

The Essential Need for Bible Meditation

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If you'll open your Bibles to the book of Joshua 1. I'm going to read verses 1-9, and then we'll just focus in on one verse. Joshua 1 The reading of God's Word. "After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 'Moses, My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites from the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous. Be careful to do according to all the word that Moses, my servant, commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of 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. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.'"

Let's pray. Oh God, You are a good God. God, You've done so much, and You know our needs. You say You know our needs before we ask. So, Lord, I know even in our asking we won't even ask sufficiently, because our need is so great. But I thank You that You're a good Father Who desires to give good things to His children. We ask in faith, believing You are able, and believing You are willing. Lord, give to us help now - help to understand, help to see, Lord, the grace and unction of the Spirit to come, to work in our midst as my brothers have prayed. Lord, to do a work of transformation in the heart of Your people. And God, maybe even to draw some people unto You. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.

I'll tell you after hearing Brother Don preach, it makes me just want to stop and not preach right now. Just to sit and really think about what you just preached, brother. That's what the Word of God preached should do. It should stop you in your tracks and make you sit there and ponder and think. I'm going to focus today on v. 8.

Beloved, if you're a genuine Christian, I want you to know this for sure: You are more than forgiven and reconciled to God. You have been made new. Not in any way to minimize Christ's work of reconciliation that He accomplished for us. All praise be to His name for that. But you need to know you're more than reconciled. You're a new creation. And this newness of life - it's a work of the Holy Spirit. It's a transforming work. We call it regeneration, or being born again, or born from above. You and I did not work for that. In fact, it's what we call a monergistic work. It means there is One at work, and that One is the Holy Spirit. In regeneration, you are worked upon, or within. But you didn't do anything. It is not you and God working together to make you new. It's not you saying, "I'll turn over a new leaf, and God, You do Your part." It is

God taking a person walking this way - dead in sin - and regenerating them and turning them around and giving them newness of life.

Now because we have been made new, we have new hearts. We have spiritual life now. We have a living and active relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. We can understand truth - something we couldn't do before. And with the new heart and life comes new desire. We have new desires for God. We have new desires for His glory. We have new desire for His will to be done in our lives and the world around us. We have desire for His Word and truth. And we have a desire for His people. Many of those new desires as a direction of life are the evidences that you've been truly converted. For one to say, I love God and have not those new desires and new ways about their life, can have no assurance that they've been born of God. As a Christian also, you want to please the Lord, and glorify the Lord, you want to know Him more. You want more intimacy. You want to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

I'm believing you want those things. I'm believing what we sang earlier, "Speak, O Lord..." We're asking Him to do that work here in our midst as the Word is preached, that we would be strengthened and renewed and stirred. I'm believing you want that. Many of you drove great distances, spent money, you're giving up work and time to do other things. So I'm believing that you want more intimacy with God. I'm believing you want to be more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and set apart for His purposes.

But we do have competing desires, don't we, that tempt us daily? We are still susceptible to temptation even though we've been made new. And we have responsibility, beloved. We have responsibility. In that work of regeneration, you were acted upon. But in this growing of intimacy and conformity to Jesus Christ, we have a responsibility. Still utterly, totally dependent upon the Spirit. Without Him we can do nothing. But we do have responsibility. We will not grow in intimacy and conformity apart from the power of the Spirit. But know this, He does not do that work in you apart from you. He does not bypass you in this work. You're a part of it.

I'm sure many of you have read Whitney's book, "The Disciplines of the Christian Life." He goes through some of what he calls the means of grace. Things that God has given to us that we work in and we have responsibility in, in regards to this growing of intimacy and growing into conformity. He mentions things like prayer as Brother Don mentioned. He mentions things like service with the saints or stewardships, Bible intake and worship. And beloved, we must acknowledge the means of grace that God works through. It's not enough for you to say I want intimacy. I want conformity. Whitney talks about these waterfalls of grace, that if you say I want that, then you have to subject yourself willingly, knowingly, to this waterfall of grace that God works in and through. And if we ignore the means of grace, then we should not be surprised when we're not growing; when we're not growing in intimacy.

