

**BIBLICAL MEDITATION**  
**(SUNDAY, AUGUST 29, 2010)**

---

**SCRIPTURE READING:** PSALM 1; PHILIPPIANS 4:1-13

**INTRODUCTION**

For about two years I have been following and studying what is called the Emergent or Emerging Church movement. The Emergent Church is in some ways a reaction to the Mega-Church movement, but unfortunately at the heart of the Emerging Church is recycled liberalism and the elevation of man's supposed knowledge over the Word of God.

What is also troubling is the embracing of some of the same ideas and 'spiritual practices' by supposedly Reformed and evangelical churches. And at many supposed Christian colleges there are dangerous 'spiritual practices' that are being encouraged and taught under the idea of what is called spiritual formation and the use of 'spiritual disciplines.'

For a number of weeks I have wanted to address one area in particular where there are many dangerous ideas, and that is the subject of **meditation**. Regarding this subject I want us to look at some of the dangers and false teaching and also the antidote to these dangers found in God's Word.

**1. SOME OF THE DANGERS**

Earlier this year we looked at Genesis 3 and the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is a passage that we probably should study much more than we do. **What was Satan's strategy?** It was a combination of getting Adam and Eve to question what God had said, that God was being unfair,

along with convincing them that what he, the devil, was offering them would make them far happier than what God was offering them.

The devil is a creature. Unlike God he cannot create anything out of nothing. The devil can only try to twist what God has created or commanded or mimic what God has created or commanded.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 warned against false apostles. He wrote in verses 13-15

**13** For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. **14** And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. **15** Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

So when it comes to the things that God has commanded, we should not be surprised to see the devil seek to twist, pervert, and mimic.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 declares that there is nothing new under the sun. Abortion did not start in our nation in 1973. Perversion did not begin with Hugh Hefner. But with changes in technology and culture, some of the dangers take on new looks and appearances. It is the same basic evil, but there is in some cases a new look to it.

---

Many professed Christians today would admit to being so busy that they feel overwhelmed. They also might claim that they feel like they are not as close to God as they would like to feel. And if they are part of churches where there is little truth being proclaimed they may also feel like they have no answers to their problems.

And what do we find the devil offering today to handle our stress and isolation? The devil offers us yoga, meditation, psychology, and the like. Today at the Hindu temple in Lemont is the second day of a special conference on meditation and spiritual wellness. In some cases the devil doesn't even have to blur the lines. Supposedly in America there are 4 million people who follow or practice Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> For many years there have been all sorts of supposed Christians who have been teaching that Christianity and Buddhism can be merged together. This is nothing new. Some people might not be comfortable with going that far and so it is not a surprise to see the devil encouraging practices commonly found in eastern religions but without perhaps the direct link being so obvious.

Gary Thomas, the author of a book called *Sacred Pathways*, writes about what is called "centering prayer."

It is particularly difficult to describe this type of prayer in writing, as it is best taught in person. In general however, centering prayer works like this: Choose a word (Jesus or Father, for example) as a focus for contemplative prayer. Repeat the word silently in your mind for a set amount of time (say, twenty minutes) until your heart seems to be repeating the word by itself, just as naturally and involuntarily as breathing.<sup>2</sup>

To be honest, I haven't read this book, but I find this idea to be entirely non-Biblical and quite dangerous.

Contemplative Outreach a Catholic based group which teaches contemplative prayer asks the question, "What happens 'in secret' during

---

<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Citation from p. 185. Source:  
<http://www.lighthouse Trailsresearch.com/newsletter060908.htm#LETTER.BLOCK10>

Centering prayer? Two things: affirmation of our basic goodness and purification of the unconscious.<sup>3</sup>

Another book called the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* published by InterVarsity Press discusses 55 so-called “spiritual disciplines” including: Practicing the presence, Slowing, Unplugging, Silence, Care of the Earth, Breath Prayer, Centering Prayer, Contemplative Prayer, Labyrinth Prayer.<sup>4</sup>

I know what a labyrinth is; it is a type of maze, but I had never heard of “Labyrinth Prayer” before, so I did a bit of research. A church called Mathews United Methodist Church says that the “labyrinth is one of the oldest contemplative and transformational tools known to humankind, having been used for centuries for prayer, ritual, initiation, and spiritual growth.” Some churches in Europe and the US have labyrinths, which in these cases are not mazes, but a walking pattern you follow in a church or in a field. The process of Labyrinth Prayer according to this church website consists of three stages – Shedding, Illumination, and Union. Do any of those sound biblical to you? A suggested prayer was given:

*Holy Center of all that is, draw us in.  
We yearn for the healing only you can give.  
Empower us to walk in your truth.  
Make us good companions on the journey.  
Help us to put aside divisions and distractions,  
So we can be fully present on our pilgrimage.  
Source of all Love, call us to You.*<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Twitter message cited by Ken Silva at [appraisingministries.org](http://appraisingministries.org)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ivpress.com/cgi-ivpress/book.pl/code=3330>

<sup>5</sup> This prayer composed by Julie Howard. <http://www.mathewsumc.org/html/growth/labyrinth.htm>

These mystical and non-Biblical practices are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to some of the strange things that are being taught in many, many churches, colleges, and Sunday Schools. Some of these practices are even being endorsed by major Christian leaders, who in many ways would be very sound in their theology, but for some reason they are open to some of these non-Biblical and dangerous practices.

Maybe you have heard of the term Spiritual Disciplines. We used to sell and even at times use a book called *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. The book on the whole is helpful and encouraging, but I have come to see that one must be very careful in both the use and promotion of what are called Spiritual Disciplines. The book I just mentioned covers some very good things and offers practical suggestions related to the reading and studying of God's Word, Prayer, Worship, and Evangelism. But it has two chapters also on Silence and Solitude and Journaling. These chapters are not heretical but I don't find anything directly in Scripture that suggests that these are special means that God has given to us to promote spiritual growth. As a parent you might wish for your children to be silent so that you can find some solitude, but I think we have to be careful calling these things Spiritual Disciplines. I do find Scripture commanding us that we pray not in front of men but in secret, but merely being in silence or being alone is not some special means that God gives to us to promote holiness.<sup>6</sup> And even more in this same passage, Jesus commands that we do not pray like the heathen do, using vain repetitions, saying or praying the same word or phrase over and over.

---

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 6:6-7.

Some have used the verse from Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God,” as a justification for some of these mystical practices, but this verse has no connection with these practices. Psalm 46:10 is not a call for you to practice silence before the Lord, rather it is calling for the enemies of God to surrender and drop their weapons.<sup>7</sup>

So in summary, there are several dangers that must be avoided.

First, the direct use of pagan and mystical practices incorporated somehow with prayer, silence, or meditation. I would encourage you to be aware of some of these dangers. I have mentioned a very good ministry on the internet called Apprising Ministries which seeks to expose some of these practices.

Second, there is the danger of elevating what maybe are helpful things and calling them **means of grace**. I may find it very helpful to go outside for a walk and at the same time pray. But should I write a book about the benefits of prayer walking and promote it as some special way to draw close to God? We believe that God has given us means of grace. God has given us for our growth in grace His word, prayer, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the discipline that comes through God’s Providence.<sup>8</sup> God also calls us to be obedient in many different areas of life. By confessing our sin and seeking to grow in our obedience to Gods’ Word in humble reliance upon Christ we find the path of spiritual growth and maturity.

There is a third danger. It is good to recognize the false practices, but if you neglect the means that God has given to you, you also are in spiritual danger

---

<sup>7</sup> The Holman Christian Standard Bible reads then appropriately, “Stop your fighting and know that I am God...” John Calvin held to this same position in his commentary on Psalm 46.

<sup>8</sup> A. A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 204.

in seeking to resist the wiles of the devil. If you are not using the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, if you are not praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, then you also are in a dangerous position in the midst of spiritual battle.

## **2. BIBLICAL MEDITATION**

We read earlier Psalm 1, which I believe, provides us an excellent summary for true spiritual growth. The blessed or truly happy man is the one who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or seek to follow the lifestyle of sinners, or find company in the seat or assembly of scoffers, that is those who are arrogant, who love conflict, who reject wisdom and correction. Rather the blessed man is the one who delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on His Law day and night.

Our English words meditation and meditate come from Latin. The Latin verb *meditari* comes from a word that means to measure. The Hebrew verb used in Psalm 1 doesn't exactly mean the same thing. In fact, it can be a difficult verb to translate, because the verb has the idea of making a low muttering sound. Remember back in Biblical times there was no such thing as silent reading. Silent reading is a more recent invention.<sup>9</sup> There is another similar verb used in the Psalms that is also translated in some cases as to meditate. It has the meaning also of both thinking and speaking. It is a verb of

---

<sup>9</sup> See Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 3.

worship.<sup>10</sup> Other similar verbs would be to delight, to remember, and to search out.<sup>11</sup>

Taking into account some of the cultural changes from the time of Moses and David until today, I think we can still use the word **meditation** and define Biblical meditation as the thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of our understanding, application, and prayer.<sup>12</sup> Unlike pagan meditation it is not the emptying of the mind, but the **filling** of the mind. It is not seeking to be passive but **mentally** active. It is not the creating or altering of reality but **seeking** to live in terms of God's created reality.<sup>13</sup>

I believe that meditation is not really different from studying God's Word.<sup>14</sup> John Calvin wrote on Psalm 1:2, "From this love of the law proceeds constant meditation upon it, which the prophet mentions on the last clause of the verse; for all who are truly actuated by love to the law must feel pleasure in the diligent study of it."<sup>15</sup> Now there are unbelievers who study the Bible and who profit nothing spiritually from it. So we could say that meditation is a studying of God's Word not just to gain intellectual knowledge but for the benefit of one's entire soul and spiritual well being. **Meditation is study for the purpose of finding delight and satisfaction in God, His Word, and His Works.** I do think meditation is different from simply the reading of God's Word. God's Word first must be read, of course. Meditating

---

<sup>10</sup> NIDOTTE, s.v. "שָׁמַח שָׁמַח שָׁמַח," n.p.

<sup>11</sup> "Ancient Psalms and Modern Worship." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 618 (Apr 98): 287.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Whitney, *The Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Whitney, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Contra Whitney who distinguishes the two, where I see basic unity.

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, s.v. Psalm 1:2.



on God's Word begins with reading it, but it can be very possible to simply read without any real thought or reflection. Maurice Roberts said, "It is not the busy skimming over religious books or the careless hastening through religious duties which makes for a strong Christian faith. Rather, it is unhurried meditation on gospel truths and the exposing of our minds to these truths that yields the fruit of sanctified character."<sup>16</sup>

---

Just as to varying degrees we are all busy, so it is the case that we are always meditating. The question is always what are we busy doing and what is it that occupies our thoughts?

I came across some statistics recently about text messages and cell phones. Eighty percent of all 15-18 year-olds own a cell phone. Don't you feel sorry for those twenty percent who don't? And in just the last 3 years, the rate of texting or sending messages with a cell phone has increased 600%. The **average** teen now sends 3,000 text messages a month. Some psychiatrists would classify this as an addiction. Supposedly neuroimaging studies show the same brain areas are stimulated with both texting and the use of heroin.<sup>17</sup>

I don't simply want to blame technology, but technology has made it possible to constantly be occupied and entertained. Our immature culture generally cannot handle this responsibility, younger generations especially. There is a danger then in being constantly occupied by trivia to the great neglect of God's Word and prayer and other much more productive ways of using the mind which God has given us.

---

<sup>16</sup> Quoted by Whitney, 51.

<sup>17</sup> CBS3 from Philadelphia news report. Accessed 8/24/10 from cbs3.com.

**The command of God's Word is that you intentionally seek to fill your thoughts with the truth of God's Word.** Make a diligent effort that instead of just filling your thoughts with news, sports, social media, music, mindless conversations, etc. that you instead meditate on that which is worthy of meditation. There are not that many places in the OT which speak of meditation. But Scripture does show directly four basic areas for our meditation – The Word of God, Creation, Providence, and God's character.<sup>18</sup>

Richard Baxter in his work *The Saints Everlasting Rest* speaks of both solemn mediation and transient meditation. By **solemn** mediation he refers to specific times that are set aside strictly for the purposes of reading God's Word and then meditating on it. By **transient** meditation he refers to meditation in the course of other business and activities where there is opportunity for meditation on the Word of God, creation, Providence, and God's character.<sup>19</sup>

I believe Baxter's advice is in agreement with Psalm 1. The expression day and night cannot literally mean 24-hours in this case. But the phrase certainly must mean that meditating on God's Word is not optional or simply recommended for the Christian to do. The phrase indicates a very high standard is the goal because God's Law Word is of infinite value. It is worthy of specific times set aside for meditation. It is definitely also worth as much thought and attention you can give to it throughout the day.

---

<sup>18</sup> Whitney, footnote 5, 59-60.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2006), chapter 13

Joshua was commanded by God, “This Book of the Law **shall not depart from your mouth**, but you shall **meditate** in it day and night.”

A similar passage would be Deut. 6:6-9.

**Deut. 6:6** “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. **7** You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. **8** You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. **9** You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Don't these verses imply that God's Word is to be a constant source of meditation? Especially as fathers and mothers we have a great responsibility so that we can diligently teach our children. We have the great duty also of helping our children learn to meditate on God's Word.

### **And why should you seek to meditate on God's Word?**

First, it is something you are commanded to do. I can't tell you exactly how much time you must set aside each day or each week, just as I can't tell you how long or much you must pray each day. But God's Word does tell you both directly and indirectly that you need to give time both formal and informal for meditating on God's Word.

Second, there is associated with the command an incredible blessing. Joshua was promised that in both meditating and keeping God's Law, he would be prosperous and would have good success. And what does Psalm 1:3 declare? “He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its

fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.”

The key to both of these passages is understanding what the word prosper means. We like to think of it in terms of great outward success. But true success cannot be defined by man. The prospering here is best understood as a prospering that is caused by and defined by God. The world may not recognize it. The godly person might not even recognize it. But the promise still stands and applies to all who humbly seek to live according to the words of Psalm 1. Prospering is not popularity, fame, or recognition.

James Boice in his commentary shared the story of a missionary couple who lived in China for two years after it was taken over by the communists. The only piece of furniture they had was a stool. They had very little money. Their only source of heat was a small stove which they lit once a day to boil rice for dinner. The fuel for this stove came from dried animal manure that the husband Art Matthews collected from the street. They finally were able to escape and share their story. They called the book they wrote, *Green Leaf in Drought Time*. They lived the truth of Psalm 1 through a difficult time.<sup>20</sup>

I think it is important to focus on both the command and the blessing. Sin keeps us from delighting in God’s Word as we should. It wants us to see the duty as being a burden instead of a delight. So it is good to keep this blessing in mind because it will help you overcome your sin and laziness. Can that which the world offers give this same promise?

### **CONCLUSION:**

---

<sup>20</sup> James Boice, *Psalms*, Vol. 1, 18.

Psalm 1 is not simply a Messianic Psalm only applying to Jesus Christ, but truly our Lord is the only one who ultimately has fulfilled every part of this Psalm.<sup>21</sup> The goal of meditation is that as we think on God's Word we are encouraged and strengthened to follow after our Lord and Savior and to be conformed into His image.

Meditation is not for monks, nuns, mystics, "holy men," spiritual directors, and the like. Meditation is for the godly man and woman, young and old alike, who acknowledge their dependence on Jesus Christ for all things.

For the children in the church I would remind you also of the testimony of Jesus when he was still a boy. Remember when he was in Jerusalem for Passover with his parents and then was separated from them? What did he do during that time? For three days he was in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.<sup>22</sup> If when Jesus was still a child and yet had this testimony, isn't this also a powerful example for you that you also seek to be about your Heavenly Father's business. You also have many things that are good and right to be doing, but seek also to give the attention that you can give to thinking about truly important matters. Seek not to be like some of your friends or others you know who have to be constantly entertained and kept busy or they think they are bored. While you are young, try to keep God's Word in your thoughts as much as you can.

---

<sup>21</sup> James Boice, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 2:41-48.

**Phil. 4:8** Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

**Closing Hymn: 446**

**Benediction – 2 Corinthians 13:11, 14**

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.