

Meditation

Vital Key to Spiritual Growth

HENRY FORD is reputed to have said: "Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is the probable reason why so few engage in it." Whether Ford actually said it or not, that statement has never been more accurate than today. For most of us turning on the TV is much easier than turning on our minds. Ours is the age not only of the paid entertainer and the hired specialist who can provide the services we're unable to perform for ourselves, but it is also an age in which we can even become accustomed to letting others do our thinking for us

A Human Weakness

Our educational processes have a part in this mind-numbing movement. Too often, as students, instead of analyzing the subject matter to see if it was accurate, we simply repeated on the exam sheet what we had been spoon-fed. After all, didn't many of us just go to school for grades?

And now even our jobs tend to become increasingly specialized and automated, leaving us as workers with little need or incentive to think. Our environment encourages a natural tendency to avoid "unnecessary" thinking.

Humanly, we tend to be superficial. As God says in I Samuel 16:7, *man normally-looks only at the outward appearance*. This often means that we accept an answer, solutions, or supposed fact on face value.

Early in this century, for example, people *assumed* the new and mighty Titanic was unsinkable, though in reality its watertight integrity had been sacrificed for the comfort of the passengers. Superficially, it was undoubtedly a majestic, awe-inspiring ship. Probably nobody *thought* much about her internal strength and stability until a massive iceberg ripped a 300-foot gash in her hull.

But perhaps the most unfortunate part of our "no-think" environment is its effect on our mental outlook. As its consequences, we don't spend the time or effort we should in active thought and meditation about God, His laws, His Word, and how they all relate to our lives.

Meditation Leads to Prosperity and Success

We find in Joshua 1:8 that God commanded the children of Israel: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt *meditate* therein day and night"--why?-- "That thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way *prosperous*, and then *thou shalt have good success*."

We all want to be successful and prosperous. Yet often God cannot bless us, as He would like to do because we are inadvertently breaking His law. For unless we are meditating on our own lives in relation to that law, we can easily overlook areas where our performance is not up to God's standards.

Don't just assume you are on solid spiritual ground! Examine yourself (II Cor. 13:5) and at the same time ask God to help you search out your own life (Ps. 139:23-24). Use the law as a spiritual yardstick with which to measure your own personal performance. Look for the hidden, subtle sins that often escape notice.

David, in Psalm 119:105, called God's Word, which includes the law, "a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." For God's law to illuminate our lives, as it should, we must be actively *thinking* and meditating on it.

Constructive meditation can and should play a vital role in our Christian lives. This article will show you how to begin meditating effectively.

Meditation on God's Law

The first Psalm, verse 2, very aptly describes the righteous person (a true Christian): "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night."

Fine. But how do you meditate on God's law? Let's take one of the Ten Commandments, the seventh for example "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Now, think about this for a while. The people of the world, for the most part, don't keep that one too well, do they?

Suppose they *did* keep this commandment, then what?

All forms of venereal disease would eventually be wiped out! No more gonorrhea and syphilis. No more blind babies born to unwed mothers. The incidence of babies born with serious mental defects would drop as well.

Another result: fewer potential juvenile delinquents. The phenomenon of fatherless children would virtually disappear. Children would develop with more balanced personalities, keener minds, better health, etc., etc.

Now think about what happens to the people involved in an adulterous relationship. Are they helped? Far from it! The first time they probably feel pretty guilty about it. But if they continue to indulge, they will probably sear their consciences to the point where anything goes.

Then there is the other mate. Think about what it must feel like to be cheated, defrauded and lied to by the very one who supposedly took you for better or worse (if, indeed, that was even done in the first place). And let's not forget the children. Certainly they will sense that mommy and daddy aren't getting along (even if the wronged mate doesn't realize what has been happening). A feeling of insecurity will develop. And permanent scars will form in their personalities and character that may never be completely erased in this physical life.

What about the plight of the expectant unwed mother? In considering the alternatives, she may undergo the tragedy of an abortion. If it's too late for that, the newly born child may be abandoned or discarded in someone's garbage can. It actually happens! Or if the unwanted child is more fortunate, he might be farmed out to an orphanage or adoption agency. But even if the expectant mother loves and really wants to keep the

baby, what chance do you think the child has for a normal existence?

