

The Disciplines of a Godly Life: The Simple Discipline of Meditation

One of the most enduring experiences for me from the Holy Land is Ein Gedi. When you get to the lowest spot on the face of the earth, the shores of the Dead Sea, you immediately notice that it is hot most of the time. It is also dry, sun baked, and salted with minerals and chemicals that combine to make it quite inhospitable for most forms of life other than bacteria. In every direction there is lifelessness, death, and scorched rocks. That is in every direction but one. Sprouting from the rocks like a modern day Garden of Eden is a Dead Sea oasis called Ein Gedi.

From the earliest times Ein Gedi has been known and inhabited by desert travelers. From the rocks there flows the coolest, sweetest, and freshest waters imaginable. The contrast between the stark and barren and lifeless shores of the Dead Sea and the sun baked mountains that ring it – and the lush green gardens of Ein Gedi are almost beyond words. Most people have to experience it to fully feel the side-by-side contrast of life and death.

Hungry, exhausted, hot, and thirsty -- it was to this place that David and his men ran in flight for their lives from King Saul. It was here they stayed and refreshed and renewed their bodies and souls. And it was from here that David marched. And it was this wilderness "a dry and thirsty land" that prompted David's mighty 63rd Psalm. For David meditation was taking the God he long for with him -- no matter what was going on.

Please stand as we read Psalm 63.

Meditation meant David "seeks longingly" Psalm 63: 1-2 O God, You are my God; Early will I seek (*to seek early or earnestly, look early or diligently for*) You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs (*to long for, faint, faint with longing; The word¹ seems to mean "has gone blind", or "gone dark". How vivid Hebrew poetry is! Then seek is a most revealing verb. Basically it means longing for the first light of the dawn.*) for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. 2 So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.

¹ Psalm 63 notes by Knight, George A. F., *Daily Study Bible Series: Psalms, Volume 1*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2001, c1984.

Meditation is a soul that thirsts and drinks of God in His Word; that longs for the waters of life and drinks them of God in His Word; that drinks from an ever present oasis in the arid, sun baked, lifeless deserts of life through finding and communing with God in His Word.

We need an EnGedi oasis throughout each day. The way to bring cool rivers of refreshing water into the driest of times is to meditate upon God through His Word. As Ray VanderLaan says²:

Where can you find an "En Gedi," a place where you can become restored with God's shade and living water, in the midst of your busy days? Just as David and his men needed the life-giving, living water of En Gedi in order to survive their time in the wilderness, God's people today need God's life-giving, living water in order to serve Him in the wilderness of life.

When we are nourished and filled with His living water, we will overflow with streams of living water that we can share with thirsty, needy people who live in a spiritually barren world (John 7:38). But in order to have anything to give, we need to have an En Gedi times of devotion, Bible study, prayer, retreat, meditation where we can meet with God to satisfy our own spiritual thirst. What will you do this coming week to guarantee that you will have time with God your "oasis" who will give you what you need in order to flourish? Accept no substitutes for living water! Although many things in our culture may look like living water, they all fail to give us life, to satisfy our thirst for God.

As a shepherd David had learned the secrets of desert survival. Sheep know how to make it in arid and parched lands. One modern shepherd who became a powerful devotional writes these insights:

Generally³ speaking, water for the sheep came from three main sources...dew on the grass...deep wells...or springs and streams. Most people are not aware that sheep can go for months on end, especially if the weather is not too hot, without actually drinking, if there is a heavy dew on the grass each morning. Sheep, by habit, rise just before dawn and start to feed. Or if there is bright moonlight they will graze at night. The early hours are when the vegetation is drenched with dew, and sheep can keep fit on the amount of water taken in with

² Ray Vander Laan, *4-L 314 Faith Lessons On The Life & Ministry Of The Messiah. Leader's Guide*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, p. 314 .

³ Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd looks at PSALM 23*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zonderavan Publishing House, 1970, p. 51-53.

their forage when they graze just before and after dawn. Of course, dew is a clear, clean, pure source of water.

In the Christian life it is of more than passing significance to observe that those who are often the most serene, most confident and able to cope with life's complexities are those who rise early each day to feed on God's Word. It is in the quiet, early hours of the morning that they are led beside the quiet, still waters where they imbibe the very life of Christ for the day. This is much more than mere figure of speech. It is practical reality.

