

# Rest for the Distracted

## Introduction

*You can't rest if you're distracted.*

*\* When you're focused on the world, drown out the world with the truth of Scripture through meditation.*

Let's imagine...it's Sunday afternoon. You've finally made it home from church and had lunch. You sit down in your favorite chair to rest, and maybe get a Sunday afternoon nap. Just as you start to relax, the phone rings. You jump up to answer it, only to find out it's a wrong number. While you're up, you realize that you never did respond to an important email you received yesterday, so you decide to do that. While you're on the internet, you decide to check Facebook to see if there's an update about a friend who's dealing with a tough situation. There's not, but you start to scrolling just to see what else is going on with your friends and family. After a while you realize that you've been on longer than you intended, so you put your phone and head back to your chair. On the way you see the basket of laundry that you folded but didn't get put away. That should only take a few minutes, so you pick up the basket and get to work. As you take the empty basket back to the laundry room, you notice something else that needs to be done...and you never do get back to your chair to rest.

Now, maybe your Sunday afternoons don't go that way, but can you relate to the idea of not being able to rest because of so many distractions?

*What are some things that distract you from being able to rest?*

Unfortunately, there are so many things in the world that can distract us. We may be distracted by our to-do list, our family, by entertainment such as TV and Facebook, or just by the noise and the busyness of the world. These things can distract, not just from physical rest, but also from spiritual rest. We all have things that demand our time and attention. That's not bad, but often we allow those things to keep us from spending time with Christ.

## Choosing the Good Portion

*Can you think of an example from Scripture about someone who was too distracted to spend time with Jesus?*

My mind immediately went to the story of Mary and Martha. Let's read that from Luke 10:38-42.

No as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lords' feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Here we see two sisters who had very different responses to the coming of Jesus.

*How did Martha respond to Jesus' visit?*

Martha was so busy serving that she failed to actually spend time with her visitor. We read that this was her house, so it's understandable that she felt the need to be a good hostess. We as women can relate to that. However, she was so distracted by serving that she missed the opportunity to sit with and learn from Jesus.

*How did Mary respond to Jesus' visit?*

Mary realized what an amazing opportunity she had, so she chose to ignore the distractions and just be with Christ. When Martha complained that Mary wasn't helping, Jesus rebuked her. First, He says that one thing is necessary, which is to spend time with Him. The housework, the to-do list, the distractions will always be there. While those things seem extremely important at the time, most of them can wait until after we've spent our necessary time with Christ.

Jesus also says that "Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Mary had her priorities in order. She knew that time with Jesus was most important, and she made a wise choice. Jesus praised her for that.

What does that look like for us, though? Obviously, we can't have Jesus physically come to our homes and talk to us. How can we put aside the distractions and spend time with Christ? Well, obviously part of it is what we talked about last time...spending time with Jesus through reading our Bibles. It's important to set time aside each day to search the Bible and see what each passage tells us about who Jesus is and what He's done for us.

However, we can't stop there. Just reading the Bible isn't enough. We have to actually absorb what we're reading, allowing it to sink into our hearts and change us from the inside out. There also may be times when we really don't have much time to spend studying the Bible, because some distractions can't be ignored. We may have appointments or work or children to teach and care for. How can we spend time with Jesus in those moments? This is where meditation comes in.

## **A Biblical Understanding of Meditation**

*What comes to mind when you hear the word "meditation"?*

Many people misunderstand the idea meditation, or even reject it as something pertaining to false religions. The common idea of meditation is of emptying your mind and entering a meditative state. That's not what we mean when we talk about it in a Christian context. Christian meditation involves filling your mind with thoughts of God and His truth, as found in Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Donald Whitney defines meditation as "deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer."<sup>2</sup> So we don't empty our minds; we actually fill them with thoughts of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Whitney, Donald. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 47.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Meditation is a biblical concept, although it's one that's sadly neglected in modern Christianity. We are commanded many times in Scripture to meditate:

- Joshua 1:8
  - *What do you notice about meditation from this verse?*
    - We are to meditate “day and night.” This doesn't just mean have a morning devotion and an evening devotion. This phrase means we are to meditate all throughout the day and night. Thoughts of God and Scripture should be in our minds all day long.
    - Those who meditate will be prosperous and successful. This doesn't mean success as the world defines it. It doesn't mean we'll be rich or have a lot of material possession or be successful in our jobs. This verse promises success according to God's standard.
    - Donald Whitney writes, “True success is promised to those who meditate on God's Word, who think deeply on Scripture, not just at one time each day, but at moments throughout the day and night. They meditate so much that Scripture saturates their conversation. The fruit of their meditation is action. They do what they find written in God's Word and as a result God prospers their way and grants success to them.”<sup>3</sup>
- Psalm 1:1-3
  - *What do you notice about meditation from these verses?*
    - This person delights in the law of the Lord. We think about those things that we like, that make us happy. So, when we delight in God's Word, it's not hard to think about it day and night.
    - A couple of years ago I wrote a blog post, titled “The Beauty of God's Word.” We desire and delight in things that we find beautiful. Many people, even Christians, don't see the Bible as beautiful, but David recognized the beauty in God's Word. If we can view the Bible as David described it in Psalm 19:7-11, then maybe we'll come to delight in it as well. (Refer to “Beauty of God's Word handout) David calls the Bible:
      - 1) Perfect
      - 2) Trustworthy
      - 3) Right
      - 4) Radiant
      - 5) Pure
      - 6) Eternal
      - 7) Reliable
      - 8) Righteous
      - 9) Desirable
    - The imagery we see here is one of a tree planted by the water. We all know what happens to a plant that doesn't receive enough water. We have plants on our porch, and if don't water them daily, they start to droop, and it wouldn't take long for them wither and die. But this tree has a constant supply of water from which is draws nutrition. In the same way, as we meditate constantly on the things of

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<sup>3</sup>ibid., 48.

God, we'll receive constant feeding and nourishing from that, which can't help but bear good fruit in our lives.

- Psalm 119:98-99
  - *What do you notice about meditation from these verses?*
    - The result of mediation is not just success and prospering, as seen from previous verses. Those who meditate on God's Word will also gain wisdom and understanding.
    - As we meditate on God's Word it transforms us from the inside out, as we see in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." As we dwell on the things of God, as we grow in His truth, it makes us more discerning of the lies that we encounter. We also become more aware of God's will, and we're able to recognize that which is good, acceptable, and perfect in His sight. We begin to think as He thinks and value what He values.
- Philippians 4:8
  - *This verse doesn't mention meditation specifically, but how does it relate to our discussion?*
    - We see here the kinds of things that we are supposed to think about, or meditate on.
    - *When you read these descriptions, does it call to mind anything we've already talked about?*
      - This sounds an awful lot like David's description of God's Word, doesn't it? I can't prove it, but I wonder if Paul had Psalm 19 in mind when he wrote this. That's not to say that there aren't things outside Scripture that might be true, pure, lovely, etc. But the Bible is the epitome of those virtues, it's one thing that all of these virtues describe, so it's a good place to start when meditating.

## A Practical Look at Meditation

We've laid a biblical foundation for meditation, looking at the importance and benefits of it. Now we're going to take a practical look at meditation. This is the "how-to" portion of our study. Before we start talking about what meditation should look like or how we do it, I do want to point out that putting aside our distractions to spend time in meditation can be a challenge.

*Why do you think it's so challenging to meditate on God's Word?*

According to Donald Whitney, a major challenge we face is the sheer amount of information that we encounter. In his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Whitney, in commenting on Psalm 119, says the following:

We experience a flash flood of information that the psalmist could never have imagined. Combine this with some of our additional modern responsibilities and the result is a mental distraction and dissipation that choke our absorption of Scripture...We've reached a point where the average weekday edition of the New York Times contains more information than Jonathan Edwards would have encountered in his entire eighteenth-century lifetime...Despite his inconveniences, his mind, like the psalmist's was not as distracted by instant world news,

television and radio, portable and car telephones, personal stereos, rapid transportation, junk mail, and so on. Because of these things, it's harder for us today to concentrate our thoughts, especially on God and Scripture, than it ever has been.<sup>4</sup>

*Do you agree with Whitney? Do you think that we have so many more things to distract us than the Psalmist or Jonathan Edwards, for example, that it's harder for us to concentrate our thoughts on God?*

I think Whitney is exactly right. He wrote that statement in 1991, so the amount of information has only increased since then. The point is, we have to train our minds to be able to concentrate and meditate. It may be hard, because I believe that people today have extremely short attention spans and we are easily distracted. It's hard to focus on any one thing for long. But, the benefits of meditation are worth the effort.