One vital thing as we begin to talk about responsibility; as we approach things like spiritual disciplines, we must be continually reminding ourselves what we're not talking about. When we talk about spiritual disciplines and growth in intimacy and growth in conformity, we are not talking about earning God's favor. Jesus Christ, through His death, burial, and resurrection and our union to Him through faith, has eternally secured God's favor towards us as His children. We are not earning or even improving upon God's love for us. God's love for His people came from within Him. It was set upon them despite them. And His love for His children is a perfect love. It cannot be improved upon. You cannot pray enough to earn God's favor or

read enough to earn God's favor. If you studied from now until you died, He would not love you more. Because His love is perfected towards you. It is not based on you. It is not based on your performance. It's called grace. We should rejoice that we don't have to earn God's love and favor.

This does not mean, though, that He is indifferent to how we live. The Scriptures do teach that we can grieve the Holy Spirit. We must understand the basis of His love and acceptance, again though, is not rooted in our performance. All that said though, beloved, reading, meditating, prayer, the disciplines of grace, are the means that God works through to magnify and reveal Himself to you more and more. To show you His promises more and more. And they are essential in our intimacy and the growing in grace and understanding, in the growing of our faith and our conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

My desire, my prayer, for you in this conference: One, if you're lost, my prayer for you is that you would be saved during this time. My prayer if you are saved by God's grace, is that you would grow in intimacy and understanding and conformity to Jesus Christ. That's my desire for you. I know that's Nate's, Mack's, Don's desire. If you are in a local church, and I'm hoping that you are, that is your pastor's desire, that you mature in these things and that you grow in these things.

Let's read verse 8 again. "This Book of 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. For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success." I want to focus in on biblical meditation. This will, obviously, in this short amount of time not be all inclusive. It will be more of an introduction and an exhortation. I want to look at four aspects of biblical meditation. First, we just want to understand what is it. So, we'll attempt to define biblical meditation. Second, we will look at what is the focus of meditation. What is the focus of meditation? You could say: the object of meditation. Third, what is the frequency of meditation? The frequency. And fourth, what is the fruit? So, we'll define it, and then the focus of it, the frequency of it, and then the fruit of meditation.

Let's start with what is meditation. When we say the word "meditation," for many of us, it's not a word that we use very often. And sadly, it's something that we practice even less. We often associate the word meditation with things like Eastern mysticism. We've let our culture take this word away from us. We think about people maybe in weird poses. Maybe chanting things. The emptying of their mind as they search for inward peace to be found within. And quite honestly, when we think - if that's the understanding we have of meditation, then it makes complete sense why we would say, well, I'm not going to practice meditation. But meditation's a biblical word. It's a biblical practice. The Lord says to Joshua here, you shall meditate.

And in many places throughout Scripture, a lot in the book of Psalms, we see meditation and meditation practiced. All of us are familiar with Psalm 1. Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked nor stand in the way of sinners nor sit in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and on His law, he does what? He meditates day and night. There are two other places in the Psalms. You can just listen to them and write the references down. I'll read them to you here. Listen to Psalm 63:1-8. "Oh God, You are my God. Earnestly I seek You. My soul thirsts for You. My flesh faints for You as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon You in the sanctuary, beholding Your power and

glory. Because Your steadfast love is better than life my lips will praise You. So I bless You as long as I live. In Your name, I lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise You with joyful lips. When I remember You upon my bed, and meditate on You in the watches of the night." When will he do all those things? When he remembers Him upon His bed and when He meditates upon the Lord.

Listen to Psalm 119:145-149. "With my whole heart I cry, answer me, O Lord! I will keep Your statutes. I call to You, save me, that I may observe Your testimonies. I rise before dawn and cry for help. I hope in Your words. My eyes are awake before the watches of the night." Why are his eyes awake before the watches of the night? "That I may meditate on Your promises." "Hear my voice according to Your steadfast love, O Lord, according to Your justice, give me life." Christian meditation, beloved, is commanded in Scripture here to Joshua. It's practiced in Scripture. And it's practiced as we see all throughout church history. Probably most notably among the Puritans. Those were people that learned how to meditate.

And one of the things that we glean so much from those people is because they spent so much time meditating. Unfortunately, many genuine Christians of our day, do not read the Puritans. Why? Because just reading upon what they meditated about requires quite a bit of time and meditation. It's not easy reading. But these people spent hours before the Lord, drinking in the Word of God. They were given to meditation.

