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THE WORD
UPON MY
HEART-II

In the last issue, my column focused on the value and object—the “what”—of Christian meditation. Christians meditate on various aspects of the Word of God. In this article, the focus will be on the “when” and the “how.” Of all the basic questions to consider on this subject, the “when” and the “how” might be the easiest to understand but perhaps the hardest to practice.

When I was a young pastor, I once asked Leslie Hardinge, the former and highly esteemed theology professor of a previous generation, how he went about studying the Word of God. I had considered his insights into Scripture refreshing, his thoughts profound and yet simple about the character of God. His reply stayed with me to this day; he simply said: “Little and often.”

To cover less ground but do so several times each day is better than studying a huge amount occasionally. Memorizing or focusing on a verse or passage in the morning, going about one’s business having

stored it in the heart, then coming back to it for a few minutes at noon, and yet again before bed, forces the mind to grapple with the intent of God’s words.

This concept has a higher source: “There is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the Bible through and yet fail to see its beauty or to comprehend its deep and hidden meaning. One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained. Keep your Bible with you. As you have opportunity, read it; fix the texts in your memory. Even while you are walking the streets you may read a passage and meditate upon it, thus fixing it in mind.”¹

No wonder Joshua was urged to meditate on God’s word “day and night” (Joshua 1:8, KJV), and the first promise in Psalms is “Blessed is the man . . . [whose] delight is in the

law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Ps. 1:1, 2, KJV)! There is evidence that suggests we keep thinking through the night, while we sleep, what we pondered during the day.

This may have become obvious by now: the reason we meditate on God’s Word is to appropriate God’s character: “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18, KJV).

When Jesus encountered Saul on the road to Damascus, His purpose was to induce meditation upon His wayward Israelite to help him recog-

nize that he was pursuing the wrong foe. He blinded him for three days and nights to give him a chance to ponder what he was doing.

It turned out that Saul saw more while in darkness than when, while sighted, he was so busy persecuting God’s people. Insights into the purposes of God became so much clearer to him than when he sought advanced teaching from the apostles in Jerusalem. They had nothing new to offer him. He changed from Saul, the Pharisee who read and studied Scripture that resulted in religious elitism, to Paul, the apostle who pondered Scripture, leading him to see Jesus’ humility as the ultimate self-emptying experience.



Once I was meditating on the story of the feeding of the 5,000. At the end of the day, after thousands were fed, after Christ walked on water and enabled Peter to do the same, the disciples had still not grasped the power of the miracle of the loaves. Why? Had they been obedient to Him perhaps their hearts would not have become hardened in spite of witnessing such great miracles. But obedient to what? To Christ's command: "You give them to eat" (vs. 37, NKJV).

Christ wished to empower John's disciples as well as His own to act on God's word alone. Had they not cast out demons and healed the sick just days before? If the disciples had acted on Jesus' word, they would have saved Him great heartache and spared others the ensuing confusion. They would have seen that God was even able to provide for multitudes through them, and that God, through His church, would accomplish much.

I wondered how often I do not pick up on subtle commands of Jesus that, if obeyed, would make such difference to my family and those around me for ministry. How much more does God want to use us than we often realize? How much more is Jesus willing to trust me than I am willing to obey Him?

To Amos, the Spirit of God said, "Behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind and declares to

man what are His thoughts" (Amos 4:13, NASB). But the Lord God does not merely want us to be informed of His plans. What God wants to accomplish through our meditation of His Word is to take us from the basic stage of communication with Him, through that of communion and eventual union with the Almighty. Anything less falls short of His glory. "What is spiritual arrogance to the extreme?" asks Blackaby. "It is dutifully rushing in and out of the presence of holy God, while carving out plenty of time for anything else that amuses or entertains us."² Only the discipline of meditation upon His Word will cause inner, lasting transformation.

There is always a risk in being open to meditation, even if well-intentioned and well-directed Christian meditation. Some writers and Christian thinkers today have toyed with mystical elements of meditation that subtly veer the sincere Christian from God's path. But the mere risk should not discourage us from God's desire to delve deeply into His very self.

Frank Laubach was considered "the apostle to the illiterate" in the 1930s and 1940s. Selfless, with a generous spirit, he spent many hours every week helping adults in Philadelphia to read. A Christian, he came to decide that his life with Christ could be so much more if he chose to set his mind on Christ. Disci-

plined, he made a conscious choice to think on Him every waking hour of the day. He kept a diary in the form of letters to his father. And he noticed a change in his life.

"April 18, 1930. I have tasted a thrill in fellowship with God which has made anything discordant with God disgusting. May 24, 1930. This concentration upon God is strenuous but everything else has ceased to be so. I think more clearly, I forget less frequently. Things which I did with a strain before, I now do easily and with no effort whatever. I worry about nothing, I lose no sleep. . . . Nothing can go wrong excepting one thing. That is that God may slip from my mind. . . . June 1, 1930. The effort [of fixing my mind on Christ] does something to my mind which every mind needs to have done to it. . . . God does work a change. . . . Last Monday . . . I remember how as I looked at people with a love God gave, they looked back and acted as though they wanted to go with me. I felt then that for a day I saw a little of that marvelous pull that Jesus had as He walked along the road day after day 'God-intoxicated' and radiant with the endless communion of His soul with God. Thou art no longer a stranger, God! . . . Thou art all the way inside with me—here . . . I mean to struggle tonight and tomorrow as

never before, not once to dismiss Thee. For when I lose Thee for an hour I lose. The thing Thou wouldst do can only be done when Thou hast full sway all the time."³

As we ponder what God said, the Holy Spirit engages our minds in a similar fashion as what He did with His prophets of old. We enter into His audience to hear a personal word from the King rather than an impersonal pronouncement by a monarch to whom we could hardly relate. We're often surprised at His longing that we remain before Him to hold conversation with us, so great a group of sinners. He seeks communion. And as we part from His presence represented by that favorite chair in the den at 5:00 a.m., or by the tree in the forest near our home, we carry with us His words that, when replayed in our minds later in the day, will slowly and surely lead us to more than communion with the Almighty. It will bring union with God's purposes, wishes, and hopes.

REFERENCES

- ¹ *In Heavenly Places*, p. 138.
- ² Henry Blackaby, *Hearing God's Voice* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publ., 2002), p. 131.
- ³ Frank Laubach, *Practicing His Presence* (Jacksonville: Christian Books, 1976), pp. 13-18.