That being said, how do we meditate on God and His Word? Let's look at a few ideas:

1. Spend regular time in the Word. That may seem obvious, but if you're not spending regular time in the Bible, it may be hard to think of something to meditate on. I found this out the hard way. Several weeks ago, I was going through a situation with another family. Something happened, and I didn't handle it very well. I was pretty upset about the situation, and I just couldn't stop thinking about it. I was distracted by it. I actually crying in the shower one day, pleading with God to give me something to meditate on that would take my mind off of what happened. Unfortunately, I hadn't been reading the Bible consistently that week, and nothing came to mind. Part of that may have been my emotional state, but because I had neglected God's Word, there was nothing fresh in my mind to meditate on.
2. Look for Christ in the Scripture that you read. Last time, we talked about the importance of searching the Scriptures to find Christ, because true rest can only be found in Him. The goal of Bible reading, and meditation as well, is to deepen our relationship with Christ. So, as we read the Bible, we want to discover what the passage tells us about who Jesus is or what He's done for us.
3. Choose one aspect of Jesus' person or work to meditate on. The chart that we looked at last time has questions that will help you focus in on Jesus. Once you've found Him in the passage, then maybe choose just one thing that really struck a chord to you or impacted you about Him that day. It may be something new that you learned that you learned about Him. It may be that you were reminded of His work on your behalf to guarantee your salvation. The idea, though, is to narrow your focus as to what you'll be meditating on that day rather than trying to remember everything that you read.
4. Start meditating! There are so many different ways that you can actually do this. We can find some guidelines in the Bible about how to meditate:
  - First, we've already discussed that we are to meditate day and night, or all through the day.
    - Meditation begins with our quiet time or our Scripture reading, which may be an argument for doing quiet time in the morning, but we're to spend time throughout the day thinking about Christ. Even on days when we don't have time to read Scripture, we can still meditate by remembering things we've recently read and learned about Him. Other things can be sources of thoughts for

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 50.

- meditation, such as songs or sermons or devotions, although Scripture is the best.
- Meditation can be done while doing other things. As we do things that don't take a lot of thought, such as driving, housework, waiting for appointments, etc., we can redeem that time by focusing our thoughts on Christ.
- Second, we are to meditate with our hearts. We've already look at the beginning of Psalm 19, but in verse 14, David is praying that the meditation of his heart would be pleasing to God. Hebrew meditation "involved intellectual engagement with the text of Scripture."<sup>5</sup>
    - *How might we engage with Scripture intellectually?*
    - Consider how the passage points to Christ. If you're reading the OT, what person, event, or thing is pointing to Jesus? What aspect of His person or work is being predicted?
    - Think about wording. Carefully consider which words the author chose and what those words mean. Donald Whitney suggests repeating a verse or phrase several times, putting emphasis on a different word each time (*God is love; God is love; God is love*)
    - Ask questions of the text. What other thoughts come to mind as you think about the Scripture? Does it call to mind any other verses or something else you've read or heard? Does it remind you of a personal experience you've had? Does it bring to mind a song that you know?
    - Paraphrase the passage. Try to think of your own words to explain the text.
    - It's ok to allow your thoughts to wander, as long as you keep them on Christ. Women are described as being like spaghetti. Our thoughts can be kind of jumbled. One thought can lead to another then another, until we can't even remember how we got to what we're thinking about because it's so far from where we started. When it comes to meditation, it's ok to let one thought lead to another.
  - Third, we are to meditate with our mouths. We've also looked at Joshua 1:8, where we read, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you should meditate on it day and night." Hebrew meditation involved a low speaking of Scripture.<sup>6</sup>
    - *How can we meditate with our mouths?*
    - We can repeat Scripture out loud to ourselves.
    - We can pray the Scripture out loud.
    - We can talk about Scripture with other people.

Reading the Bible is important, but it doesn't do a lot of good unless we actually absorb what we've read. We can do that by meditation. As we think about Christ and God's Word throughout the day, we'll find that we're being drawn closer to Jesus and being transformed more and more into the image of Christ.

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<sup>5</sup>*Reformation Study Bible*, 832.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*