Now consider what mankind is doing about all of these problems. You guessed it treating the *effects* with penicillin, the pill, prophylactics, and misguided sex education. To even suggest that adultery or fornication is harmful to all parties concerned, and that it violates a living law given by an all wise God for man's benefit, well-being and happiness, would be considered a bit "old fashioned" in today's "enlightened" modern society.

Does thinking meditating on these evils get you stirred up a little? Can you see how badly this world needs God's Kingdom and His laws? Does this give you a better understanding of why obeying God's laws is so vital to our own salvation as well as that of the world?

Use this principle of meditation on all of God's commandments, statutes (Ps. 119:48) and judgments. You'll then be able to pray more fervently, "Thy Kingdom come!"

But what's that you say? You "can't meditate"? "It takes too much effort"?

Reconditioning Our Minds

We might compare our minds to a well-made precision watch. Kept running, cleaned and oiled periodically, a fine watch normally will function smoothly and efficiently for a lifetime. Neglected, the parts will eventually become rusty, dirty, and out of synchronization. If our minds are not kept active and fed a proper mental and spiritual diet, they will also become inefficient and run down.

Unfortunately, if you have allowed your minds to stagnate to the point that deep and continuous thinking or constructive cogitation of any type is a chore be it spiritually oriented or otherwise it is going to take some effort to get it back into condition. But it can be done!

Environment, surroundings and life-style can be great hindrances to effective meditation. It's difficult, you know, to do any constructive meditation if your life is one big round of activities, social events and entertaining junkets. Or if you continually "burn the midnight oil" because you're snowed under, behind in your assignments, or simply engrossed in your work, you may experience the same lack of deep, reflective thought.

Jesus Christ successfully

confronted that kind of problem during His earthly ministry. He and His disciples were so busy in the Work of God that at one point they didn't even have time to eat! (Mark 6:31). The obvious solution was to break up the routine and get away from the pressures for a while. Whenever He did succeed in getting away by Himself, Christ must have spent a significant amount of time in meditating and planning. On other occasions, He took the time for this type of spiritual rejuvenation even in the midst of a busy day's activities (John 6:15, 8:1).

We need, just as Christ did, to step back from time to time from our routines and take a long, reflective look at what we're doing. Almost anything that will get you out of your normal environment will help. One of the most relaxing and enjoyable ways is to get out into God's creation by going hiking, camping, backpacking or canoeing. You'll find that meditation will come much easier in this type of environment.

You won't have to contend with television, radio, ringing telephones, sirens, barking dogs, etc. And once you get out and away from "the four walls," you'll find that many of your day-to-day problems, inconveniences and difficulties won't seem quite so all encompassing and "earth-shaking" as you originally imagined. David got the "big picture" and saw things in their true perspective when he was able to meditate in the midst of God's creation (Ps. 8:3-9).

Meditate on God's Creation

David said in Psalm 143:5: "I meditate on *all* thy works; I *muse* on the work of thy hands."

Being out in the wide, open spaces is not always necessary to be able to reflect on the creative power of God and His creation and on what they reveal about His nature and character. You can easily do this right in your own backyard.

For instance, if you happen to be raking leaves, think for a few minutes about those little objects being pushed along by your rake. Each one possessed symmetry, balance and a purposeful design. Thinking about these aspects of your subject should give you a better insight into some of God's personality and other traits.

Then look a little further. Notice the difficult varieties, shapes and designs of leaves hanging from the surrounding trees. Someone had quite a bit of

imagination to design everything from pine needle to giant fern leaves.

And each variety is not only fabricated to be pleasing to the eye in terms of beauty and color, but is also designed with a specific functional purpose in mind. Man has yet to fully explain the mysterious action of the chlorophyll that makes leaves green. Obviously it took the master Designer, Chemist and Artist of the universe to “put it all together” and create leaves!

Take any object, small or great, simple or complex, in God’s creation and think about it from the standpoint of the genius of design, breadth of imagination, depth of planning and understanding that went into it, and you’ll soon begin to marvel and stand in awe of the mind and power of Almighty God!

Meditate on Lessons from the Past.

