

# MEDITATION

Meditation - Prayerful rumination upon God, his Word, and his world.

*On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate (Psalm 145:5).*

Many of us worry that “meditation” has a ring of the occult or of Eastern religions. Yet the Bible is filled with references to God’s people meditating on his word, pondering Jesus or “higher things,” reflecting on the beauty of creation. Unlike Eastern meditation, in which participants seek to empty themselves of attachment, in Christian meditation we seek to fill ourselves with God, to form a more complete attachment to Christ. “Christian meditation involves, not emptiness, but fullness,” writes author Joyce Huggett. “It means being attentive to God.”

Meditation is trying to focus on God with the aim of letting God direct our thoughts. Like so many of the disciplines, it is ultimately about seeking God’s voice. And while meditation is closely linked with prayer and study, it focuses more on listening than on talking, is more devotional than analytical. In meditation, our emotions and our imaginations are equally engaged as our minds.

Just as Enoch, Moses, the prophets, and countless others walked and talked with God, so to we seek to listen for God — whether in the slow savoring of God’s word, in silent meditation, or in contemplation of creation or events in the world around us.

Meditation is countercultural for many of us who tend to want to learn and try and read as quickly as we can, so we can get to the next item on our to-do list. Reading slowly, pondering a flower, thinking about God with no set agenda — these are often difficult tasks for us, which shows just how essential they are for our formation.

\*These devotionals were taken from *A Year with God: Living Out the Spiritual Disciplines*, edited by Richard Foster and Julia Roller, Harper Collins Publisher, 2009. Used with permission.

DAY 1 / MARCH 17

# MEDITATING ON SCRIPTURE

*Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things (2 Timothy 2:7).*

In the days ahead, we will seek to meditate on a specific passage of Scripture — ponder it, think it over, and muse on it until it becomes part of us. Choose a very short passage, perhaps just a sentence in length. Any of these would work beautifully: one of Jesus’ “I am” statements from the Gospel of John, a proverb, the first line or stanza of one of the psalms, or a teaching from a Letter.

Aim to enter the passage as an active participant, imagining yourself hearing Jesus say the words, experiencing the sights, sounds, and smells of that day. “Our task is not so much to study the passage as to be initiated into the reality of which the passage speaks,” writes Richard Foster. Remember that Christ assures us that he is still here with us, to teach and instruct us. Allow him to do this very thing with you. You may want to spend several days on the same passage. Or perhaps you would like to meditate on several different passages.

DAY 2 / MARCH 18

## MEDITATE ON IT DAY & NIGHT

*Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful (Joshua 1:7-8).*

God's words to Joshua at the beginning of Joshua's story suggests that effective leadership calls for concentrated meditation and musing on the law of God. This word was not to "depart" from his "mouth," for mortals to not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3). Like Joshua, we are to talk about the word, think about the word, and obey the word (Psalm 1:2-3). In a sense, every word from the Lord is also a call from the Lord. We read every verse of Scripture lovingly and attentively, because every verse is a potential summons from God. Perhaps when we read, we ought not to ask ourselves, "What do these words mean?" but "What is God summoning me to do through these words?"

Be guided by these words from Liliias Trotter as you return to your meditation today: "You must look up with the vision of the heart to the Person of Christ, and listen for the impress of His will on your will through His words, that is, through the Book of the Gospel that was written to be the means of communication with the souls of His people. As you become familiar with them He will by His Spirit bring them to your memory as you need them, to be your defence in the dangers of the way, even as David said in the Psalms: 'Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee'" (Psalm 119:11, KJV). (*The Way of the Sevenfold Secret*, page 89).

## KNOWING JESUS' VOICE

*The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”*

*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd (John 10:2-5, 14-16).*

John's Gospel cites the phrase "I am" together with seven sets of names to record metaphors for Christ. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 48), "the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5), "the gate" (10:7, 9), "the good Shepherd" (10:11, 14), "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6), and "the vine" (15:1,5).

All these pictures are expanded in ways that teach us more thoroughly about the triune grace that rescues, restores, establishes, nourishes, and indwells, enlightens, guides, protects, saves, and raises us. Each of these statements provide ample ground for meditation.

Jesus' description of himself as the shepherd also brings comfort and assurance to those of us struggling to discern his voice in our contemplative prayer. All those who are his sheep know his voice. He knows us and we know him. If we trust him to shepherd our lives, we will not follow a stranger. Today, meditate on one of Jesus' "I am" statements.

