

Module : Meditation**Session 1** : Meaning of Meditation**Focus** : The Significance of Biblical MeditationWord to the World
www.randolphbarnwell.com**RESTORING THE LOST DISCIPLINE OF MEDITATION**

I am reminded of W.H. Davies' 'Leisure', a poem I was required to learn and recite in primary school. It started - "What is this life if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare." The rest of the poem highlights how our present fast-paced and stressful existence literally leaves us no opportunity to pause, note and reflect upon life's beauty. Thus, much that would enrich our lives is lost and our lives are the poorer. The poem ends as follows: "A poor life this, if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare". To Pharaoh, God said through His servant Moses, "Let my people go that they might worship/serve me". With similar intensity, God is presently saying, "**Let my people meditate, that they might obey me**". This is the new command from God to the Pharaohic and Babylonian systems in the world and church that keep God's people unduly preoccupied with endeavours that literally leave no or little time to stop and consciously reflect upon the vast treasures of truth in God's Word. Meditation on this truth will bring them into perfected obedience and thus greater liberty and personal and corporate enrichment. Biblical meditation affords us the powerful occasion to live a fuller, richer and ennobled life in God.

The pace of life in western civilisation is fast and frenetic. We run the treadmill of life, whose speed is usually determined for us by factors external to ourselves. This treadmill often affords no reprieve, allowing neither for few stoppages and rest. Life presently does not afford many people the essential of meaningful reflection and contemplation, for these require a deliberate cessation of labour, activity and busyness if the total benefit associated with these practices are to be reaped - even though meditation can be done consistently irrespective of one's state - whether active or in a condition of absolute rest. The Scriptures call us to meditate 'day and night'.

Meditation too is an activity. It is a discipline of thought and internal rumination that at times is not notable to an observer. Humans generally are works-centred, always having to do something discernible to others. Even if not motivated by the applause or regard by others, many of us feel out of sorts when not actively and visibly engaged in some task. Many live under a subtle pressure to 'perform' and this evidences itself in a visible preoccupation with mastering how we are able to demonstrate our worth and value by outward works in our body. As such, there is neither esteem nor prioritisation given to the absolute necessity of meditation - an inward, unseen employment of the minds of the spirit and soul. Ultimately meditation is the bedrock of ones visible outward progress.

"Sustained imaginative reflection is, if I am not mistaken, so rare today that few of us understand its power to motivate, and are not ourselves motivated by it." (J.I. Packer)

In Biblical times, both in Old and New Covenant periods, **the Hebrew world was vastly different.** Theirs was a life that was highly contemplative and deeply thoughtful. The mind of the spirit and soul was

subjected to regular rehearsal of God's word, will, works and ways. The average twelve-year-old Hebrew child could recite the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. **The Word was treasured in the mind and in the heart.** It was forever kept before their eyes – literally and obviously figuratively, before the eyes of their understanding (Eph. 1:18). Many Psalms are punctuated by the regular interjection of 'SELAH', which was essentially a call to stop reading and deliberately muse and reflect upon what is read.

Sophistication and modernisation, as evidenced in inventions such as computers, cellular phones, ipads, social media like facebook and twitter, etc., that are designed to make our lives far more efficient and convenient, can potentially serve to further clutter our lives and thus pose as major hindrances preventing time devoted to rest, deep thought, personal prayer and meaningful meditation. There exists an uncanny obsession with technological gadgets and digital platforms of communications – as these provide efficient forms of research, information gathering, communication and entertainment. These are now considered indispensable components of human life in the twenty first century. These are not evil. In fact I maintain that they are absolutely essential when used correctly and can be efficiently used to facilitate the global purposes of God. **The problem is, as with any good thing, that it can become a distraction to the priority of developing a contemplative and prayer lifestyle. That which is often designed to make life, time management and communication more efficient, if abused, can potentially result in time wasting.**

