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Engaging in “muchness” and “many-ness” is a disease that affects Christians with particular virulence. Although our constant busyness makes us useful on the outside, our lives may be hollow and empty from having little of substance inside. Eventually, exhausted, we collapse. Psychiatrist Carl Jung once said: “Hurry is not *of* the Devil; it *is* the Devil.”¹ There is much truth in the statement.

Slowing down to meditate and think about God is neither easy nor natural for many of us. The messenger of the Lord once warned: “One reason that there is not more sincere piety and religious fervor, is because the mind is occupied with unimportant things and there is no time to meditate, search the Scriptures, or pray.”²

But the very notion of meditation makes many Christians nervous: Is it truly biblical? Isn’t meditation associated with mystical practices?

In the Bible we find familiar char-

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acters who meditated. Isaac was found early in the morning meditating in the fields (Gen. 24:63); David meditated regularly (Ps. 19:14); Mary, the mother of Jesus, pondered in her heart what was said about Jesus (Luke 2:19); Timothy is told to meditate on the words of his mentor, the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 4:15). God told Joshua that the key to victory in his new leadership post was meditation upon God’s law day and night (Joshua 1:8).

Often the psalms admonish the reader to meditate, the psalmist speaking from experience: “My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord” (Ps. 104:34, KJV). Psalm 119 reveals the author’s conviction upon meditation: “I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways” (vs. 15, KJV); “My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes” (vs. 48, KJV); “Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely

with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts” (vs. 78, KJV); “Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word” (vs. 148, KJV).

While an increasing number of busy and sophisticated people have found the benefits of meditation—such as a sense of well-being—that is not what drives a Christian to meditate. For the Christian, meditation is reflection upon God’s Word.

Note the persistence on that point by Ellen White: “Merely to hear or to read the word is not enough. He who desires to be profited by the Scriptures must meditate upon the truth that has been presented to him.”³ Christian meditation, in its truest sense, is the experience in between Bible study and prayer—after reading (or hearing) what God says, and before responding to Him in prayer. It is like taking the Word just read for a walk, allowing it to seep through the mind sufficiently to prompt meaningful conversations with the Almighty. We must meditate on the Word to understand better the God behind the words.

King David said: “The meditation of my heart shall be of understanding” (Ps. 49:3, KJV). So, followers of God meditate to understand. Ellen White added, “*It is what we meditate upon that will give tone and strength to our spiritual nature.*”⁴

Even though any mediation upon

the Word would yield profit, I have found three specific areas the Bible itself recommends we reflect upon with care and intentionality:

1. Meditate on the expressed commandments of God (Ps. 1:2; 119:23, 48, 78, 97; Joshua 1:8). The legendary missionary-humanitarian David Livingstone memorized Psalm 119 at the age of nine. One wonders how much having stored such word in his mind influenced such an extraordinary life. This very psalm, the longest in Scripture, encourages frequent meditation on God’s commandments. “O how love I thy law!” said David, “it is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97, KJV); “I will meditate in thy precepts” (vs. 15, KJV); “thy servant did meditate in thy statutes” (vs. 23, KJV).

Why meditate on God’s laws or statutes? Doesn’t focus on the law smack of legalism? We must remember that the people of the Lord will be distinguished in the last days for having the faith of Jesus and for keeping the commandments of God (Rev. 14:12). God’s law is the reflection of His character or His glory (Ex. 33:18-34:7). The more we meditate on His character the more like Him we’ll become.

This was Jesus’ whole point in His Sermon on the Mount. If we want to be like our Father in heaven, we must assimilate into our lives the *spirit* of the law and not merely its

letter. So, though the scribes understood the letter of the law to say, for instance, not to kill, meditation upon such law would have led them to understand that any ill-feeling, any animosity toward another breaks the spirit of God’s intent (Matt. 5:21-25, 44-48). This is achieved when one meditates on what is read.

2. Meditate on the love of Christ (Eph. 3:14-19). Ellen White becomes rapturous with the prospect: “Christ’s sacrifice for fallen man has no parallel. It is the most exalted, sacred theme on which we can meditate. Every heart that is enlightened by the grace of God is constrained to bow with inexpressible gratitude and adoration before the Redeemer for His infinite sacrifice.” In spite of her long illness while writing this in Australia, Ellen White exclaimed, “I love to meditate upon the love of Jesus.”⁵ No wonder she advised to spend an hour each day in contemplation of His life.⁶

I remember one morning I felt very distant from God, with renewed evidence of personal sinfulness. I was depressed because I felt victory in my life was elusive. But as I meditated on Psalm 51, David’s prayer for forgiveness after his great sin with Bathsheba, it took several re-readings to discover something all too obvious: David insisted on the greatness of his heavenly Father’s mercy

rather than the greatness of his sin. “Have mercy upon me, O God, *according to thy* lovingkindness: *according unto the multitude of thy* tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (vs. 1, KJV, italics supplied).

It is the love of Christ that will constrain us (2 Cor. 5:14). Only understanding some of the breadth and depth of His love will make us want to die to self and yield to Him who gave up all for us. Without such meditation, our lives remain unchanged.

“We should meditate,” Ellen White writes, “upon the Scriptures. . . .The infinite mercy and love of Jesus, the sacrifice made in our behalf, call for most serious and solemn reflection. We should dwell upon the character of our dear Redeemer and Intercessor. . . .We should meditate upon the mission of Him who came to save His people from their sins. By constantly contemplating heavenly themes, our faith and love will grow stronger.”⁷

3. Meditate on God’s ways (Ps. 77:12; 143:5). The psalmist says he reflects on God’s creation, on how He does things. Jonathan Edwards, the key figure in the First Great Awakening of the 18th century, was accustomed to the contemplation of God’s works for his meditation. It is reflection on the way God works that leads us to an increased understanding of His

character and of His will for our lives.

Years ago, I decided to *listen* to the Bible on cassette for a few minutes each day. It took only three months to listen to the whole Bible, and then I'd begin again, and so on. I did this for a number of years. The first few times I took up this habit, while taking the sweeping view of God's activity among the children of Israel as recorded from the time of Numbers through that of Ezra and Nehemiah, lights came on all over my mind. I saw how God worked. I understood His insistence on faithfulness. I grasped why He longs for us to be obedient. The immense sacrifice God was making to lead His wayward children came to me with full force. Understanding His ways led me to a much greater confidence in His words. Many times hence, when faced with difficult decisions or asked to counsel others facing them, I was able to review "This is how God usually works" and allow light to give clarity to the issues at hand.

I once heard prolific author and theologian John Piper tell the story of Albert Einstein and his disappointment with Christian leadership's lack of substance. Einstein had come to know, better than most, the

majesty of God in the heavens. His friend, physicist Karl Meissner, articulated an explanation for Einstein's frustration with Christian preachers: "He must have looked at what preachers said about God and thought that [that was] blasphemy. He had seen much more majesty than they had imagined. They [the preachers] were just not talking about the real thing."⁸

If we want to know God, He reveals Himself through His Word. Only by meditating upon His Word can we come to realize how truly real He is to His children.

In my next column, I will share the how and the why of mediation upon the Word. I hope you can join me then.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Morton T. Kelsey, *The Other Side of Silence: A Guide to Christian Meditation* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 83.

² *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 125.

³ *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 59, 60.

⁴ *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 228, italics supplied.

⁵ *In Heavenly Places*, pp. 14, 121.

⁶ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

⁷ *Review and Herald* (June 12, 1888).

⁸ Quoted by John Piper, "Training the Next Generation of Evangelical Pastors and Missionaries," paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society conference in Orlando, November 19-21, 1998.

