

Freddy Fritz / General

New Year's Message / Word of God; Remember; Ponder; Meditate / Psalm 77

As we approach 2024, I want us to review the Bible's strategy for living the Christian life.

Introduction

We know from the way the New Testament writers used the Psalms that the Psalms were the book of praise and meditation for the early church.

In other words, the early church did not say, "Well, Christ, the Messiah, has come now, so everything written of old is out of date and unhelpful."

On the contrary, they saw Christ in the Psalms, and they saw their own experience in the struggles and triumphs of the Psalmists.

So we should read the Psalms like they did.

Christ didn't come to abolish them, but to fulfill them (see [Matthew 5:17](#)). So we should read them as fulfilled, not as abolished.

They should be fuller and richer for us, not nullified.

So, for example, when the Psalms call us to meditate on the word of God we should not say, "We don't need to do that, we have the living Christ and his Spirit."

Rather we should say, "We have a richer, fuller word of God, including the Gospels and the Epistles—the testimony of the Apostles—as well as of Moses and the Prophets."

So our meditation becomes richer and deeper—at least, it should.

Most of you know this intuitively because when you read the Psalms you see yourselves in them so often. The experience of the Psalmist is your experience. And that is no accident.

God put the Psalms in the Bible not only to call us to great heights of praise and worship but also to comfort us in very dark seasons of discouragement and doubt.

The strategy of fighting this kind of darkness is what I want us to look at today.

Indeed it's the strategy for living the whole of the Christian life.

It is the same strategy that we should use.

Only we now have so much more truth and more history and more of God in Jesus Christ than the Old Testament saints did.

But the design of the strategy is the same, even if our arsenal of truth is larger than theirs.

Scripture

Let us read [Psalm 77:1-20](#):

TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO JEDUTHUN. A PSALM OF ASAPH.

**¹ I cry aloud to God,
aloud to God, and he will hear me.**

**² In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.**

**³ When I remember God, I moan;
when I meditate, my spirit faints. *Selah***

**⁴ You hold my eyelids open;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.**

**⁵ I consider the days of old,
the years long ago.**

⁶ I said, "Let me remember my song in the night;

let me meditate in my heart.”

Then my spirit made a diligent search:

**⁷ “Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favorable?**

⁸ Has his steadfast love forever ceased?

Are his promises at an end for all time?

⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious?

Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” *Selah*

**¹⁰ Then I said, “I will appeal to this,
to the years of the right hand of the Most High.”**

**¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.**

**¹² I will ponder all your work,
and meditate on your mighty deeds.**

¹³ Your way, O God, is holy.

What god is great like our God?

**¹⁴ You are the God who works wonders;
you have made known your might among the peoples.**

**¹⁵ You with your arm redeemed your people,
the children of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah***

**¹⁶ When the waters saw you, O God,
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;
indeed, the deep trembled.**

¹⁷ The clouds poured out water;

**the skies gave forth thunder;
your arrows flashed on every side.**

**¹⁸ The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;
your lightnings lighted up the world;
the earth trembled and shook.**

**¹⁹ Your way was through the sea,
your path through the great waters;
yet your footprints were unseen.**

**²⁰ You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.**

Lesson

And so, as we approach 2024, I want us to review the Bible's strategy for living the Christian life.

I. Christian Living Means Living on the Word of God

My main assertion today is this: Christian living means living on the word of God.

We live on the word of God.

Day by day, the written word of God in the Bible is the means of our relationship to Christ.

We fellowship with Christ by knowing him in the written word.

We talk to him in prayer based on what we know of him from the written word.

We hear him speak to us through what he has shown us of his character and purpose in the written word.

Moment by moment, our vital union with Christ, experientially, is sustained and shaped and carried by the word of God.

If you don't read the word of God and memorize the word and meditate on the word daily and delight in the word and savor it and have your mind and emotions shaped by the word, you will be a weak Christian at best.

You will be fragile and easily deceived and easily paralyzed by trouble and stuck in many mediocre ruts.

But if you read the word and memorize important parts of it and meditate on it and savor it and steep your mind in it, then you will be like a strong tree planted by streams of water that brings forth fruit.

Your leaf won't wither in the drought and you will be productive in your life for Christ (see [Psalm 1](#)).

Christian living means living on the written word of God, the Bible.

In true Christian living, our relation to the word is intentional, not haphazard. It's active, not passive. We pursue it and don't just wait for it to happen.