I seek to **highlight the value of meditation and so trust that the reader will then give it the accord and priority it warrants.** The church will be the poorer if this essential discipline continues to be a neglected, and in some cases, totally forgotten practice. Two classic scriptural portions citing the importance of meditation occur in the first chapter of the books of Joshua and Psalms. In both portions the outcome of meditation is set forth as prosperity and success in every single endeavour relative to God's will. I trust this will be your experience as you 'meditate for good success' (see Joshua 1:8). [Interestingly, Joshua is the first book of the 'Prophets'; Psalms is the first book of the Poetic Writings – and meditation features prominently in the first chapter of each of these two sections of the Old Testament, which is traditionally divided into the 'Law', 'Prophets' and the 'Psalms' (or Poetic Writings)]

N.B.: I encourage you to rehearse **Sessions 15 to 20** in this series before proceeding. If you received the Word of God within your spirit, the only potential factor that will result in disobedience is the state of the soul. The state of the soul is determined by the strength of one's spirit in its ability to lead and direct the soul, and by your conscious victorious living over the desires of the flesh. The original intent of God was that the soul would blindly follow the leading of the spirit. The soul has a mind, as does the spirit. **Meditation takes place in the mind of the spirit and soul.**

MEDITATE WITH THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT TO IMPACT THE MIND OF THE SOUL

Psalm 19:14 Let the **words of my mouth** and the **meditation of my heart** Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 77:6 I will **remember my song in the night**; I will **meditate with my heart**, And my **spirit ponders**:

Ponders = chapphas = Signifies such an investigation as a man makes who is obliged to strip himself in order to do it; or, to lift up coverings, to search fold by fold, to leave no stone unturned

Psalm 77:6 I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, and my spirit makes diligent search. (NKJV)

THE RE-MINDING OF THE SONS OF GOD

When Adam sinned, he lost his mind, i.e. the mind of his soul lost its proper placement and function within the scheme of his being. The mind of the soul is native to the earth; the spirit is native to the eternal, unseen heavenly dimension. God communes with man's spirit from His Spirit. It is 'Spirit to spirit' – and spirit to Spirit'. At salvation, the spirit of man is regenerated, but his soul requires daily renewal until it is restored back to its original position (Rom. 12:1,2), this being that it should blindly follow the dictates of God's leading through the spirit. The soul was meant to follow the spirit, but by the sin of man, the soul of man asserted pre-eminence over the spirit. As such, man began to function independantly of God's leading by His Spirit through the human spirit. The battle of the ages is for the mind of man. This topic is a vast one and I refer the reader to my series on the subject available on my website.

The activity of the mind of the soul must mirror the activity of the mind of the spirit. This is important if the mind of the soul is to submissively follow the dictates of the Word of God in the mind of the spirit. The process of meditation is crucial and important in our quest for oneness in our spirits and souls (and obviously our bodies, with which we actively express our obedience).

The mind has got to be SET on things of the Spirit and not the flesh. The mind of the soul is pulled in two directions. The spirit competes with the flesh for being the dominant influence over the mind of the soul (Gal. 5:16-18). For the **mind set on the flesh is death**, but the **mind set on the Spirit is life and peace** – Rom 8:6. The **mind set on the flesh is hostile towards God and cannot obey God** – Rom 8:7. Set your mind on things above where we are seated with Christ – Col. 3:1-3.

As the soul is the vehicle through which we engage our world or environment, whichever of the spirit or fleshly nature succeeds in suppressing it into submission will configure or determine it's thinking, decisions and even emotions. The resultant outward behavioural action would either be obedience or disobedience to the Divine will.

The saying is true: '**Your thinking determines who you are.**'

Prov. 23:7a For as he thinks within himself, so he is.

Literally read in the original Hebrew, this reads as follows: "**As he reckons in his soul, so is he**". The state of your mind determines the quality of your life. You are as you think. Ultimately the mind of the soul must be transformed to think like that of the mind of the renewed spirit, and not like the 'mind of the flesh'. The true battle is for domination of the mind of the soul by the Holy Spirit in the spirit of man

versus the spirit of this world via 'things/lusts of the world'. Whichever realm you feed will win. Whichever realm you starve will lose. **BIBLICAL MEDITATION FEEDS THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT.** It is not so much psychological as much as it is spiritual. The mind of soul will follow the mind of the spirit which meditates upon God's Word.