*Lord, as I meditate on your word, I get concerned that I will not be able to recognize or discern your voice. Please help to make the way clear as I work to focus on you, my master, my shepherd. In your name I pray. Amen.*

DAY 4 / MARCH 20

## SETTING OUR MINDS ON GOD

*So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (Colossians 3:1-2).*

In the days ahead, we will try to set our minds of the things that are above, practicing clearing out from our minds the noise of daily life and focusing on hearing God's voice. Try to find a place that is as quiet and free of distractions as possible. Choose a comfortable position. Many prefer sitting on the floor or in a chair with feet flat on the ground. The idea is to be in a position comfortable enough that it requires no thought. You can close your eyes, or keep them open and focused on a religious item, perhaps a cross, or a tree or some other image from nature.

You might want to pick a word or phrase to keep your mind focused on God if you find yourself distracted by thoughts about work, household tasks, family, or a noise outside. "Jesus" or "Abba" is a good word to use. At first, you may find that your mind shoots out all kind of information at you, like a computer shutting down. Just try to relax as you work through this stage; keep repeating your word.

Spiritual writer Madame Guyon writes: "Be assured that as your soul becomes more accustomed to withdrawing to inward things, this process will become easier. There are two reasons that you will find it easier each time to bring your mind under the subjection of the Lord. One is that the mind, after much practice, will form a new habit of turning deep within. The second is that you have a gracious Lord!" (*Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*, page 305).

If you have not tried meditative prayer before, then start with five minutes or less. You can gradually work up to longer. You may find that God leads you to practical insights about your family or your life or events that have happened in your past or perhaps direct insights about God, his nature, and your relationship to him. The experience of meditative prayer is different for everyone. Many find it extremely helpful to keep a journal detailing their experiences and insights.

DAY 5 / MARCH 21

# THE MEDITATION OF MY HEART

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer (Psalm 19:14).*

This familiar verse invites God scrutiny and correction (see Psalm 139:23-24). The word translated “meditation” here would be better rendered “whisperings” or “murmurings.” Welcoming God’s knowing and shaping of our inner talk deepens our vulnerability. It is a huge step in our formation.

Joyce Huggett writes, “We meditate to give God’s words the opportunity to penetrate not just our minds, but our emotions — the places where we hurt — and our will — the place where we make choices and decisions. We meditate to encounter the Living Word, Jesus himself. We meditate so that every part of our being, our thoughts and our affections and our ambitions, are turned to face and honour and glorify him. Yet another reason for learning to meditate is so that we may become conversant with the will of God.” (*Learning the Language of Prayer*, page 11)

Use this quote as inspiration for your meditation today. Or you may wish to begin with this prayer.

*Father God, today I come to you in meditative prayer. I asked that you open my heart to whatever you want to show me. Guide my meditations, my inner whispers, in the way that is acceptable and pleasing to you. I want so much for you to shape my inner being, yet I don’t often seem to succeed at setting aside the time for you to do this work. Help me to be consistent in my meditations over the coming days, that I may come to you eagerly to learn, to be changed. In your name I pray. Amen.*

DAY 6 / MARCH 22

## RESTING & REFLECTING

*On the first day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. It is a day for you to blow the trumpets (Numbers 29:1).*

Built into the religious calendar of the Israelites was a day to rest and blow the trumpets. Taking time to rest is important in the spiritual life. Rest is not merely the state of doing no work. Rest is a time for refreshment. It may be a time to reflect on the past or plan for the future.

It is also a time for worshipping God. The Sabbath is an intentional time set apart for worship. Our souls receive truth peace and strength when we worship God. Rest is a Spiritual Discipline that requires and also restores our trust in God. Our trust grows as we see how God fulfills our needs even when we are working. We realize we don't need to earn God's provision. Rest helps us reside in the unconditional, unfailing, and forgiving love of God.

Meditation is a wonderful way to rest in God. Today think of your meditative prayer time as resting in God, seeking the refreshment only God can give. Relax, close your eyes, even allow yourself to fall asleep if that is what your body wants. When you awake, thank God for the gift of rest.

DAY 7 / MARCH 23

## REFLECTING ON JESUS

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also “was faithful in all God’s house.” Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope (Hebrews 3:1-6).*

Spiritual existence is not isolated existence. The work of Jesus reconciles believers to God, but also forms them into a new community, a “house” far greater than was possible through the law of Moses. Believers are urged to “consider... Jesus.”

The Greek word for “consider” means to think about in a careful and reflective manner. The relation of Jesus to his “house” is different from the relation of Moses to his “house.” Jesus is the Son and thus the true heir, whereas Moses was a servant. Moses “had” a house, that is, the law all possessed believers; Christ and believers “are” a house, a new community of Sanctifier and sanctified (2:11), one with the Lord and with each other.

Spend some time today meditating on this passage about Jesus. Begin with this prayer for understanding, by Nicholas Ridley:

*O heavenly father, the author and fountain of all truth, the bottomless sea of all understanding: Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts, and lighten our understandings with the beam of your heavenly grace. We ask this, O merciful Father, for the sake of your dear Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (A Year with God, 184)*