

## Hermeneutics- Profiting From The Word

**“Covid-19 has disrupted everything, including (for some people) their engagement with Scripture. According to a recent study in the USA, the first half of 2020 witnessed a fall in Scripture engagement. The largest changes were in the groups classified as “Bible Centered” and “Bible Engaged”. Another new poll indicated that many found it challenging to understand the Scriptures on their own. Whether or not these surveys indicate a widespread reality we must acknowledge that we need constant help to engage with Scripture. This is not merely a matter of discovering a new method, technique or tool. One of the reflections on the survey results is that Christians need to be reminded about why they need to regularly engage with the Bible. But it may be that this should include a reset in the attitudes we bring to Scripture and how we approach it.”**

From “Engaging Afresh With Scripture” Courtesy of ReformationScotland.org

### **Responding to the Present Alarm**

Jonathan Mattull (March 25,2020)

The alarm is blaring. Men hit snooze, some cover their ears, others panic, aimlessly running around with anxiety. The alarm continues.

***The global advent of COVID-19 has arrested the attention of our world.*** Even those who consider this to be nothing more than fearmongering are unable to ignore this news. It is beyond my calling to comment on the medical side of current illness and its progress. Certainly, I encourage all to observe prudence, love of others, and honor of those in authority—civil, medical, and ecclesiastical. It becomes us to give honor to those above us. But I would like to direct our attention to one greater than all of these.

***The alarm that blares is from God. He is overseeing and directing all the details.*** “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done *it?*” (Amos 3:6). The alarm is picked up by his servant embedded in the soul of each of us. ***The conscience speaks to us and raises the question, “Are you ready to appear before God?” Even the possibility—much more the reality—of a pandemic sweeping across the globe cannot but prick our conscience in such a way that speaks to us of our own mortality.***

***Men are shortsighted. Without understating the real impact and hardships associated with a sinking market, the concerns to this point in America have largely been related to self-love. The current alarm has challenged our idols. Our love of wealth and the comfort it has brought us, our lust for entertainment, our independence, getting what we want and when we want it—all of these have suffered a direct blow. Men have grown concerned, frustrated, anxious, and burdened by these temporary impacts. However, these are just the sound waves of the alarm. These are not the danger the alarm sounds.***

Others have become concerned with death. Some might say that this is the real matter. Surely it is closer to the point. However, it is to what death issues us that is the greater matter.

Still others, trumpeting their supposed better vantage point, say that all is a false alarm. “Don’t worry,” they say, “this will pass.” Interestingly, this has come largely from so-called conservatives. It is true, without diminishing the potentially catastrophic impact of COVID-19, eventually its impact will lessen. This has been true of the greatest ravages of our world—the various outbreaks of the plague, the most overwhelming wars, the greatest natural disasters to wipe out whole civilizations. Each of them comes to an end. Some will survive, some will even prosper in the midst of such terrors.

However, all will die. The alarm is not the thing to be concerned about, it is the reality to which the alarm directs our attention. Everyone who is alive at this moment, everyone who contracts this illness, everyone who is immune to it, everyone who avoids it—each and every one of us will die. We may escape this illness. We may pass through this life never knowing another health crisis. We may skip through this world with many blessings around us. Yet, at the appointed time, each of us will die.

Thus the alarm blares. It is not the danger. It however warns of the danger—the real crisis. Many such alarms have sounded in the past. Many such alarms will sound in the future. The alarm reminds us of a fact common to every man, woman, boy, and girl. You must give an account of your life to God: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). ***In light of this alarm, it is profitable to consider several lessons on which we may focus with benefit. While no one will grow in spiritual health by panic or presumption, giving attention to wholesome advice from God’s word would benefit all.***

## **Prepare yourself for the real matter**

While our nation scrambles to stockpile necessary goods to make it a month or two through a potential quarantine, you ought to stockpile necessary goods for entering heaven to the praise of God. These goods are not purchased by our works. They are given freely to all in need who come to Christ. The merit of Christ, his sacrifice and substitutionary atonement, his grace and truth, his fullness to save—these are what we ought to be stockpiling to our souls. While grocery stores, supermarkets, and other suppliers have limits upon their products, Christ limits none of what he offers, but calls upon us to draw from him life for all eternity.

## **Consider God’s word, in Isaiah 55:1–3:**

*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

The same is promised us directly from the lips of our incarnate Savior: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). ***Let us spend at least as much time purchasing the goods of eternal life without money and without price as we do purchasing the goods of temporal life. Take time to read God’s word and exercise faith upon it.***

## **Prize the Bible**

***National and international trials have a way of sobering us for a season. Let that sobriety make us more watchful to search the Scriptures.*** However, don’t be swept away to the unprofitable searching for dates and signs so common to historical panics. Rather, ***search the Scriptures to know God, to know sin, to know salvation, to know holiness. Take up the main things. Feed your soul by the daily, regular, and prayerful intake of his wholesome supply of life. “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).***

## **Pray for true transformation**

***This ought to be true personally and nationally. Anyone with death before them will sober for a season.*** Our hearts race when we nearly collide with another car. Give it ten minutes, and our hearts return to their normal rate. A drunkard swears off drinking when his body is impacted by his excess. Once the consequence is behind him, he returns to his drunkenness. ***Many who are concerned at present will return to their idols and comforts in a month or more.*** For the first time in years, the Sabbath has not witnessed professional sports. Without God's grace, when this constraint is removed, like a dog to its vomit, our society will return to its sin. ***There is a window of concern in our nation and world. Pray that the Lord would pour out his Spirit unto the conversion of sinners. The real need is the regenerative work of God.***

*Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence (Isa. 64:1-3).*

## **Increase your pursuit of God**

***This is needed for believers and unbelievers. Believers will benefit from limiting, if not wholly quitting, their time on social media. At the very least, appoint a limit of time on social media and the intake of news. Imagining your thoughts at the end of your life, which of the following is more likely? "I wish I had spent more time on social media," or, "I wish I had spent more time on eternal things."*** Social media has a place in our lives today, but it ought to have a far more limited place. ***Instead of scouring the news for updates, scour God's word for grace, comfort, guidance, promises, commandments, and Christ. Do so individually, do so in your families, do so in public worship. Prioritize the Lord's ordinances.*** "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Psalm 119:71-72). Affliction brings about deepening desire for the Lord and his word. ***This season of concern ought to multiply our pursuits in secret alone, in private with our families, and in public with our brethren. While the world grasps after its gods, let us worship the true and living God.***

## **Pray for our leaders**

***It is a sign of our corruption that Christians are ready to speak so carelessly against elected officials, medical personnel, and prudent measures to prevent the spread of illness.*** If you happen to disagree with a decision, remember that you are under authority. Wicked men speak against dignitaries. Christians of all people ought to be ready to hold their tongue and honor men who are above us (Rom. 13:1, Titus 3:1, 1 Pet. 2:13–17, and 2 Pet. 2:10). ***Instead of imprudently speaking against our rulers, speak for them before God. Intercede for them.*** Who among us can understand how much information is coming at each one: local, state, and federal? Who can realize the number of decisions they have to make that impact hundreds of thousands of people? Yes, wrong decisions will be made, poor directives will be implemented, but do you think your rejoinder on social media will do anything to establish wisdom? ***You would be far better to close your account with men and open your account with the Lord upon the throne of grace. Pray that our leaders of all political parties would be given wisdom. Pray for favor. Pray for repentance.***

## **Do not speak deridingly of the few that have died**

***Yes, some have exaggerated claims. But it is true that some have died. The death of one sinner is to be lamented. Death itself is an invasion brought by sin into the world.*** Yes, all is under God's control, but death is the testimony of a rebellion and a shame belonging to men. Let us not mock it. Moreover, it is the solemn severing of the cord of life. A wife will lose her husband. A son will lose his father. A father will lose his daughter. Is any of this worthy of our mocking? Some have, others will, enter eternity by this virus. ***Instead of mocking the "few" who have died, let us pray that many would be brought to life by the good news of Christ.***

Christian, comfort yourself by the knowledge that Christ has conquered the grave for you. I have news for you, Christian: you will die. You cannot escape it. If it is by COVID-19, you will likely die in the next few months. If it is not, you will still die. No amount of handwashing, no amount of social distancing, no exercise of the greatest wisdom can prevent this end. While we have a responsibility to our neighbor in love to implement best practices, let us be sure that this will not prevent the ultimate end. Do not misconstrue this for a reason of carelessness. Such carelessness is sin. However, with the greatest care, you will still die. Consider the following question. How many people died who lived through the outbreak of the black plague? All of them. Every single one. Everyone alive right now will die.

However, Christian, Christ has died. Christ has risen. Your greatest need at this hour is to give glory to him in your secret devotion, family worship, and public worship. How will you do this without comfort and peace? Draw comfort from his death and resurrection. ***You are to be a beacon of faith, hope, wisdom, holiness, and love in a crazed world. Let the world focus on worldly things. Let the world cultivate anxiety, presumption, carelessness, and disrespect. Let the world cultivate selfishness and callousness toward others in need. You are a citizen of heaven. Live, walk, and speak as one.*** The only way you can do this is by living by faith in the Son of God. Draw near to him personally; draw near to him in your families; draw near to him with your local church. Rejoice in this, that though you will die, because Christ has died and is risen, you will rise again. Derive comfort from this. Comfort other brethren with this.

*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13–18).*

By trusting the Lord and walking in him, you will be prepared for that of which the alarm sounds. May the alarm that now sounds awaken you to believing and holy diligence. Redeem the time allotted to you. Serve the Lord with fear. Serve your neighbor in love. Avoid a worldly perspective, and, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). May the Lord bless you to trust him, love him, and serve him the length of your days.

## **Thomas Watson's Directions For Profitable Bible Reading**

Dane K. Jóhannsson  
Lead Pastor, Agros Reformed Baptist Church

The Holy Scriptures, being what they are (namely, “a message from Jehovah”, “a golden epistle sent to us from God”, “our Magna Carta for heaven” and “the stamp of God Himself”, we should therefore see that it is our greatest “care to get some spiritual remuneration and profit” from our reading of it.

These are the words of the eminent puritan Thomas Watson in a sermon titled, *“How We May Read the Scriptures With Most Spiritual Profit.”*

Watson was a master of practical, experiential religion. For him, the Christian faith was not simply theoretical, but thoroughly practical.

As Christians we must see what a blessing it is to have the Scriptures. So many millions of Christians throughout history were without access to the Scriptures and remain so in our own day. We do not have this problem. We have the Scriptures even on our cell phones, which will even read them to us. We have a much different problem, a problem that has always existed among Bible readers (but I argue is in greater measure today), namely, a lack of skill in profiting from the Scriptures.

Even those of us who attempt to make it our daily habit to read God’s Word are often hampered by our lack of facility in profiting from it. ***What does it mean to “profit” from the Scriptures? It means to improve them, to apply them to ourselves, to not merely read their words on the page, but to take them unto our souls for life, to live them out, to experience their practical power in our daily lives.*** It means to get a return on the investment of time spent reading them.

The Words of God in the Scriptures are ***“life unto those that find them, And health to all their flesh.”*** (Pr. 4:22) Jesus prays the Father that we might be sanctified in the truth, adding ***“thy word is truth.”*** (John 17:17) The Psalmist declared ***“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”*** (Ps. 119:103) Furthermore, Jesus commands us to ***“Search the scriptures”*** (John 5:39), for in them we have life. ***We are commanded to have our minds transformed that they might be conformed to the image of Christ and not of the world*** (Rom. 12:2). This is done by giving ourselves to the reading and improving of God’s Word.

***In Watson’s day, Christians also struggled to spiritually profit from the Scriptures. They might read the Scriptures, but they came away from their reading no different than when they came to it. In this sermon he offered some remedies.*** Watson proves himself to be a trustworthy guide.

***Let us go through his list of directions for profiting in Scripture, and make some brief comments.***

## **Thomas Watson's directions for improving our reading of Scripture:**

### **1. "If you would profit by reading, remove those things that will hinder your profiting." (pg.115)**

Such as "the love of every sin", which acts as poison to our souls and neutralizes the medicine of the Word we take by reading (pg.115). *Watson urges us to remove "those thorns which will choke the Word read", such as, the cares of this world...which can cause us to be so taken up in our minds with secular employments that we "can scarce find time to read", and even when we do, our eyes will be "upon the Bible" but our hearts "upon the world."* (pg.116)

### **2. "If you would profit, prepare your hearts before the reading of the Word." (pg.116)**

Watson adds that "the heart is an instrument which needs to be put in tune." To do so *we must summon "our thoughts together to attend to the solemn work we are going about."* We are not reading the morning paper, or our friend's Twitter feed, but God's holy and infallible Word, given for our eternal benefit.

### **3. "Read the Scriptures with reverence; think about every line you read; God is speaking to you." (pg. 116)**

When a person of great importance speaks with us we give them *our full and undivided attention*. How much more when the Lord of Glory is speaking to us about matters of our salvation!

### **4. "Read the books of Scripture in order." (pg.117)**

Watson adds, "*Order is a help to memory*. We do not begin a friend's letter in the middle." Whatever reading plan you employ, starting in Genesis and reading through Revelation in order is always an easy one to follow.

### **5. "Get a right understanding of Scripture" (pg.117)**

The psalmist prayed, "*Give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments.*" (Ps. 119:73) Understanding the words on the page as English is not enough, we must understand their meaning. We must not only read what God says, but comprehend it. "*The knowledge of the sense of the Scriptures*", writes Watson, "*is the first step to profit*. In the law, Aaron was first to light the lamps and then to burn the incense; the lamp of the understanding must be first lighted before the affections can be inflamed. Without knowledge the Scripture is a sealed book." *We obtain understanding of Scripture's meaning by "comparing Scriptures [with other Scriptures], by conferring with others, [and] by using the best commentaries."*



**6. “Read the Word with seriousness.” (pg.117)**

***We cannot expect to profit from the Word if we casually and cursorily read it***, as one might meander through the articles in a magazine at a doctor’s office. We must read them with seriousness, acknowledging the importance of what we are reading. The Word is not an invitation to a third grader’s birthday party, but an invitation to eternal life. “Some of have light, feathery spirits”, says Watson, “they run over the most weighty truths [in Scripture] with haste.” (pg.118) ***Many people attempt to see how much they can read or how quickly they can read it rather than to see how much they can comprehend or how quickly they can apply it.***

**7. “Labor to remember what you read.” (pg.118)**

***Satan labors to take the Word from our mind the moment it enters. We must labor to retain it. Watson rights, “If the Word stays not in the memory, it cannot profit.”*** Watson’s next comment could not be more relevant, “Some can better remember a piece of news than a line of Scripture.” Be as the Psalmist, ***“I remembered Thy judgments of old.” (Ps. 119:52)***

**8. “Meditate upon what you read.” (pg.118)**

Again, the Psalmist serves as an example, ***“I will meditate in Thy precepts.” (Ps. 119:15)*** “In meditation there must be a fixing of the thoughts upon the object” writes Watson. ***We must fix our minds upon what the Scriptures say and then turn them over in our heart until they meld with our spirit. “Reading brings a truth into our mind, meditation brings it into our heart.”*** Watson concludes this section with these words, “Meditation is the bellows of the affection. ***‘While I was musing the fire burned.’ (Ps. 39:3)*** The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.” ***Do not simply take the Scriptures into your mind by reading, but into your heart by meditation and into your hands by practice.***

**9. “Come to the reading of the Scripture with humble hearts.” (pg. 119)**

Watson says that we must “acknowledge how unworthy [we] are that God should reveal Himself in His Word to [us].” ***Humility is the key to exaltation. Those who are taken highest in spiritual attainments are those who realize how low they are.*** David had, ***“more understanding than all my teachers” (Ps. 119:99)***; but he was humble, ***“I am a worm, and no man.” (Ps. 22:6)***

**10. “Give credence to the Word written.” (pg. 119)**

In other words, *believe it*. Do not stand skeptically over it, but believingly under it. **“Believe it to be of God,” says Watson, “see the name of God in every line.”** He exhorts us to, “believe the Scriptures to be divinely inspired (**2Tim. 3:16**). Who but God could reveal the great doctrines of the Trinity, the atonement of Jesus Christ for sinners, the resurrection? Whence should the Scriptures come if not from God?” Unbelief destroys the effectuality of the Word read and causes us to profit nothing from it. “If you will profit by the Word, you must believe it to be of God. Remember, that the Israelites in the wilderness perished because they did not believe. **“The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith.” (Heb. 4:2)**

**11. “Highly prize the Scriptures.” (pg. 120)**

David declared, **“The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.” (Ps. 119:72)** **What greater possession have we as Christians than God’s Word?** It is better to lose a kingdom than the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the breeder and feeder of our graces, the hope and strength of our faith. **What else do we have but Christ, and where else do we meet Christ but in the pages of Scripture?**

**12. “Get an ardent love to the Word.” (pg. 121)**

**“Consider how I love Thy precepts.” (Ps. 119:159)** He who loves his business shall have great success in it. **He who loves his study will master his subject. Watson writes, “The Spirit is God’s love token; the Word, His love letter; how doth one rejoice to read over his friend’s letter! The Word written is a divine treasury or storehouse;** in it is truth scattered as pearls to adorn the inner man of the heart. The Word written is the true manna which has all sorts of sweet taste in it; it is a sovereign elixir; it gives wine to them of a heavy heart.” The Bible is our only comfort, our best guide. David said, **“This is my comfort in my affliction: for Thy Word hath quickened me.” (Ps. 119:50)**

**13. “Come to the reading of the Word with honest hearts.” (pg. 122)**

Namely, to come to the Word with a heart “willing to know the whole counsel of God. A good heart would not have any truth concealed.” **We must be willing to take God at His Word, and His Word in its entirety. We cannot pick and choose what we wish to receive, but must rather receive it in whole.** We must read the Word with a heart that is honest, a heart which reads that it might be made better by the reading. **“The Word is a medium and method of sanctification,” says Watson, “and we come to it not only to illuminate but to consecrate us.”**

14. “Learn to apply Scripture; take every word as if spoke to yourselves.” (pg. 122)

*Do not read the Scriptures with someone else in mind, thinking, “So and so would really benefit from this passage.” Rather, Watson tells us, “When the Word thunders against sin, think thus: God means my sins; when it presseth any duty, God intends me in this. Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it concerned only those who lived in the time when it was written; but if you intend to profit by the Word, bring it home to yourselves. A medicine will do no good unless it be applied.”* (pg. 123)

15. “Observe the preceptive part of the Word, as well as the promissory.” (pg. 123)

*We must not only give attention to those portions of the Bible which give sweet promises to us, but also those parts that tell us our duty.* “The precepts carry duty in them, like the veins which carry the blood; the promises carry comfort, like the arteries which carry the spirit. Make use of the precepts to direct you, the promises to comfort you.”

16. “Let your thoughts dwell upon the most material passages of Scripture.” (pg. 123)

*Although all Scripture is profitable for us, “yet some parts of it may have a greater emphasis, and be more lively and pungent....Mind the great things of the law (Hos. 8:12).* They who read only to satisfy their curiosity, do rather busy than profit themselves.”

17. “Compare yourselves with the Word.” (pg. 123)

Let us see “how the Scripture and [our] hearts agree ... Are [our] hearts, as it were, a transcript and counterpart of Scripture? *Is the Word copied out into our hearts?* The Word calls for humility; are you not only *humbled*, but *humble*? The Word calls for regeneration (**John 3:7**); have you a change of heart – not only a moral and partial change, but a spiritual?” Etc.

18. “Take special notice of those Scriptures which speak to your particular case.” (pg. 124)

Do you feel heavy with lust? Cling to those passages which deal with lust, its sinfulness, its punishment and its remedy. Do you lack assurance? Bring those passages into your heart which deal with God’s promises of love and preservation over His saints. *“In reading, observe those Scriptures which do touch upon your particular case. Although all the Bible must be read, yet those texts which point most directly to your condition, be sure to put a special star upon.”* (pg.125)

19. **“Take special notice of the examples in Scripture; make the examples of others [to be] living sermons to you.” (pg. 125)**

***Observe the examples in Scripture of God’s judgments upon sinners, His mercy upon His saints, His dealings with man, and man’s responses to God.*** Learn how those before us triumphed and failed, and apply it to yourself.

20. **“Leave not off reading in the Bible till you find your hearts warmed.” (pg. 125)**

***Watson writes, “Read the Word not only as a history, but strive to be affected with it. Let it not only inform you, but inflame you ...***

***Go not from the Word till you can say as those disciples, ‘Did not our heart burn within us.’ (Luke 24:23)”*** Do not read the Word as a mere religious discipline, rather read the Word expecting to meet with God and be taught of Christ.

21. **“Set upon the practice of what you read.” (pg. 125)**

***“I have followed Thy commandments.” (Ps. 119:66)*** Do not leave the Word where you read it, but ***take it up into your heart and walk it out in practice.*** ***“Christians should be walking Bibles”*** says Watson. For David the Word was ***“a lamp unto his feet.” (Ps. 119:105)*** “It was not only a light to his eyes to see by, but to his feet to walk by...Reading without practice will be but a torch to light men to hell.” (pg. 126)

22. **“Make use of Christ’s prophetic office.” (pg. 126)**

***Christ is Prophet, Priest and King. He is Prophet to teach us God’s will, Priest to reconcile us to God and King to rule over us. In His prophetic office He teaches us what we are to believe about God and how we are to live for Him.*** “Such as would be proficient in Scripture must [have] Christ to be their teacher.” It was Christ who opened the minds of the disciples to ***“understand the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:45)*** Those who desire to profit in the Word must still come to Christ for understanding.

23. **“Tread often upon the threshold of the sanctuary.” (pg. 126)**

***By this Watson means that we must often attend the means of grace in preaching. We must sit under the sound preaching of our pastors if we are to profit in what we read. What we read in the Word will be explained and applied in the pulpit. Ministers, says Watson, are earthen pitchers, “but these pitchers have lamps within them, to light souls in the dark.”***

#### **24. “Pray that God will make you profit.” (pg. 126)**

David prayed, **“Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.” (Ps. 119:18)** “Pray to God,” writes Watson, “to take off the veil from the Scriptures, that you may understand them; and the veil of your heart, that you may believe them.” (pg. 127) We must come to the Lord in our Scripture reading as the father in the gospels came to Jesus, **“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” (Mark 9:24)** ***If we are to have any hope of profiting in the Scriptures, even after observing all of Watson’s previous directions, we must anchor the whole endeavor in prayer. Without God’s aid we shall never understand, and His aid is obtained only by fervent prayer.***

Dear believers, if we are to profit in our Scripture reading, we would do well to heed Watson’s directions. The reading of Scripture must never become a common thing, but must remain a sanctified action. There is nothing more profitable to our souls than the reading of God’s Word, let us seek to make it worthwhile.

### **How Should We Meditate? Let the Puritans Be Your Teachers**

by Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Perhaps nowhere are the Puritans so helpful as in offering guidelines for the process of spiritual, biblical meditation. They said to begin by asking the Holy Spirit for assistance. Pray for the power to harness your mind and focus the eyes of faith on this task.

As Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) exhorted, ***“I would have you pray unto God to enlighten your understandings, to quicken your devotion, to warm your affections, and so to bless that hour unto you, that by the meditation of holy things you may be made more holy, you may have your lusts more mortified, and your graces more increased, you may be the more mortified to the world, and the vanity of it, and lifted up to Heaven, and the things of Heaven.”***

***Next, the Puritans said to read the Scriptures, then select a verse or doctrine upon which to meditate.*** Be sure to pick out relatively easy subjects to meditate on at the beginning, they advised. For example, begin with various attributes of God rather than the doctrine of the Trinity; consider subjects one at a time.

***In addition, select subjects that are most applicable to your present circumstances and that will be most beneficial for your soul.*** For example, if you are spiritually dejected, meditate upon Christ's willingness to receive poor sinners and pardon all who come to Him. If your conscience troubles you, meditate on God's promises to give grace to the penitent. If you are financially afflicted, meditate on God's wonderful providences to those in need.

***Then, memorize the selected verse(s), or some aspect of the subject, to stimulate meditation, to strengthen faith, and to serve as a means of divine guidance.***

Next, fix your thoughts on the Scripture or a scriptural subject without prying further than what God has revealed. ***Use your memory to focus on all that Scripture has to say about the subject. Consider what sermons and edifying books say about the topic.***

***Like Mary, ponder these things in your heart.*** Think of illustrations, similitudes, and opposites in your mind to enlighten your understanding and enflame your affections. Then let judgment assess the value of what you are meditating upon.

Here is an example from Calamy. If you would meditate on the subject of sin, "Begin with the description of sin; proceed to the distribution of sin; consider the original and cause of sin, the cursed fruits and effects of sin, the adjuncts and properties of sin in general and of personal sin in particular, the opposite of sin—grace, the metaphors of sin, the titles given to sin, all that the Scripture saith concerning sin."

***Remember that reading Scripture, meditation, and prayer belong together. As one discipline wanes, turn to another. Persevere; do not surrender to Satan by abandoning your task. Next, stir up affections, such as love, desire, hope, courage, gratitude, zeal, and joy, to glorify God. Hold soliloquies with your own soul. Include complaints against yourself because of your inabilities and shortcomings and spread before God your spiritual longings. Believe that He will help you.***

***Examine yourself for your own growth in grace. Reflect on the past and ask, "What have I done?" Look to the future, asking, "What am I resolved to do, by God's grace?"*** Do not ask these questions legalistically, but out of holy excitement and opportunity to grow in Spirit-worked grace. Remember, "Legal work is our work; meditation work is sweet work."

**Follow Calamy's advice, "If ever you would get good by the practice of meditation, you must come down to particulars;** and you must so meditate of Christ, as to apply Christ to thy soul; and so meditate of Heaven, as to apply Heaven to thy soul." Live out your meditation (Josh. 1:8). Let meditation and practice walk hand in hand. Meditation without practice will only increase your condemnation.

**Next, turn your applications into resolutions.** "Let your resolutions be firm and strong, not [mere] wishes, but resolved purposes or Determinations," wrote Thomas White (c. 1577–c. 1610). Make your resolutions commitments to fight against your temptations to sin. Write down your resolutions. **Above all, resolve that you will spend your life "as becomes one that hath been meditating of holy and heavenly things."**  
**Commend yourself, your family, and everything you own to the hands of God with "sweet resignation."**

**Conclude with prayer, thanksgiving, and Psalm singing.** "Meditation is the best beginning of prayer, and prayer is the best conclusion of meditation," wrote George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673). **Watson said, "Pray over your meditations. Prayer sanctifies every thing; without prayer they are but unhallowed meditations; prayer fastens meditation upon the soul; prayer is a tying a knot at the end of meditation that it doth not slip;** pray that God will keep those holy meditations in your mind for ever, that the savour of them may abide upon your hearts." Thank the Lord for assistance in meditation, or else, Richard Greenham warned, "we shall be buffeted in our next meditation."

As God's Word, the Psalms are a proper subject for meditation. As a "complete anatomy of the soul" (Calvin), they afford abundant material and guidance for meditation. As prayers (Ps. 72:20) and as thanksgiving (Ps. 118:1), they are both a proper vehicle for meditation and a fitting way to conclude it. John Lightfoot (1602–1675) said, "Singing God's praise is a work of the most meditation of any we perform in public. It keeps the heart longest upon the thing spoken. Prayer and hearing pass quick from one sentence to another; this sticks long upon it."

**Finally, do not shift too quickly from meditation to engagement with things of this world,** lest, as Thomas Gouge (1605–1681) advised, "thereby thou suddenly quench that spiritual heat which hath in that exercise been kindled in thine heart." Remember that one hour spent in such meditation is "worth more than a thousand sermons," James Ussher (1581–1656) said, "and this is no debasing of the Word, but an honour to it."