The biographies of the great men and women of God repeatedly point out how the secret of the success in their spiritual life was attributed to the "quiet time" of each morning. There, alone, still, waiting for the Master's voice one is led gently to the place where as the old hymn puts it, "The still dews of His Spirit can be dropped into my life and "soul". One comes away from these hours of meditation, reflection and communion with Christ refreshed in mind and spirit. The thirst is slaked and the heart is quietly satisfied.

In my mind's eye I can see my Flock again. The gentleness, stillness and softness of early morning always found my sheep knee deep in dew drenched grass. There they fed heavily and contentedly. As the sun rose and its heat bummed the dewdrops from the leaves, the flock would retire to find shade. There, fully satisfied and happily refreshed, they would lie down to rest and ruminate through the day. Nothing pleased me more. I am confident this is precisely the same reaction in My Master's heart and mind when I meet the day in the same way. He loves to see me contented, quiet, at rest and relaxed. He delights to know my soul and spirit have been refreshed and satisfied.

So how did they do it? How were those with so little, able to live such godly lives in such a barren, inhospitable wilderness world? How did they live through so much trouble, hardship and adversity?

One habit sets each of these apart from the rest of the world. They each practiced ***the Simple Discipline of Meditation***. How did they do it? Were there keys books, seminars, tapes, study guides...no, they just grasped a truth from God and wouldn't let go of it.

D.L. Moody⁴ has it right when he said, "The Bible wasn't given for our information but for our transformation." God did not give us the Bible to tell

⁴ Dr. Bruce Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner How To Teach Almost Anything To Practically Anyone!* Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1992, 141-164.

us what happened in the past but to equip us to live in the present in light of the future.

Here are a few brief insights⁵ on how to deepen your meditation upon God in His Word:

Want to find the meat of the passage. Desire it. Seek it. Motivate yourself to continue wanting it. Hold fast to the belief that every passage contains at least one key principle. Finding the essence of the content takes time and effort. Pray for illumination from the Holy Spirit to see more of what already has been written. Think! Think a lot! Meditate over and over on the passage. Don't hunt for the principle in the commentaries. Relax. Enjoy developing the principle through your personality.

FINDING: First, we must be Cultivating the Discipline of Simplicity by COMING TO GOD THROUGH HIS WORD. Jeremiah 15:16a **Your words were found**...

EATING: Secondly, we must be Cultivating the Discipline of The Simplicity by MEMORIZING FROM GOD'S WORD. Jeremiah 15:16b Your words were found, **and I ate them**...Memorizing God's Word is recording the voice of God into the memory of our very own minds. Lifting it off the pages of the Bible, writing it down upon the pages of our heart.

DIGESTING: Thirdly, we must be Cultivating the Discipline of Simplicity by MEDITATING UPON GOD THROUGH HIS WORD. Jeremiah 15:16c Your words were found, and I ate them, **and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.**

Meditating upon the Word brings us immediately into the intimate presence of God, but too few are willing to pay the price.

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:1-3).

This is the secret of all of God's great warriors. Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission, conquered immense hardships by daily meditation on God's Word. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor record this in his biography:

⁵ Dr. Bruce Wilkinson, The 7 Laws of the Learner How To Teach Almost Anything To Practically Anyone! Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1992, 126-137.

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life⁶, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four a.m. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.

Hebrews 5:11-14 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Meditation is the only means to digest the nourishment of God's Word; an undisciplined life begins to show these marks of malnutrition. When Scriptural Meditation⁷ is not practiced, these Danger Signs of Spiritual Immaturity will appear:

1. There will be only marginal desire for God's Word, so that the person will be by all accounts almost 'Biblically illiterate'.
2. There will be little understanding the difference between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit.
3. There will be little evidence of being filled with God's love to serve others, giving, etc.
4. They are a person who is often easily swayed or deceived by false doctrines.
5. They often get stuck in the basics, and there is no growth.
6. They exhibit only a limited desire for fellowship with other believers.
7. They often feel a strong desire for worldly possessions; selfish ambitions; spirit of competition, and are often covetous, boastful, prideful, manipulative, etc.

⁶ Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), p. 235.

⁷ Adapted from e-mail newsletter from Doug Morrell.