The Christian life is a *joyful project* that calls for energy and aim and resolve and determination.

It is not coasting or drifting or something that just happens to you like the weather.

The word of God, soaked in prayer, is the substance (in the sense of the "material" or the "fuel") of that joyful project.

Our delight is in the word of the Lord, and on his word we meditate day and night (see [Psalm 1:3](#)).

Let's see this way of life at work in [Psalm 77](#) and then step back and do some planning for living this way in the word in 2024.

II. Reading Soaked in Prayer

I said that the word of God, soaked in prayer, is the substance of the joyful project of Christian living.

One of the reasons I say "soaked in prayer" is that so much of the word of God is prayer.

[Psalm 77](#) is prayer. If you are going to read it authentically, you read it as a prayer. You pray it.

I think this is the way all Scripture should be read.

We read it in the presence of God.

We read it as read before God and to God.

We read it as praise to him or confessions to him or questions to him or pleas to him.

God is always listening to his word in our mouths or our minds, and watching what we do with it. He cares what we do with it.

So we should be aware that he is listening to our reading and should acknowledge to him that he is there and that we want him involved in the reading: helping us understand and helping us believe, and receiving praise and thanks and petitions and cries and questions.

The word that we live on should always be prayer-soaked.

It should be Godward reading.

III. A Strategy for Living

So here is Asaph in [Psalm 77](#) praying and struggling with darkness and discouragement and with a sense of the distance of God.

Verses 7-10 are the essence of his misery:

⁷ “Will the Lord spurn forever,

and never again be favorable?

⁸ Has his steadfast love forever ceased?

Are his promises at an end for all time?

⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious?

Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” *Selah*

¹⁰ Then I said, “I will appeal to this,

to the years of the right hand of the Most High.”

Now here is a typical struggle in the Christian life.

The feeling that God is not favorable.

That his lovingkindness has ceased.

That his promise is not reliable.

That his compassion has been rescinded.

That he is a fickle God and has changed.

I say that is a typical struggle. Please hear me: I am calling you to the word of God in 2024 not because I believe Christians rise above struggle by the word, but precisely because we never rise above struggle in this world and because the word is our only hope to survive and come through our struggles with faith and hope.

So now, what does the Psalmist do in this critical time of darkness and discouragement? What is his strategy for life? How does he live his life of struggle?

How should we?

The answer is in verses 11-12.

But before I read verses 11-12, let's read verses 13-20 so that you can see the effect of this strategy:

¹³ Your way, O God, is holy.

What god is great like our God?

¹⁴ You are the God who works wonders;

you have made known your might among the peoples.

¹⁵ You with your arm redeemed your people,

the children of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

¹⁶ When the waters saw you, O God,

when the waters saw you, they were afraid;

indeed, the deep trembled.

**¹⁷ The clouds poured out water;
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your lightnings lighted up the world;
the earth trembled and shook.**

**¹⁹ Your way was through the sea,
your path through the great waters;
yet your footprints were unseen.**

**²⁰ You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.**

What has happened between verses 7-10, when the Psalmist was so low and uncertain and discouraged, and verses 13-20, which is filled with worship and confidence?

Worship has swallowed up his doubt, and boldness in God has swallowed up his fear.

What happened?

This is what we want to happen when we are in darkness and discouragement and doubt.

What was the key?

Now let's read the Psalmist's strategy for life in verses 11-12:

**¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.**

**¹² I will ponder all your work,
and meditate on your mighty deeds.**

His strategy is to “**remember...ponder...and meditate**” on the miracles and works and mighty deeds of God in history.

This is what I am calling for in 2024.

This is the way to live the Christian life. This is what I mean by living on the word of God.

The mighty deeds of God and his miracles of long ago are available to our minds one way: by the word of God.

We **remember** and we **ponder** and we **meditate** one way: by the word of God.

IV. Conscious Effort

The central Biblical strategy for coming out of darkness and discouragement and doubt is a conscious effort of the mind.

Notice these strong words of intentionality (even stronger in Hebrew with the second verb in each pair being a cohortative): “**I will remember...yes, I will remember**” (v. 11), and “**I will ponder...and [I will] meditate**” (v. 12).

These are conscious acts that the Psalmist chooses to do.

This is the fight of faith.

This is the fight for delight.

This is the opposite of passivity and resignation.

This is a strategy for life.

All of us have said from time to time: “I know God in my head, but I don’t feel him in my heart. My knowledge is not rescuing me the way it did the Psalmist.”

I don’t want to minimize physical and traumatic obstacles, but I do want to raise this question—mainly for myself, but for you too: “When we say that we know facts about God in our head, but they are not making their way down into our hearts and making any difference in our lives in the way they seem to be for the Psalmist, what do we mean by ‘knowing facts about God’?”

Do we mean what the Psalmist does by “**remember...ponder...and meditate**”?

I wonder.

Take an example. Suppose you are feeling unworthy and unacceptable to God and generally a failure and having little motivation to rise above the sense of despondency.

Now, you have lots of knowledge in your head of Christ's great deeds of old.

And if someone says to you, "But don't you know that you are justified by faith and that God looks on you in Christ as you cast yourself on him for mercy?" you might say, "Yes, I know that in my head, but it isn't having any effect on the way I feel."

But is that knowledge of justification what the Psalmist means by "**remember...ponder...and meditate**"?

Could it be that he means for us to think something like this? "I will call to mind that my Lord Jesus—the kindest, most loving, and utterly sinless man—on a day in history hung on a Roman cross of torture and execution in horrible pain next to a man who had lived a life of sin all his life and was on the brink of eternal damnation.

"I will **remember** the sufferings of what he experienced that day and let them brew in my mind.

"I will **remember** that the thief next to him said, for some wonderful and inexplicable reason (for he was cursing at first), 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom' ([Luke 23:42](#)).

"I will **ponder** the grace of God that brought that change of heart.

"I will **meditate** on how unlikely that was and how hopeless that request was.

"I will talk to myself about how this man had no time to become good and deserving before he died.

"I will think about what kind of grace he thought might be available from this dying Christ.

"Then I will **remember**—I will consciously pursue the memory, I will call it up from my memory or I will track it down in the Gospel of Luke—that Jesus said to the thief, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise' ([Luke 23:43](#)).

“And I will pause here and **ponder** this answer for a long time.

“I will not hurry off somewhere to say that such knowledge does not effect my emotions. I will pause. I will linger and **ponder** and **meditate** on this.”

And here is a wonderful truth! Here is a dying man declaring a life-long thief accepted and loved and heaven-bound.

Here is a grace that sweeps a lifetime of guilt away in an instant.

Here is a power that says death can hold neither you nor me.

Here is an authority that decides who goes to heaven and who doesn't.

Here is an immediacy that says it will happen this very day.

No purgatory, no testing, no penance.

Just absolute forgiveness and acquittal and cleansing and acceptance.

And it causes us to cry out with the Psalmist: “Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples” ([Psalm 77:13-14a](#)).

How many of us have fought for the joy of faith like that when we complain that we know the facts of God but they are not having any effect on our feelings?

V. Make a Plan for the New Year

I am pleading with you to make 2024 a year with a new strategy for living.

It is a strategy laid out in [Psalm 77:11-12](#)—and many other places.

It is a life based on the word of God.

Reading the word of God so that you can **remember** the word of God and **ponder** the word of God and **meditate** on the word of God.

And to that end, to memorize the word of God.

So I call you to do something very specific today: plan a place, plan a time, and plan a way to read the Bible every day in 2024.

This is the foundation to help you “**remember...ponder...and meditate.**”

If you don't make a plan, it will not happen.

Notice those words of intentionality in verses 11-12, **“I will remember...I will ponder...and [I will] meditate.”**

If you will join the psalmist in this purposeful way of living, rather than just drifting and coasting into the New Year, then mark off some time today to plan by asking yourself three questions:

First, *when* will I fit the reading of God's Word into my day? What can I change to make it fit?

Second, *where* at home or work will I read and begin my meditations and prayers? Where can I make some quiet and solitude? If you want it, you can make it.

And third, *how* will I read my Bible this year? Will I read a chapter a day? Will I use the Daily Bible Reading guide? Will I use a thematic guide? Will I use a devotional help?

Conclusion

May the Lord help you to see that this strategy for living is not marginal.

This is not icing on the cake of Christian living.

This is the appointed means of God by which he sustains and grows the faith and fruit of his children.

Planning to **“remember...ponder...and meditate”** on God's word is the path of joy.

This is the strategy for delight.

As you commit yourself to the word of God, may God give you a truly wonderful 2024! Amen.