GOD'S WAYS AND THOUGHTS ARE BE OURS

Isaiah 55:6-11

- 6 **Seek the Lord** while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.
- 7 Let the **wicked forsake his way** And the **unrighteous man his thoughts**; And let him **return to the Lord**, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God,
- 8 For He will abundantly pardon. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.
- 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.
- 10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
- 11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it

Rain is an image of the Word of God, particularly the obedience to the Word of God inclusive of meditation (see Deut. 32:2; 11:13,14,16-17; 28:23,24 and Isaiah 30:12-15).

Rain and dew depict the teaching and speech of the Lord respectively – (Deut. 32:2). The Word received is responsible for all success and prosperity. **Your obedience to the Word activates the power of the Word to bring success and increase** (see Psalm 29; Is. 30:21-23).

Isaiah 30: 21-23

- 21 Your **ears will hear a word behind you**, " This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left.
- 22 And you will defile your graven images overlaid with silver, and your molten images plated with gold. You will scatter them as an impure thing, and say to them, " Be gone!"
- 23 Then He will give you **rain for the seed which you will sow in the ground**, and bread from the yield of the ground, and it will be rich and plenteous; on that day your livestock will graze in a roomy pasture

In Isaiah 55, the Word proceeding out from God's mouth is likened unto rain falling to the earth that results in the growth of seed into plants which produce more seed to the sower and bread to the eater.

The Word is also likened unto seed. The Word that is obeyed results in the son of the kingdom (wheat), who has become the seed sown – so the Word becomes flesh – see Matthew 13. The seed has now grown and is transformed into a fruitful and useful life. To move from seed to fruit requires obedience. To perfect obedience requires meditation on the Word until it becomes the dominant and all-pervasive influencing factor upon the mind and heart.

The Word of God reveals the thoughts or mind of God.

God's Word reveal His thoughts towards us. Generally, words are thoughts clothed in language. God's Words are His thoughts clothed in language that is intelligible to us. By knowing His Word, we know His thoughts. More than this, His Words are spirit and life. It is far more than a system of communicating. It is the very means by which His thoughts come into us, dislodge thoughts within us that are contrary to his. In Psalm 139:17,18 the Psalmist declares that God's thoughts are 'precious' and 'vast', and to assist our human minds to appreciate the vastness of the totality of God's thoughts towards us, he explains that's that they are innumerable as sand.

The Word of God is the agency through which the Spirit, who knows the mind of God, makes it known to us. We are to 'seek the Lord' (Is.55:6) and 'return to the Lord' (Is.55:7) by forsaking wicked and unrighteous 'thoughts' (Is. 55:7). The state of our minds accurately depict whether we are seeking hard after God. His thoughts are meant to be our thoughts when the entrance of His Word finds accommodation in our thoughts. Our outward obedience to His word will be reflective of a mind that is fully submitted to His ways and thoughts. Biblical meditation is a God-ordained discipline for the realignment of our mind, thoughts and ways to the mind, thoughts and ways of God.

Jer. 4:14 **Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved. How long will your wicked thoughts lodge within you.**

*"God shows us here that Israel's evil deeds were only the manifestation of their evil thoughts, which 'lodged' within them. Your predominant thoughts lodge (abide) within you. Thoughts are powerful. What we constantly ponder on/consider eventually alters our mindsets and behaviour. Meditating on the Word does not just bring us closer to God, but it allows His Word to Lodge within us, that we may obey and do what the Word requires of us, thus being transformed more and more into His Image." **Matthew Barnwell***

MEANING OF MEDITATION

Let us consider what is means to meditate by examining the original Hebrew and Greek words translated

'meditate'. The Old Testament Hebrew word translated 'meditate' is '**hagah**'.

Meditate = hagah = to ponder, to imagine; to groan, to sigh, to mutter, to speak, mourn, roar, study, talk, utter; to growl – to utter sounds

As is obvious from the Hebrew meaning of meditation above, the activity, literally, is **audible**. The word '**hagah**' properly means, "**to emit sound**", "**to mutter**", "**to speak in an undertone**". Almost inaudible sounds or mutterings in soft undertones accompanied the discipline of meditation in the Hebrew culture. Hence we can understand why the Word is not to depart from Joshua's mouth but he must meditate in it day and night, and David prayed that the words of his mouth and the meditation of his heart be acceptable in God's sight.