8. They often experience difficulty in repenting/forgiving others; having compassion for the lost; and don't desire to actively assist in the spiritual development of others.
9. They may confess a limited sense of God, His character or His will.
10. They often face a life filled with fear, anxiety, and an absence of peace -- combined often with ongoing financial difficulties (living far beyond means...in debt).
11. They seem to drift towards being merely seekers of pleasure with lives marked by lack of discipline (physically, mentally, and spiritually).
12. They have only partial victory over sin, an often nonexistent or lackluster prayer life.
13. They experience little or no time or sincere interest in worship, avoid accountability to anyone for anything, and have only a small degree of grace and mercy toward others or self.

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." (Ps. 1: 1-3)

When Scriptural Meditation⁸ is practiced, these signs of Spiritual Maturity will appear:

1. They experience a growing hunger and desire for God Himself, His Word, His Way.
2. In their daily walks they have learned the difference between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit.
3. They show a growing ability to apply God's Word.
4. They show obvious 'works of faith', i.e., serving others, giving, etc.
5. They become firmly grounded (not swayed or deceived by false doctrines), and experience ongoing spiritual growth toward maturity.
6. They exhibit a great desire for fellowship with other believers, and their life evidencing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
7. The desire for worldly possessions diminishes while unselfish motives and a spirit of cooperation advances.
8. They are quick to repent of their sins, and readily forgive others.
9. They experience a growing compassion for the lost, and among believers they are actively assisting in the spiritual development of others.
10. They live with a continuous sense of God, knowledge of his character and will.
11. They live lives visibly characterized with peace.

⁸ Adapted from e-mail newsletter from Doug Morrell.

12. They have a growing attitude of meekness and humility.
13. Their life at home is orderly, and they set their lives after seeking God's purpose for them not their own.
14. The marks of spiritual discipline is seen in each area of life (physical, mental, spiritual), as they grow in putting to death ungodliness in any area of their lives.
15. They mature into an increasingly powerful prayer life, coupled with a dynamic life-style of worship

Remember we each get the same deposit of time each day. How are you using your time? We don't use our time wisely because we have a wrong perspective of time. Incremental time adds up into huge blocks of priceless moments.

12 min./day x 365 days equals 73 hours per year (or once through God's Word).

24 min./day x 365 days equals 146 hours each year (or twice through God's Word).

36 min./day x 365 days = 219 hours and that is enough time to read God's Word through three times thoughtfully.

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

In front of an open Bible. A modern spiritual Goliath was George Mueller. His life may be distilled down to these words he wrote in a diary:

It has⁹ pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, the benefit of which I have not lost for more than 14 years. The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, or how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished...Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as a habitual thing, to give myself to prayer in the morning. Now I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to the meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd and instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, while meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.

⁹ Scroggie, Method in Prayer, pp.17-18.

GETTING ALONE WITH GOD CAN BE AT ANY TIME: Don't let your schedule hold you back. Jesus doesn't teach us about the times of prayer – because we are to pray at all times. In the Bible, people got alone with God at all different times:

- ✓ ***God asked those who were His personal representatives, the priests, to get alone with Him every evening and every morning*** 1 Chronicles 23:30 to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at evening;
- ✓ ***Daniel -- one of the busiest administrators of the Old Testament, was also a towering giant among the Old Testament saints. The key to his life from just a teenager? He was in the habit of getting alone with God three times a day.*** Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, **as was his custom since early days.**
- ✓ ***The Psalmist says we should get alone with our Great God today.*** Psalm 95:6, 8 Oh come, **let us worship** and bow down; **Let us kneel** before the Lord our Maker. 7 For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: 8 "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As in the day of trial in the wilderness,
- ✓ ***Jeremiah confesses he had learned to get alone with God in his youth*** Jeremiah 3:4 Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You are the **guide of my youth?**
- ✓ ***Moses said a good time to remember to get alone with God is after enjoying the bounties of a good meal*** Deuteronomy 8:10 When you have eaten and are full, **then you shall bless the Lord your God** for the good land which He has given you.

DON'T LET YOUR TROUBLES HOLD YOU BACK FROM GETTING ALONE WITH GOD. Jesus doesn't teach us about the circumstances of solitude – because any circumstance will do as a place to get alone with God. In the Bible, people are seen getting alone with God in all kinds of circumstances:

- ✓ When Jesus was so burdened that He was loudly crying He got alone with God in Gethsemane. Hebrews 5:7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,
- ✓ When Job was so incapacitated that he had to resort to sitting in ashes, and shaving his head for painful sores, he learned even there he could get alone with God (Job 1:20-21; 2:8). Job 1:20-21 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to

the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord."