

Meditation: What it is . . .

Website note: In light of the contemplative spiritual movement's influence over evangelicalism among its publishers, educational institutions, churches and pastors, this writing by Dr. Griffith-Thomas is reproduced. From Scripture he informs seekers about what meditation is. In discussion about contemplative spirituality many of us have warned, and justifiably so, about the dangers of meditation and what contemplation is not. Yet in this chapter titled "Mediation" written a century ago, Thomas in his book *Grace and Power* reminds seeking readers about what Godly meditation is. Read this and be blessed!

IX

MEDITATION [1]

By W.H. Griffith-Thomas [2]

The spiritual life which becomes ours, and is constantly realized by means of Justification, Sanctification and Consecration, must be maintained and sustained if it is to grow and increase in vigor, power, and blessing. Spiritual life in the true sense of the term is far more than spiritual existence; it implies strength, vigor, progress, joy, and satisfaction. "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). [3] This abundant life is the only life that will really influence others and fully realize the will of God.

For the maintenance of spiritual life certain conditions are necessary. As with physical life, so with spiritual life, we have to use means and fulfill requirements, and this, not intermittently, but as the habit of our life. It is with the chief means or methods that we shall be concerned in this and the remaining chapters. Taking an illustration from the body, let us bear in mind that for the maintenance and furtherance of spiritual life we require good food, pure air, and regular exercise. To the first of these we now turn our attention, when we speak of meditation. The "good food" is, of course, the food of the Word of God, for as food builds up the tissues of the body, repairs waste, and preserves us in health, so the Word of God is the complete food of the soul. It is noteworthy that we have it brought before us in the Bible as milk for babes (I Pet. 2:2; I Cor. 3:2), as strong meat for adults (Heb. 5:14), affording us the necessary constituents of spiritual nutrition, and as honey (Ps. 19:10) suggesting the pleasure and enjoyment of dessert in addition to the food actually necessary for life and work (Jer. 15:16).

Coming now more closely to the details of this important element of spiritual life, we notice:

I. THE SUBJECTS OF MEDITATION

One of these is the *Word of God*, that revelation of God's will which is enshrined in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. The counsel to Joshua emphasized this (Josh. 1:8), and the

description of the truly blessed man makes meditation a prominent feature (Ps. 1:2-3). The great Bible Psalm (119.) has at least seven references to meditation, while the value and necessity of the Word of God to the godly life is the outstanding feature of the whole psalm. Let it be clearly and constantly borne in mind that no true Christian living is possible apart from meditation on the Word of God.

Meditation is also to be exercised on the *Works of God*. The Psalmist realized the value of this form of meditation (Ps. 105:2 and 143:5). The works of God in Creation, the actions and activities of God in history and general providence, the dealing of God in our own experience and in particular providences, are all fit subjects for meditation, and should all have their place in our thought and life.

But above and beyond all, our meditation should be centered upon *God Himself*. "My meditation of Him" (Ps. 104:34). "I will meditate on Thee" (Ps. 63:6). Our use of God's Word and God's Works is only intended to lead us up to the consideration and contemplation of God Himself, and on Him we must ever fix our gaze. God first, God everywhere, is the secret of the "highest" Christian life.

It is important to notice that meditation is no where associated with ourselves, or our sin, as the subjects. Such an attitude of introspection would be as unhealthy as it would prove discouraging and disheartening. To be occupied with ourselves is dangerous; to be occupied with our sin is depressing, for we cannot fathom either the treachery and deceitfulness of our hearts, or gauge the depths of our depravity. But if our hearts are led out from themselves and fastened on God, then "in His light we shall see light" on ourselves, and see ourselves as we really are, while the same gaze will also lead us to the secret of grace and blessing in God Himself. It is sometimes said, "For one look at self, take ten looks at Christ." But why not take eleven looks at Christ and none at self? It might be infinitely more profitable.

II. THE CHARACTER OF MEDITATION

How shall we meditate? What does it mean?