Joshua 1:8a This book of the law shall not depart from **your mouth**, but you shall **meditate on it**

Psalms 19:14a Let the **words of my mouth** and the **meditation of my heart** be acceptable in Your sight.

Psalms 49:3 My **mouth will speak wisdom**, and the **meditation of my heart** will be understanding

Meditation is expressed mentally and verbally. Meditation is an activity of the minds of the spirit and soul that may be accompanied by **actual speaking to oneself where one verbalises one's thoughts**. It involves articulating your deliberate thoughtful contemplation on God's Word, works and ways. This is a powerful discipline that is notably absent from contemporary Christianity. This form of meditation should be of no great surprise to us, for **"out from the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks"**. You realise the importance of this practice all the more when you know that **"life and death are in the power of the tongue"**. Further to esteeming this practice as priority, is the realisation that **one's world is framed by ones' words** (see Heb.11:3), which reflect one's inner thought-life – and as you think, so are you. It is true that your external environment can be shaped or at least mastered internally within your unseen thoughts.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). The NASB renders the phrase **'Word of God'** as **'Word of Christ'** and in the margin renders it as the Word 'concerning' Christ. The context of Romans 10 testifies to this being the accurate thought. It is a rhema, present and relevant CHRIST-CENTRED Word that produces faith. Note here that there is a double emphasis on 'hearing', viz. **'hearing, and hearing'**. True faith is generated not just by one hearing, but by the principle of the second hearing – basically referring to hearing again and again over and over in your mind what God has said – through repetitive rehearsal of His Word. For me, the process of meditation is the **'second hearing'** of the Word of God.

Cf. **Psalms 62:11** **Once God has spoken; Twice I have heard** this: that power belongs to God.

{This verse could also read as "One thing God has spoken; Two things I have heard ..." (NASB Margin)}

Cf. **Job 33:14–17** (14) "Indeed God speaks once, or twice, yet no one notices it. (15) "In a dream, a vision of the night, When sound sleep falls on men, While they slumber in their beds, (16) Then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction, (17) That He may turn man aside from his conduct, And keep man from pride

Memorisation of scripture or scriptural principles has great value and is to be encouraged, for it will aid the meditative process. One can also meditate by actually reading the Word aloud, or reading and hearing again recorded sermons and teachings. The important process is to let the Word of God be on your lips – utter it in soft undertones. Do it slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to amplify your understanding and insight into what you hear and allow for the nature of Christ to be manifest to you and in you – and so be conformed into the Divine nature.

An Example: Read, study, memorise and meditate upon the following scripture, isolating and reflecting upon each word – you will be amazed at how the Spirit will enlighten your spirit and soul with His speaking.

'You shall therefore keep every commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you are about to cross to possess it.'

{Deut. 11:8}

The Imagery of a Cow Chewing Cud

Certain animals are termed ruminants, because they regurgitate their food and chew on it again – and this process is repeated. The word "**ruminant**" comes from the Latin '**ruminare**', which means "**to chew over again**". From this word we derive the English word '**ruminare**' which means to meditate or to ponder. Thus, a brief consideration of how cows chew their cud will amplify our understanding of meditation.

The phrase "**chewing the cud**" is used to describe the process of meditation. Biblical meditation has often being compared to a cow chewing its cud. A cow's stomach has four digestive chambers. It chews some grass mixing it with saliva and swallows it into chamber number one. The digestive process starts here. After some time, usually in a rested seated position, this is regurgitated back up into the mouth, where it is



masticated again and broken down into smaller sizes – this process is actually termed '**ruminating**'. It is then swallowed into chamber number two, where the water content is extracted and the cud is now transformed into pellets. After some time again these pellets are brought back into the mouth where they are munched on for hours on end. It is then swallowed into the third and fourth chambers thereafter. This might be a **time-consuming exercise**, but is it certainly **not a time-wasting exercise**, for the result of **good creamy milk** right at the end of this process proves the point. Apparently, **dairy cows spend almost eight hours a day chewing their cuds for a total of almost 30,000 chews daily**.

