

“Meditating on God’s Word”

by Justin Taylor

Don Whitney writes:

Have you ever read a few chapters in your Bible, closed it, and then realized, “I don’t remember a thing I’ve read”? When this happens, don’t blame your age, IQ, or education, for they’re not the cause. Nearly all Bible readers frequently experience this forgetfulness. In most cases, however, the problem has more to do with the *method* of engaging God’s Word than anything else. For if you merely read the Bible, don’t be surprised if you forget most—if not all—of what you’ve read.

What’s the simple solution? (And I do believe that benefiting from the intake of God’s Word *must* be fundamentally simple since the Lord expects it of all His people, regardless of age, IQ, or education.) The solution is not only to read the Scriptures, but to *meditate* on them. Reading, of course, is the starting place. *Reading* is the *exposure* to Scripture, but *meditation* is the *absorption* of Scripture. And it’s the absorption of Scripture that leads to the transformation of our lives.

But how do you meditate on God’s Word so that we are not “forgetful hearers” (James 1:25)?

At his website, Dr. Whitney has a helpful outline of methods for meditating on Scripture. Here they are:

Repeat the verse or phrase with emphasis on a different word each time.

E.g., John 2:5:

- *Whatever* He says to you, do it.
- Whatever *He* says to you, do it.
- Whatever He *says* to you, do it.
- Whatever He says *to you*, do it.
- Whatever He says to you, *do* it.
- Whatever He says to you, do *it*.

Rewrite the verse or phrase in your own words.

Look for applications of this text—what should you do in response to it?

Pray through the text.

Ask the Philippians 4:8 questions.

When meditating on an event, an experience, a thing, an encounter, etc., and especially on a story or event in Scripture, ask:

- What is *true* about this, or what truth does it exemplify?

- What is *honorable* about this?
- What is *right* about this?
- What is *pure* about this, or how does it exemplify purity?
- What is *lovely* about this?
- What is *admirable, commendable, or reputation-strengthening* about this?
- What is *excellent* about this (i.e., excels others of this kind)?
- What is *praiseworthy* about this?

Ask the “Joseph Hall” questions.

In his book *The Art of Divine Meditation* (1606) the English Puritan Joseph Hall listed a number of questions to ask of a Scripture passage for meditation:

- What is it? (*Define and/or describe* what it is.)
- What are its *divisions or parts*?
- What *causes* it?
- What does it *cause* (i.e., its *fruits and effects*)?
- What is its *place, location, or use*?
- What are its *qualities and attachments*?
- What is *contrary, contradictory, or different* to it?
- What *compares* to it?
- What are its *titles or names*?
- What are the *testimonies or examples of Scripture* about it?

Discover a minimum number of insights into the text (set the number in advance).

Find a link or common thread between all the chapters or paragraphs you’ve read.

Use Meditation Mapping

- Put the verse(s), phrase, word, or topic to be meditated upon in the middle of the page. (When possible, this should be done in picture form.)
- Allow insights, ideas, and thoughts to come quickly and freely.
- Use key words to represent your ideas.
- Connect your key word ideas to the central focus with lines.
- Use as few words per line as possible.
- Print all words for easier reading.
- Use color for emphasis and recall.
- Make frequent use of symbols and pictures in addition to words.

Joshua 1:8

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth,
but you shall meditate on it day and night,
so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

Psalm 1:2

His delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

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