It must be an individual and personal meditation. Let us look well and long at this text, made as clear as the printer's art can emphasize its teaching: "My meditation of Him" (Ps. 104:34). Do we see the point? "My" meditation; not some one else's. The great, the primary, the essential point, is first hand meditation of God's Word as the secret of Christian living. Who does not remember Dr. Andrew Murray's definition of milk as "food that has passed through the digestion of another." And so all the little books of devotion, the helps to holiness, the series of manuals of thought and teaching, including these very lines, represent food that has passed through the spiritual digestion of others before it comes to us, and has to be used as such. Do we then decry all these? God forbid; we establish them, but only in their place and for their purpose. If they are put first, to the exclusion of the Bible alone, and the Bible day by day, they become dangerous and disastrous, crutches that prevent vigorous exercise, and that will inevitably lead to spiritual senility. If they are put second they can become delightful and helpful, inspirations to further thought, and suggestions of deeper blessings. When we have had our own meditation of the Word we are the better able to enjoy what God teaches us through others of His children, and especially those whom God honors with special gifts of teaching. So it must be first, foremost, and constantly, "My meditation of Him."

Meditation must be real. It must be “the meditation of my heart” (Ps. 49:3), and “the heart” in Scripture means the centre of the moral being, including the intellect, the emotions, and the will. It implies that we come to the Word to be searched thoroughly, guided definitely, and strengthened effectually. It is not a time for dreamy, vague imaginings, but for living, actual blessing, whether in the form of guidance, warning, comfort, or counsel.

Meditation will also be practical. What are its stages or elements? *First*, the careful reading of the particular passage or subject, thinking over its real and original meaning. *Next*, a hearty turning of it into prayer for mercy and grace that its teaching may become part of my life. *Next*, a sincere transfusion of it into a resolution that my life shall reproduce it. *Lastly*, a whole-hearted surrender to, and trust in God for power to practice it forthwith, and constantly, throughout the day. It is to be noted that the word “meditate,” in our English version, represents two Hebrew words—one meaning to “muse” or “think,” and the other implying “speech,” or audible thinking (see Ps. 5:1). These two elements should always be blended; thinking over the Word, its meaning, its application, its message, and then talking to God about it, in confession of past failures, in prayer for future blessing, in fellowship in present joys or needs. Thus will meditation become so practical, so vital, so blessed that we shall find in it our chief joy, and our indispensable daily power for service.

III. THE OUTCOME OF MEDITATION

We have necessarily anticipated this in some degree, but let us note more definitely a threefold result of meditation.

The first is *Spiritual Strength*. When we study carefully the description of the blessed man in Psalm 1, we see very clearly his spiritual strength by reason of his meditation. He is as the tree as contrasted with the chaff—steadfast and dependable, because rooted in the strength of God. Why did St. John say the young men were strong? Because the Word of God was abiding in them (I John 2:12-14). When do none of the steps of the righteous slide? When the law of God is in the heart (Ps. 37:31). When do we not sin against God? When His Word is hidden in our hearts (Ps. 119:11).

Then comes *Spiritual Success*. Twice at least is “prosperity” associated with meditation of God’s Word (Josh. 1:8-9; Ps. 1:2-3). And even if we translate “do wisely,” instead of “prosper,” we get the same idea, for it is abundantly evident from the New Testament that spiritual wisdom and perception come from the knowledge of God’s Word and fellowship with Him (Phil. 1:9-10; Col. 1:9). All Christian experience testifies to blessing, power, and prosperity in spiritual life and service in exact proportion to meditation of the Word of God.

Not least is *Spiritual Satisfaction*. “My meditation of Him shall be sweet.” Is it not so? “How sweet are Thy words to my taste” (Ps. 119:103).

The physical enjoyment of food and dessert is but a faint illustration of the joy of the Word in the heart. “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; they were to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jer. 15:16). “I rejoice at Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil” (Ps. 119:62). If we look at the titles of the Scriptures given in Psalm 119 such as ordinances, statutes, judgments, we see that they are words which, as a rule, we associate with what is dry and dull and

uninteresting! Yet these very statutes were a delight, a joy, a supreme satisfaction to the Psalmist, and so it ever is if our hearts are right with God. "How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God" (Ps. 139:17).

IV. THE TIMES OF MEDITATION

There is, of course, a sense in which our thoughts should ever be turning to God and His Truth. "All the day long is my study in it" (Ps. 119:97). The attitude of our souls, if in a healthy state, will ever tend to the recollection of God whenever the opportunity occurs.

But this attitude is only possible by means of stated times for meditation. These are the occasions for providing fuel for daily use. Now, there can be no doubt that early morning is the very best time for this. The body is rested, the brain is free and unencumbered, and hence the receptive powers are more available. It may not be possible to spend much time; but let no one be discouraged because of this, for quality is the desideratum, and that can be put into even five minutes. Let the attempt be made with five minutes on a single text, or phrase of a text, and the exercise will soon justify itself, and a hunger will spring up for five minutes more! And it will soon be found how marvelously we are able to do without that extra five minutes' sleep! Let but the time, long or short, be well spent, and the fruit will be quick to appear and lasting in effect.

Another time mentioned in the Scripture is "eventide" (Gen. 24:63), that time of twilight, "twixt the lights," which often brings a quiet moment or two to many a life. When the toil of the day is approaching its close, or is over, or between the work of the afternoon and any evening duties, there often steals over the soul a sense of God's nearness and a peace of heart that tells of the Spirit's presence. Then is the time for dropping the book or paper, and for allowing the soul to listen to God and to speak to Him. If our circumstances allow it, and, like Isaac, we can go "into the field" for our meditation, there will be an added delight, as in the quiet of the gathering shadows, broken only by the rustling of trees, or the evensong of the birds, we stand face to face with God, and allow His Word to have "free course" in us and "be glorified."

Once more, night is often an opportunity for meditation (Ps. 63:6), and if so it be, let us use it well. Before retiring to rest, let the heart be bathed in the water of the Word (Eph. 5:26), and then if "in the night we sleepless lie," the Word will "heavenly thoughts supply." In any case, however, and whatever our circumstances, we must find time, and make time, and take time for this blessed exercise of meditation. And it is marvelous how easy is that apparently impossible task of *making time*.

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of the meditation of Scripture for the maintenance and progress of the spiritual life. The Bible enters into every part of our experience, because it is the revelation of God on which our life is necessarily based and to which it should make a constant response. And for this reason no life can be either safe or strong that does not put meditation of Scripture in the forefront. It should be with us as with the Psalmist, "I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies" (Ps. 119:59), and with the Prophet, "Thy words were found and I did eat them: and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of Hosts" (Jer. 15:16).

Our contact with the Word of God will thus be an exact test of our discipleship and character.

The Bible is the mirror in which we see ourselves as we are and as God sees us, and it must be evident that if we never use, or rarely use, the mirror we cannot be sure of our real state before God. Christianity is largely a matter of the condition of soul, stress is laid on character, and character is power. Now, character needs solitude for growth; solitude is “the mother country of the strong”; but solitude without the Bible tends towards morbidity, while with the Bible it is a guarantee of vitality and vigor.

Let us, then, be sure that amid the hurry, flurry, scurry, and worry of life we “take time to be holy” by means of meditation on God in His Word. Let not even Christian work rob us of this secret of true service and blessing. Let the superficiality of many lives warn us “to give attention to reading,” to meditate on these things, “that our profiting may appear to all,” and also glorify God. Like the Psalmist, let us be able to *remember* past seasons of blessed meditation (Ps. 119:23), to *realize* present seasons of equally blessed privilege (Ps. 119:97) and to *resolve* that the future shall also be full of such seasons of life and health and joy (Ps. 119:15).

Notes

[1] Dr. W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Grace and Power: Some Aspects of the Spiritual Life* (London, GB: Pickering & Inglis, 1916): 153-163.

[2] The author: Educated at King’s College, London, and Christ Church, Oxford, and ordained to the Anglican ministry in 1886, W.H. Griffith Thomas, D.D. (1861-1924) served as Vicar at St. Paul’s for eleven years and then Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, for five years. In 1910 he accepted a professorship at Wycliffe College in Toronto, Canada for nine years. In 1919 he moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from where he travelled extensively and ministered all over the world. He became known as an outstanding Keswick Bible teacher, preacher and lecturer. Through his devotional commentaries—*Genesis, Romans, The Apostle Peter, The Apostle John, Hebrews*—and many other devotional works, including *Grace and Power*, he became equally known as a writer throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. Together with the American Presbyterian evangelist Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) and Canadian Presbyterian missionary-pastor A.B. Winchester (1858-1943), he helped to found Dallas Theological Seminary though because of death, never taught there.

[3] With but minor alterations (Scripture references changed from Roman to English numerals), this chapter appears as Thomas wrote it.