Don’t ever underestimate the value of hindsight! God certainly doesn’t. Forty-nine books in the Old Testament contain 929 chapters that are chock-full of historical examples written expressly for you and me! (I Cor. 10:4). But the lessons you need to learn won’t just pop out of the page and into your brain unless you’re meditating about the meaning of the black and white print passing before your eyes.

Whenever you are reading such examples, slow down and ask yourself a few questions. Read between the lines. Analyze the character and motivation of the people involved. View the passage in question as it fits into the overall panorama of historical and social events of the time. And most important of all, relate the events you are reading about to your own personal life.

For example, take the case of Saul, king of Israel. We know he disobeyed God. We understand fully that he was rebellious and self-righteous. But did you ever *analyze* or think deeply about what were some of the causative factors involved in his downfall?

First, you might remember I Samuel 15:17 which says, in the Authorized Version, that when Saul was little in his own sight, God chose him to be made king. Obviously, you would say the throne must have gone to his head. But think a little further about the time he first went wrong by offering sacrifices at Gilgal contrary to Samuel’s instruction (I Sam. 13:8-10).

Saul knew that Samuel spoke for

God, and he obviously felt guilty about what he did, but he tried to excuse his actions to Samuel. Notice what his reasoning was: “Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; therefore said I, the Philistines will come down upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.” (verses 11-12).

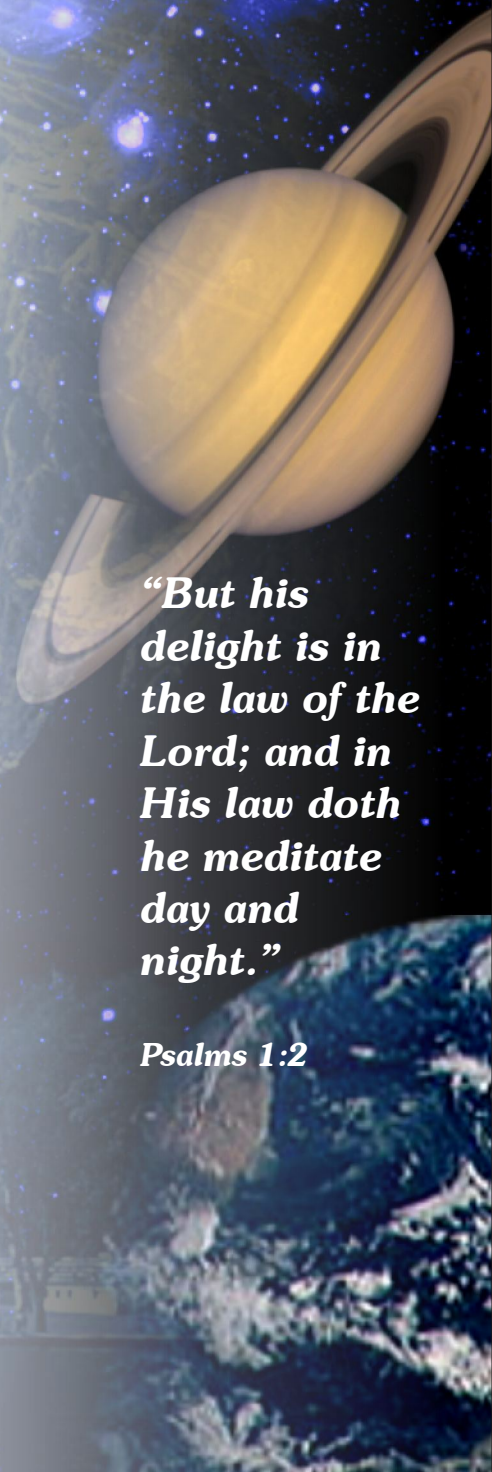
“Well, it appears he just lacked faith,” you might say. True, but look further.

Primarily he was worried because “the people were scattered from *me*.” Immediately we can surmise that he was overly concerned about his own prestige and importance in the eyes of the people. He was afraid that if he just sat there he would appear to the people like a dunce. Instead, he wanted to show them he was a dynamic man of *action* that HE, Saul, would save them from the villainous Philistines. After all, wasn’t he the biggest man in Israel? He couldn’t allow his knight-in-shining-armor image to get tarnished, could he?

