings we attend then the more godly we must be. Let us be clear, the Bible does not advocate idleness and the church has too many spectators and not enough active workers, but we all need on occasions to be still. As with all things in the Christian life we start with an awareness of the greatness and mercy of God. The reason we need to be still is because we know there is a God who cares enough about us to make himself known to us.

The purpose of stillness or meditation is to know God more. It is truly waiting upon God and expecting God to draw near.

If we believe in the God described in verses 1-9 then inevitably we will want to know not only more about him, but also to know him better. We will not be satisfied with knowledge about God. This is important but it is not enough. We need to know God active in our lives, dominating our thinking and thrilling our souls with the reality of his presence.

Throughout Psalm 46 there is a wonderful sense of the reality of God. He is ever present, and, perhaps more importantly, he is with us. We need, and so we ought to have, this awareness.

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Prayer and meditation are like water and air. They are the basic essentials of Spiritual life and without them everything else will sooner or later become meaningless and insignificant. Prayer recognizes our weakness and dependence upon God. Meditation gives time and priority to knowing this God. God told Joshua (1:8) that if he was to accomplish anything in God's service he must 'not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will prosper and be successful'.

Meditation upon the Word of God is one of the most valuable blessings open to the believer, and it is essential for spiritual growth. Meditation means more than just reading the Bible; it is giving time to the Scriptures, and this means taking time from something else. It is a matter of priorities. Meditation is what Psalm 23 is referring to when it talks about lying down in green pastures. It is the lying down of the soul, chewing over and digesting of the green pastures. Without this you can stand in the most lush spiritual pastures and be spiritually undernourished. Therefore this is not optional, or to be done when we feel like it, but a daily obligation for all Christians. The command Joshua received to meditate day and night is applicable to us all because this is set before us over and over again in Scripture (Ps. 48:9; 119: 15; 143:5).

The provisions of God to meet our spiritual needs are so rich that is amazing the Christians ever get into a state of spiritual barrenness. Why is it that there is such a thing

as a weak Christian? The answer is in the words 'lie down'. God provides the green pastures, but it is our duty and privilege to feed on it, and thus benefit from it. Psalm 63:5-6 help us to understand what it means to lie down in the green pastures. 'My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.' When will this spiritual feast be experienced? The next verse tells us, when I think and meditate on you.

Lying down means meditating, thinking, giving time to the things of God. Meditation is the lying down of the soul, the chewing over and digesting of the green pastures. Whenever you see a field of sheep, you can almost guarantee what they will be doing. They will be heads down, all nibbling away at the green grass. They have more sense than some Christians. They do not waste time debating whether or not this grass tastes better than the grass they had last week. The food is there for them, so they get on and enjoy it. The more we eat and the more time we give to thinking and meditating on the things of God, the more we will find' our souls built up and strengthened. For instance, the more you think and ponder on God's love for you, the more fervent will grow your love for him. The infinite obligations we see in the gospel lay us under an infinite debt of gratitude: we realize how much we owe God. We feel we cannot love him as we ought, we feel we cannot praise him as we ought, but we do praise him, and the more we praise, the more we love him. This is lying down and feeding on the green pastures. It is giving time to God, not rushing our devotions, but pondering on the glories of the Lord. Then divine love and holy satisfaction fill our hearts, enabling

us to know something of what David knew in Psalm 23.

Meditation is the eating and digesting of the green pasture. Without this you can stand in the most lush spiritual pastures and be weak and pathetic. You can have all the translations of the Bible on your shelf; you can sit each week under faithful, powerful, biblical preaching; you can be in a church where there is warm fellowship, but you will not grow spiritually unless you lie down and feed on what the Lord is setting before you.

Have Christians forgotten how to meditate? Are we so busy that our devotional life gets so rushed that it becomes meaningless? Is it perhaps with many Christians their whole devotional life takes place within the four walls of their place of worship, and outside of church they never pray and never open the Bible? The weakness of the Christian church today is due essentially to the weakness of the individual Christians who make up the church, and the weakness of the believers has got to be due to the fact that we do not make the most of the green pastures our Shepherd provides for us.

Meditation means giving time, and giving time means taking it from somewhere else. There is a desperate need for us all to re-assess our priorities. The writer to the Hebrews rebukes his readers because they were slow to learn (Hebrews 5:11). They had been Christians for several years and by this time should have been teaching others, but this was not possible because they were still spiritual infants. Solid food was available to

them, but instead they fed on milk. The result was a stunted spiritual growth. Verse 14 goes on to say, 'solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.' 'Constant use' and 'train themselves' imply that time and discipline and effort were given to the study of the Word of God.

Is your soul hungry? Is there a leanness and dryness in your spiritual life? Then the answer is to feed on the green pastures. The Shepherd provides the food-so eat, digest, ponder and enjoy the rich and varied diet the Lord provides for you. Lie down and take time to soak up the goodness of God.

Meditation in God's law day and night is one of the outstanding marks of the man whom Psalm 1 calls 'blessed'. And though it is a command and of obvious spiritual benefit, how many of us actually do it? Our usual excuse is that we are too busy. Our lives are so crowded with duties and responsibilities that we have no time for quiet meditation and study of God's Word. We satisfy ourselves with reading a daily Bible portion. This is good but it is not enough and meditation is far more than that. It is to read, pray, think, consider and ponder. Meditation is vital to the well-being of our souls, so we can be sure that. God never calls us to a lifestyle that crowds out the spiritual essentials. Christ's yoke is easy and his burden is light, so if our burden is too heavy then it is self-imposed. The call of God is for us to set our affections on things above. When we plead that we are too busy to meditate we are simply not facing up to the biblical teaching that 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' Is it not true that we can usually find time for the things we enjoy? The psalmist could say, 'Oh, how I

love your law! I meditate on it all day long' (Ps. 119:97). To him meditation was a joy; so he found time for it.

There is no doubt that for many Christians life is very busy; they have their job, their families and their church responsibilities; but Matthew Henry, commenting on Joshua said, 'If ever any man's business might have excused him from meditation, and other acts of devotion, one would think Joshua's might at this time; it was a great trust that was lodged in his hands; the care of it was enough to fill him, if he had ten souls, and yet he must find time and thoughts for meditation. Whatever affairs of this world we have to mind, we must not neglect the one thing that is needful. '

Meditation is not an end in itself. It should and must lead to obedience. It is easy to persuade ourselves that we want to live our lives in a way that pleases God, but how honest is this? If we really want to be obedient Christians then we must set ourselves to knowing what God's will is. That means knowing the Scriptures, because ignorance of God's ways makes it impossible to do the things that please him. One of God's chief complaints against Israel was:

I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me (Isa. 1:2).

The next verse tells us why this rebellion took place: The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.

Ignorance was the product of lack of understanding, and for a child of God this is always the result of not using the

capacity God has given us all to know his will and purposes.

Christians today seem to be obsessed with wanting blessings. But blessing, as Joshua is reminded, is the fruit of obedience. We can do what we like and say what we like, but until we give time to meditating on the things of God, and then obey what we see in the Book, we shall never know real blessing. This was the challenge to Joshua and it is always the same challenge that Christians have to face in every generation.