The constant regurgitation of the cud is to ensure that every single available nutrient is extracted from the grass so that ultimately the maximum possible benefit is derived to the cow. Such is the same with meditating on the Word of God. Much of the inherent benefit vested within the Word of God is lost simply because we do not meditatively chew and chew again on the Word we have received. We must too, like the cow, eat the Word – but literally **regurgitate it up to the forefront of our minds repeatedly over and over again until God's purpose and intent attendant with that Word is realised within our lives**.

Hearing/Reading the Word of God without meditating on it is like placing food in the mouth without chewing it. Here is what a few men of God have to say about this:

- *"What digestion is to the body, meditation is to the soul"* *(Warren Wiersbe)*
- *"God's Word is not meant to be fast food. Take time for a good long chew"* *(J.E. Yoder)*
- *"Speed-reading may be a good thing, but it was never meant for the Bible. It takes calm, thoughtful, prayerful meditation on the Word to extract its deepest nourishment."* *(Vance Havner)*

In ancient Israel, only animals that chewed the cud or split the hoof were permitted to be eaten. There were few exemptions to this (see Lev.11:3-7; Deut. 14:6-8). The spiritual principle to note here is that the real source of spiritual sustenance and nourishment that one receives is from the process of meditation (chewing the cud), as a result of accurate teaching which rightly divides the Word of God (splitting the hoof).

The NEW TESTAMENT Greek word translated 'meditate' is 'meletao'.

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Meditate = meletao = "to care for" - "to attend to, practice,"
to weigh or ponder over something so as to be able to perform well.

Meditation denotes that you 'care for' the word that you have heard; that you are 'attending to' it so as to obey it (as denoted by the word 'practice'). Words that you do not attend to or care for will not come to maximum productivity. The seed of the Word that fell of good ground bears three distinct levels of fruitfulness, namely 30, 60 and 100 fold.

The degree of productivity is based upon the measure of hearing, i.e. how the Word is heard, received, internalised and processed within the spirit and soul.

1 Tim 4:15 Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. (NKJV)

Paul calls upon Timothy, his spiritual son in the Lord, to 'MEDITATE' on the things he had been addressing throughout the entire letter up to that point (note - 'THESE THINGS'). Timothy is to 'care for', 'attend to', ponder over these things so that he will be successful.

When Mary and the others heard the report of the shepherds, they exhibited different responses to what was heard.

Luke 2:18,19 And all who heard it **wondered at the things** which were told them by the shepherds.
But Mary **treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.**

The others **wondered** at what was heard, but Mary **pondered** on what she heard. Others reacted with wonder, amazement, marvel and astonishment, but Mary chose this and more. She elected to **'meditate'** (MKJV), **'ponder'** (KJV), **'weigh'** (AMP) or give **'much thought'** (BBE) to what she heard. Mary celebrated whilst the others celebrated the Word.

In describing this deep contemplative response of Mary, the Scriptures first indicate that she **'TREASURED'** or **'KEPT'** (KJV) what she heard in her heart. This is akin to what Paul instructed Timothy to do, viz. to **'care for'** and **'attend to'** what you hear. The Psalmist David knew of this disposition, for he said, "Thy Word have I **hid in my heart**" (Psalm 119:11). Solomon too instructs us to keep the Word of God **'in the midst'** (literally the centre) of our hearts (Prov. 4:21).

One cannot ponder upon what one has not 'kept' or 'treasured'.

Treasured/kept = *suntērēō*; = To preserve, keep safe, close;
 To *conserve* (from ruin); mentally to *remember* (and *obey*):
 To preserve (a thing from perishing or being lost)
 To keep within one's self, keep in mind (a thing, lest it be forgotten)

Meditation is rooted in a deep love and high estimation for God's Words, promises and instructions.

Psalm 119:48 And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes.

Psalm 119:97 O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day

Psalm 1:2 But his **delight is in the law** of the Lord, And in His law **he meditates** day and night

Psalm 119:15 I will **meditate** on Your precepts And **regard Your ways**

(The word 'regard' here means 'to fix the eyes upon')

Rehearse Session 10 – 'First Love' – and allow the scriptures cited there to fire up your love for God's Word.

"Devout meditation on the Word is more important to soul-health than even prayer. It is more needful for you to hear God's words than that God should hear yours, though the one will always lead to the other." **Vance Havner**

To be continued.

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