Also, he *had* to get that sacrifice in before the Philistines came down on who? The people? Of course not! SAUL! (Verse 12). Saul was looking out for “old number one.” That is not the kind of character God wants in a leader!

Then there was the matter of Samuel not showing up. Maybe Saul figured he wouldn’t make it. “After all, you can’t always be sure about his word,” he probably reasoned. (Perhaps Samuel’s delay was for the purpose of testing Saul’s obedience). Then, too, Saul more than likely had his doubts about God’s government. He probably reasoned it was fine to follow it for *routine* situations, but this was a wartime emergency! The time had come to take matters into his *own* hands. Saul had his eyes on the Philistines and not on God’s power. He totally forgot whose nation he was ruling and who had put him at its head.

Actually, as the Revised Standard Version shows, Saul was “*little* in his own sight” (I Samuel 15:17) in the sense that he did not comprehend, as king over God’s nation, that he was in a very *big* position, and therefore even the smallest example of disobedience on his part would have a very serious effect on the entire nation.



“But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.”

Psalms 1:2

**"I meditate
on all thy
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Hands."**

Psalms 145:3

The whole situation should ring a few mental bells, as far as our own actions are concerned, because Saul's problems were some of the same ones that many of us today face from time to time. He lacked faith in God and in His government to work things out, became impatient, and tried to work out a human solution. He was more concerned about himself than he was the people or the nation, and he used deceit in trying to make his actions look good in the sight of *men*.

The account is all very realistic, up-to-date and applicable for us today. The lessons are there in God's Word. The question is: will we take the time to *meditate* on what we read in order to learn and apply the lessons?

Meditate on Your Life and Work

When you come home after a hard day's work, do you flop down in front of the TV and promptly fail to capitalize on the lessons and experiences of that day? Or do you, at some time during the evening, reflect on the main events that transpired and what you can do to improve your performance?

For instance, if you have offended someone, or something didn't go exactly right, don't just chalk it up to a bad day, but analyze what happened and why. See what biblical principle you or others violated. Learn from your mistakes and from circumstances that surround your life. If you do this, you'll find correction not only easier to take, but you will probably soon be getting much less of it (1 Cor. 11:31).

Remember, David said he *thought* on his ways and as a result turned his feet to God's testimonies (Ps. 119:59).

And as you meditate on your own life, it will be helpful to learn about the lives of famous men such as Franklin, MacArthur, Churchill, Patton and others. Reflect on some of their strong personal traits and characteristics.

You'll find many useful lessons you overlooked the first time through. Try to throw yourself into the company of as many successful men as possible. Study them. Try to learn **WHY** they are successful. This will help you to learn how to build a success for yourself.

Meditation Helps Prayer

David admitted his prayers were more effective when coupled with meditation. "My soul shall be satisfied as

with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: *when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches*" (Ps. 63:5-6).

Your prayers will be more joyful your praise more sincere if you take time to meditate on God! David did it. Why don't you?

After going to bed, are you ever unable to go right to sleep? What do you do? Count sheep?

Why not **MEDITATE**?

As you lie there feeling the blood pulse in your temple, think about the great master Designer who made your heart. By what processes does your heart keep beating? You almost never give it a thought. Yet this powerful pump ticks day and night. It responds to the demands of physical exertion and emotional involvement.

With this meditation will come a warm feeling. A feeling that you'd like to kneel down and praise the Ever-living Creator. Then why not? You can't sleep, why not get up and pray while you're inspired?

No other being of God's physical creation has a mind that can meditate. God gave man this capacity!

God's Word is replete with exhortations to meditate. Meditation is vitally linked with His plan for our lives. He intended that we take time from our restless everyday hurry to ponder the most important questions: what are we? Where are we going? What are the laws that will guarantee success in life? What is the way that will lead to eternal life?

Do you understand the answers to these questions thoroughly? Are you meditating on them? And is that meditation leading you to a deeper, richer understanding of God's Work into a greater, more intimate contact with God Almighty, your heavenly Father?

Paul wrote to Timothy these words which also apply to us: "*Meditate* upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting [progress] may appear to all" (1 Tim. 4:15).

Start today. Make meditation a vital part of your spiritual life! **AG**