So, where cultural meditation involves the emptying of the mind, but Christian meditation is just the opposite. It's the filling of the mind. Remember, the Lord works through means, beloved. He works through our mind and our understanding. As our brother noted, He surpasses it, no doubt. But He doesn't bypass it. That's a big difference. To surpass is to go beyond what we can comprehend or imagine. But He does not bypass us. He doesn't say disengage your mind. I'll do some work over here, and then you'll get this intimacy. You'll grow. No, He works through our understanding. He works through our mind. The word here in Joshua 1:8, "meditate" means to murmur. It means to mutter. To ponder upon. It's kind of like having a conversation with yourself. And God's instructing here Joshua to murmur with himself, to ponder with himself, to weigh things, to muse over something. It has the understanding of carefully thinking through something, asking questions of it, and talking with yourself through it. To weigh something carefully.

Now right before we see this, meditation is going to require something. It's going to require time. It's going to require a slowed down thinking and musing over things. And beloved, I want you to know this. Nearly everything today in our fast-paced, technologically advanced culture, is working against Christian meditation. We have a society today and have been trained in something called instant gratification where we have access to so much information at our fingertips, but we want things that are instantly gratifying to us.

And we can see it even when we look at people on their devices. When it slows down, when the network slows down, when the entertainment is not coming fast enough, how upset do people get? And I'm talking about genuine Christians. Can I tell you something? I'm not against technology. I'm not someone that says go hide in a cave and shut yourself in and go live like you're "Little House on the Prairie." I'm not for that. But I am for recognizing what is helping you versus hurting you. And I want us to recognize something here. This is hurting you in regards to this call and this biblical means of grace called meditation. Many, if not most, of our young

people cannot sit still for a few minutes anymore without fast paced entertainment. The thought of stopping and sitting quietly, or pondering something is dull to them. And if we are not mindful personally of what's happening to us, parentally, what's happening to our children, and pastorally, what's happening to our congregation, it will be to our spiritual detriment, if it hasn't already. I've given you a brief definition of meditation. To murmur, to mutter, to ponder, to weigh.

As we further define it here, I'm going to help you look at the object or the focus of our meditation. Look at the verse again. "This Book of Law shall not depart from your mouth. You shall meditate on it." What is God calling Joshua to meditate upon? The Book of Law. The Word of God. Scripture. Saints, I want you to know this, we, here, today, in this time are a very blessed people. We live in a time of the full revelation that God has given to us. We live in a time where we can see promise has been revealed and fulfilled in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. We see the large picture. And we anticipate His return.

I want you to notice the Scriptures from beginning to end tell us Who God is. The Scriptures tell you who you are, and they tell us what God is doing. And what is God doing? He is redeeming a people unto Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. The Scriptures are full of hope, but they're also full of warning. They are full of promise, and again, there is one main story being told all throughout revealed Scripture, and that is God's redemption through His Son Jesus Christ. Do you know this? That all other stories in the Bible - and it's full of stories - do you know that every story finds its ultimate significance as it relates to and points to the one main story of Scripture - the redemption of God's people through Jesus Christ? Can I give you a little bit of hint on your Bible reading? Interpret your Scriptures as the apostles did. They interpreted the Scriptures through the Person of Jesus Christ. Interpret your Scriptures through the lens of Jesus Christ.

And you know what that does for you? It makes stories that are not explicitly about Jesus Christ, but do point to Him or His coming in some way - it makes them Christian, rather than just some moral stories. Haven't you grown up so many times hearing Old Testament stories? And they were just told on the basis of what? Morality. And one of the things we need to learn how to do as people is understand the bigger picture and how all the smaller stories point to the bigger story. Because your understanding of Old Testament Scriptures should be understood in such a way that people who are not Christians can not say amen to them. You see, if you just teach morality, a Muslim could say amen to the morality side of that. But if you help them see how the smaller story here points to and finds its fulfillment in the bigger story of Jesus Christ, now it's a Christian story. That's completely different than a moral story. But Scripture teaches us all of these things. So we meditate on Scripture - the written Word of God. And if we understand it correctly, we'll be meditating and seeing the living Word of God: Jesus Christ. He is the object and focus of the genuine believer's desire. And it is He Who the Holy Spirit magnifies and points to. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit as a Helper, as a Comforter. And He gave Him to us, and it says that the Spirit magnifies or points to Jesus Christ. This is important here. Meditating, beloved, although it's done upon Scripture, is more than Bible reading. Meditation is more than Bible reading.

You may be saying to me, well, Jesse, I read the Bible every single day. And if I'm honest, I must confess I'm not growing in intimacy or conformity to Christ like I would like. What's wrong with that? Listen, we need to read the Bible daily. I'll borrow Jerry Bridges' words.

Jerry Bridges said that reading gives you a breadth of Scripture. You need to have a breadth of Scripture. You should be systematically reading through the Word of God. But you also need the depth of Scripture. And that depth of Scriptures comes through meditation. So this is more than Bible reading. We are fed through the reading of the Word of God, but meditation - pondering, musing, weighing, asking questions, talking with ourselves about it, carefully examining it, is also needed in our spiritual growth.

You can see here how we're back to again the problem I mentioned earlier. Slowed down, careful consideration. What's the problem we have then? When I do pastoral visits with the church, and sit down with people individually and begin to talk with them about how they're doing, one of the questions that I will talk with them about is how they're doing in Bible reading and meditation. Do you know what inevitably, I think, in almost every single pastoral meeting I have, what the issue is that people have with Bible reading and meditation? They don't have enough what? Time. I'm just too busy. I don't have enough time. I see the importance of these things. I know they are essential in my growth, and my growth in intimacy and conformity, but quite honestly, pastor, I just don't have the time.

And again, I believe that many of you if not most of you are reading through the Word. But I'm trying to convince you that reading is not enough. We have made some time to read, but many don't have enough time to meditate; to weigh our hearts in light of truth and cultivate intimacy with the Lord in the Word. As lovingly as I can say this to you, if that's the state and the reality of your life, I'm going to tell you what I've just told myself recently. And that is this: Stop. Stop what? Stop everything. Everything. Because if intimacy with Jesus Christ and conformity to Him, which brings glory to His name, is our great desire - which I believe that it is - and this is a means of grace God has given for that to be a reality in your life, and you turn around and say, I can't do it; I don't have enough time. I'm too busy living life. I would like to ask you this: what is life? Paul tells Timothy regarding the wealthy of this age that there's a true life. And that true life is Christ.

If we're so busy living this life, that we don't have time for the very means of grace that God has given for us to grow in intimacy and conformity to Christ, we have - not a time problem, a priority problem. What have we done? We have prioritized other things that we call life ahead of that which is true life. I won't speculate as to what those things are in this room, because I'm sure they're as diverse as the number of people in here. So I'll ask you this, what have you given your life to that is keeping you from intimacy with the Lord through meditation? What is it?

If I could give an analogy that may help you discern the difference and the need for reading and meditation... My co-pastor in Texas is a farmer as well. He's got cattle. And if you were to go out to his farm and look at his cows, you would watch cows and they're always doing something. You know what they're doing? They're always eating. Cows eat continually. And if you understand a little bit - I'm not claiming to be an expert on how a cow eats, but what a cow does is it chews up some of the grass that it's eating, and it swallows it. And from that initial chewing and that initial eating, there are some nutrients that pass through its digestive system and it is given strength. But a cow is not done with that piece of grass. This may sound kind of gross, but what the cow does is he regurgitates that. It has been mixed with some digestive juices now. It's what they call "cud." And he brings the cud back up - the chewed up grass - but see there are more nutrients. There's more to get out of the grass. So it brings it back up and it

begins to chew again, for up to 8 hours a day, you will find a cow chewing on its cud. What is it doing? It's getting the nutrients, the strength, that it can pull out of that grass and then swallows it again.

Well, very similarly, in a like manner, many of us - like the cow - chew the Word of God and swallow. I would correlate that to your reading. You will get some nutrients. You will be strengthened some. But there are so many more nutrients and so much more to be strengthened. And that comes, like the cow bringing it back up, the meditation upon the Word of God.

How many of you enjoyed Don's sermon? I loved it. You know what I'm afraid of and for my own heart right now? I was moved by it. I discerned a working of the Spirit in the room. I understood what he preached. I want that to be more of a reality. But now I'm coming up here to preach. And then tonight, I'm going to go home and I'm going to prepare again, and I'm going to go to bed, and I'm going to wake up and we're going to hear other brothers preach, and we'll be fed again. And it will be stirring. They'll preach truth. We're praying and believing the Spirit's going to come. We'll want the realities that they preach of. But then, we'll hear another sermon. And quite honestly, not because of anything these men have said, and not because the Spirit isn't working, but we move on so quickly to the next sermon. And we're fed a little bit. We get a little bit of nutrient, a little bit of strength. And then we move on again. And one of the things, I'll tell you this, I love conferences, but one of the things I don't like about conferences is that.

Now the beauty of technology - here's where I'm for technology - you're going to be able to go back. And I want to tell you this. If you do not go back and listen to these sermons again, or focus on one aspect where the Spirit pointed you and focused you or convicted you, and you sit before the Word and you chew on the cud of the truth of God's Word, praying for the increase of the Spirit, in the privacy and the meditation of your own home, I want you to know this, if that doesn't happen, then all that's going to happen here this weekend, is a pep rally.

Man it was good to be with those people. Likeminded, united in Christ, truth was preached, the Spirit was working, but man, I'm just busy, I've got to work Monday. Kids Monday. Soccer Monday. Workout Monday. All the things we do. I don't have time to go back and sit before that Word and marinate in it. I'm beginning to ask questions of my life. Why am I not given to prayer like that? Here's what most Christians do, they hear truth, I heard amen's through here, I said amen. Oh, that was a good word, brother. I was convicted, brother. And then we walk out of here into the fast pace of life, it's gone. And this is where your responsibility comes in. Listen, we are praying for the Spirit to work. Amen? We cannot do this without the Spirit. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to work.

I'm not talking about you doing something on your own apart from Him. But I'm acknowledging what Scripture says. The Spirit works through means. He works through this book. It's not just intellectual, as my brother said. It's a working of the Spirit. But you have an active role in it. Don't just get excited about truth. Don't just be convicted about truth. Don't just wish for that truth to be reality and then move on. Because you won't grow. "Some of you should be teachers by now." Remember that verse? Why aren't they teachers? They're not trained in discernment. What does that take? Time. Priority.

I'll tell you right now, there is no shortcut for biblical meditation. There is no shortcut. There is nothing you can do but do it. If that cow did not bring that grass back up as the cud and

get more nutrients out of it, it would be malnourished. It would have a little bit of energy, it would survive, it would get by. But it would be malnourished. You know what I'm afraid of? Malnourished Christians. They're alive, they see truth, they want truth, but they're so busy, and so wrongly prioritized, and many of them with very good things - like ministry. See, ministry makes you feel like things are going well. But it may not be the reality of the state of your soul. Ministry cannot do what sitting alone with God with the Word open, quietly, praying, questioning, murmuring, pondering can do.

You know the people around you that you look at that are just spewing truth? Not because they're trying to show off, but just because it's what's in them and it just keeps pouring out? You see them growing in joy and intimacy. Go ask them if they meditate. I bet you they do. I don't know anyone that I look at and I see the work of God like that in their life, that I don't sit down and speak with them and find out what's going on. I remember Brother Paul Washer used to talk about that a lot. He did a sermon once where he's like, "Oh, Paul, tell us what it is." And he talked about the revelation, just the beauty of Christ, but you know this? One thing I do know about that brother is that he sits alone with God with the Word of God open and he meditates.

You see, everyone's looking for this secret verse, that if I just read this verse, I'm going to grow exponentially. (Incomplete thought.) It's not. You have to cultivate a relationship with God through meditation of Scripture. Richard Baxter said it this way, "A man may eat too much, but he can't digest enough." I talk to some young Christians that will come and visit the church sometimes or at conferences. And when I talk to them, they'll be quoting off these 50 pastors they're listening to. I'm listening to this sermon and that sermon, and this sermon and that sermon... and they listen to thousands of sermons, and they're as immature as can be. You know why? They don't meditate.

One brother said this. I'd rather you listen to one sermon and meditate, than a thousand sermons and not meditate. I'm going to try to help you see why from this text why it's so crucial to meditate. Meditation in the Word is the means the Holy Spirit works through to teach us, remind us, strengthen us, and stir our hearts concerning Christ. This is the means. Do you remember in Luke 24? We were talking about it earlier today. Jesus is resurrected. He's on the road to Emmaus with some disciples. And they're talking to Him, but they don't recognize Him. And He calls them slow of heart to believe, because they weren't understanding the resurrection. And then He does something here. And I want you to listen to what He does. Listen to v. 27. "And beginning with Moses, and all the Prophets, He (being Jesus) interpreted to them, in all the Scripture, the things concerning Himself." Wouldn't you have like to be on that road right there? He opened up the Scriptures to them. That's more than reading. He took time on this walk and opened up the Scriptures to them.

What was the fruit when Jesus Christ opened up the Scriptures to these disciples? Listen to verse 32. "And they said to each other, 'did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road? While He opened up to us the Scriptures?'" Why is meditation so important? Because it's through meditation that the Holy Spirit opens up the Scriptures, and reveals to you the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ. And tell me it's not true, when you come to hear a sermon preached or you read something in the Word, and it's opened up to you and your heart begins to burn. And in that moment, you look at the world, and it's empty to you. It doesn't

mean anything to you anymore. You want to give it all away. You just want to run for Christ in that moment, don't you? Your heart is burning. It's the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Do you know you have access to that? Every single day. Aren't we to live and see the world through the lens of Jesus Christ in the Gospel? Beloved, that's not going to happen in a five minute reading per day. I'm not trying to be legalistic with you and try to give you this long list of things you have to do, and how you have to do them. I'm telling you this though, this is the means that He works through. If you're too busy, you need to stop whatever you're doing. You need to stop right now, and you need to say, what is the essential I need in my life? It's Christ. And what is the means of that? Well, it's the gathering of the saints. Is that a priority in your life? It better be. It's prayer. We need prayer. What does that take? Time. We need reading. Breadth of Scripture. And we need meditation. And those aren't all the disciplines, but you need those things. And those take time. And beloved, if you're not doing that right now - literally, clear everything off the calendar. Prioritize those realities. And then live around them.

You say, oh, I want to be seeing and beholding Jesus. I want my heart to burn. I'm going to go meditate. And I'll just fit it in. No, you won't. You won't fit it in. You have to begin with prioritizing. Literally, putting in on the calendar. And then you live around that. It's in meditation of the Word that the Holy Spirit opens up the Word and reveals Christ to us.

Can I encourage you in something as a pastor? I talked about meditating on a sermon there. I exhort the congregation in Dallas every single Sunday. I give them sermon notes, and I say you go home now, and you meditate. Because I hear a lot of amen's on Sundays when we preach, "Amen, amen, amen..." We talk afterwards and people are excited about, oh, that's so good. That was so convicting. I want that to be a reality in my life. And then they go eat lunch. About half of it's lost. Then they go home and work in the yard. About half of it's lost. And then they wake up in the morning and it's gone. (incomplete thought)

Listen, we read in Ephesians 4, God gave gifts to the church, right? Pastors and teachers. That's a gift of the Lord. But you have a responsibility with that. It's not just to show up on Sunday and sit there. You see, the Puritans used to talk like this: When the preacher said amen at the end of the sermon is when the sermon actually began. You know when it is for most of us? He said amen. We're done. And you sit there and you affirm the Word; you believe the Word, and you want its reality, but the problem for most of us, I think if we're honest, is that's the end of the sermon for us.

What would happen if you went home that night and you took out your notes and that verse and you began to sit before the Lord quietly? And you said, "Oh Lord, now teach me more." Oh God, I was convicted in the sermon, but conviction isn't enough. I am to confess and repent. I am to turn. You know Edwards' resolutions. That would be a great time when you are seeing truth, to write a resolution right then. I purpose now, by God's grace, to do this now instead of that. That would be a good time. But for so much of us, the preacher says amen and that's the end of the sermon. Beloved, it does need to be the beginning of the sermon. That's when the real work of the sermon begins. Right then. Because pastors and preachers are not here to just give you a pep really - a good feeling for a little bit. Our desire is conformity, for us and you.

One of the blessings of preaching is I have to meditate. I consider that one of the greatest blessings of preaching ever is that I have to be given to meditation. What a blessing!

You've read Ephesians 3 before. I know you have. And have you ever noticed when someone like Don comes up and reads Ephesians 3. You've read it a thousand times. And then he preaches and you go, Oh yes, yes, yes, that's true! That's true! I haven't seen that before. You have two things at work there. Number one is this: the Holy Spirit opening you up to the Scriptures. That's a glorious thing. Amen. Praise be to God. You know what the second one is? You may say well how did he see that? All glory to the Spirit of God, but remember He works through means. When's the last time you spent fifteen hours before a text? Twenty hours? Whatever it is - I'm not saying it has to be that. When's the last time we spent five hours? An hour meditating upon the sermon Sunday night or Monday night? Do you think there would be an increase? Do you think God would meet us there and do a work? Listen, He wants your conformity more than you want conformity. He wants intimacy with you more than you do, but He works through means. Beloved, if you meet Him there, in obedience and prioritizing meditation, He will meet you there. He will grace that time.

What's the frequency of meditation? "This Book of Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it, day and night." Same thing that the psalmist writes in Psalm 1 isn't it? "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night?" Is this implying everyone in here quit your job? Forgo responsibilities? Sit before the Word day and night. You're done. No. What it's speaking to us here is the daily consistency and need we have to be before the Word of God in a quiet place meditating. On His law we meditate day and night.

What I'm talking tonight about is what we would call intentional meditation. This is where you have a place that you go. And I would recommend in practical wisdom here, pick a place that's quiet. Pick a place that you can consistently go to. Pick a time. Not fit it in - pick a time and go there. That is called intentional meditation where you come to a specific place at a specific time and you meditate.

Can I tell you what intentional meditation leads to though? It leads to spontaneous meditation. You know why? Because the truths of Christ are at the forefront of your mind. They're there. They're readily available. You're looking through the lens of that. Thinking through the lens of that. And that leads to you being able to meditate on these truths day and night. And little things that we could begin to practice, beloved. Do you ever go anywhere where there's a long wait? Like the DMV? Long wait there, right? What do you see if you walk in there right now? Tell me what you see. You see this, right? (holding a cell phone). It's almost comical. And I'm guilty. Everyone does this. Let me exhort you in this.

What if you put that [phone] down? And because you meditated that morning, the Word you were studying or an attribute of God, or the sermon that Don preached, and instead of this, you begin to think about that again. And you spent twenty minutes prayerfully considering, what does it mean to be filled with the fullness of God? How much more would that be of benefit to our lives? Can I rebuke myself and you for a moment real quick? Who's this given to? Who is chapter 1:8 written to? Joshua, right? Contextually, it's to Joshua. He is instructed by God to meditate on the Law day and night. Who's Joshua? Leader of who? God's people? He's going to lead God's people? How many people is that? Hundreds of thousands? A million? Who wants to stand up and say I have more responsibility on my plate than Joshua has on his plate? I don't

think you do. And God felt it so necessary to tell him, you need to meditate day and night on My Word.

Beloved, we have time. We have a priority problem. It means you're going to have to say no to a lot of things. But I want you to know this: It is so worth it. Intimacy with Jesus Christ, growing in conformity to Jesus Christ, is the joy of the believer. Everything else that you are skipping this for, which you are searching for life or joy in, can never give you what God can give you through this. We're not busier than Joshua. We do have time. The greatest priority we have as Christians is to guard and nurture our own soul. There's a selfish aspect to the Christian life, which means if your heart is not right, if you're not guarding and nurturing your soul, of what value do you bring to your wife? To your children? To the church? To the lost world? I'm not saying things have to be perfect. But the way God works is He works in you and then the overflow of that is to be the outward.

So one of the things we have to do is we have to guard and nurture our own soul. Above all else, guard your heart. We have to guard this carefully. We have to say no to things, because we recognize the importance and the essential of these things. There is no shortcut. Well, finally, here it says, we've defined meditation. We've looked at the focus or the object of meditation being the Word of God and that focus being Jesus Christ. We've looked at the frequency of meditation being a daily consistency, day and night.

And now for more motivation, let me encourage you with the fruit of meditation. "This Book of Law shall not depart from your mouth. You shall meditate on it day and night, so that..." When you read words like "so that" in your Bible, stop and make note of it. They're important words and they're going to tell you what preceded it leads to. "Meditate day and night so that you may be careful to do all that is written in it." If you're a believer, you want to live in accordance with the revealed will and Word of God. We don't want to be hearers only, do we? We want to be hearers and doers. In fact, the Scriptures teach us that one who is a hearer only deceives himself.

There's a little bit of deception happening with us if we're honest, I think. Because on most Sundays, what do we do? We hear the Word preached. We even affirm it. But it seems to me that this link between being a hearer of the Word and a doer of the Word, finds its rest here in meditating on the Word. Again, acknowledging our great need for the Spirit. But the Spirit works through the means. Meditate on it day and night so you may be careful to do all that's written in it. It's one thing to sit in the pew and feel convicted. It's a whole other thing to go home and to acknowledge what you were convicted about. To confess that to the Lord. To repent of that, and to make changes, so that you can stop living that way. You're careful to do... We all get convicted so easily, but changing and being conformed and growing in intimacy - there's a work there. So maybe there's an issue of not only a lack of prioritizing, but just a laziness that we have at times. Just hard work here. When by grace, we are hearing and reading truth, meditating on truth, aided by the Spirit, and then we carefully do all that is written in it, look what it says next: "For (when you're doing those things), you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success." If Joshua does what the Word of God tells him, he will prosper and have success.

Beloved, if we sit before the Word and meditate upon the Person of Jesus Christ revealed through the Word by the increase of the Holy Spirit, I want you to know this, spiritually

speaking, you will have a prosperous life and a successful life. Why? Because you'll be full of promise and hope. You'll be living in light of the Gospel, which was what we read earlier in Ephesians 4. Live then in this way, in light of all these glorious truths. Well, those truths are revealed to you, they're stirred in your heart, they burn in your heart, through this work of meditation upon Scripture and the increase of the Holy Spirit.

Let me, if I could, then just end with maybe six or seven practical aspects for you to consider while meditating. Number one, let me do this, if you're not meditating today... if you say, if I'm honest, this really has no part in my daily life, then I'm going to tell you begin immediately. So often we say that's a great thing and let me begin that and we put it here, and we move on. I want to encourage you, begin it immediately. Immediately. Number two, when you come to meditate, begin with a prayer in acknowledgement and confession of the need of the Spirit of God. I need the Spirit to help me here. And ask Him to meet you there.

Number three, set aside specific time every single day for meditation. When should you do it? I would say this to you, whenever you're most alert. For some of you that's the morning. That's when it is for me. Get up before anyone else in the house gets up. I love that time. I guard it. And I get up early and I meditate by God's grace. And that is wonderful. There's realities - we may have children and different things. We have to work around some of these things. I understand. But to the best of your ability, a specific time in a specific place, as much as you can. Then, choose something to meditate on. You have some liberty here. I would meditate on your pastor's sermon after Sunday. That's a good starting point for the week. Maybe Sunday night or Monday morning. You meditate upon that sermon. That might take you two or three days of meditation as the Lord works in your heart, you begin to pray and confess and write out resolutions. You can meditate on an attribute of God. You can meditate on something you're reading. You're going through your breadth of reading and something captures you. Maybe meditate upon something that you're struggling with. Struggling in an area of the Christian life. Meditate upon that. Meditate on an attribute of God. You have some liberty there, but Scripture must guard and govern this.

Number three, we have to recognize this, it takes time. So give it time. It may be hard at first if you have not done it. But I want you to know this, meditation breeds meditation. The more you do it, the more you want to do it. The closer you grow in intimacy, the more you want of Jesus. So meditation will breed meditation. Remember this, the goal is to work through the mind, but the stirring of the affections for Jesus Christ. Okay? This isn't intellectual work only. We acknowledge He works through the Word, by the Spirit, through the mind, but we're praying for that stirring, that burning of the heart in the revelation of truth in Jesus Christ. Confession though. That doesn't happen though every time I read the Bible and meditate. It doesn't. So what do you do? Confess that to Christ. And come back again. Just confess it and come back. Christ saved us from imperfect meditation as well. Confess that and move on. And then, constantly remind yourself of this daily, and the Word will do this as you meditate upon it: We are not earning God's favor here. We have the favor of God through our union with Jesus Christ through faith alone. God loves us. Do you know what's happening here? We're growing in the revelation of that favor, of what Christ has accomplished, and we're growing in revelation of God's love for us through Jesus Christ as we meditate.

And what does Paul tell you in 2 Corinthians 5? That that love - when you begin to see it - it constrains you to no longer live for yourself. And then you start obeying, because you stop living for yourself. It's glorious. So, I pray you see the blessing, the benefit, and the essential need for meditation. And my prayer, again, is that you begin this immediately.

So, let's pray for God's grace. Father, in the name of Jesus, God, You so desire, demonstrated by the giving of Your Son, intimacy with Your people. God, You've changed us and given us the desire to know You and to glorify You. But You work through means, God. Help us not to ignore the means You've chosen to work through, for they are good. God, in my own life and my own heart, Lord, convict us all of the things we've given greater priority to, to knowing You more. Let us repent of these things, Lord. Give us wisdom in decision making. Let this lead, Lord, to changes in our lives. We don't want to just affirm truth, God. We want to be doers of it. So work that into our hearts, each of us here, we pray. We ask for these things for Your glory, in the name of Jesus, Amen.