

Devotional Dullness: Activity or Atrophy?

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Are you a morally sloppy Christian? That is, are you less zealous than you should be about the pursuit of true holiness? Would it be difficult for you to honestly say that you “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matt. 5:6)? If so, I would like to suggest that your moral sloppiness is due to your spiritual and intellectual laziness.

The Culture Factor

If you are like most professing Christians in Western society, your mind is accustomed to a steady diet of text messages, emails, video games, cable TV, and whatever your Internet surfboard happens to dredge up. Your daily devotional life (if you can even say you have one) involves 15 minutes of light reading and hours listening to popular Christian music, most of which is lacking in doctrinal substance. You are heavily involved in your kids’ sporting activities and overly busy at work, making it difficult to find time for in-depth Bible study with other members of your church (if such studies are even offered). Worst of all, you *prefer* this non-rigorous intellectual and spiritual life because you are not much of a reader or a thinker. Your mental muscles have atrophied to the point where careful reading and thoughtful study seem wearisome.



Face the facts: Your mind has become dull. As a result you are not equipped to think sharply and critically about moral issues. You profess to be a Christian, but you are living a morally compromising life.

Meditation = Your Soul Breathing

As you read this page you are breathing rhythmically. The oxygen you are taking in is keeping you healthy and alive. You were probably not even consciously aware that you were breathing because taking in and absorbing oxygen requires no conscious effort. You breathe steadily even when you are asleep. This is where the intake of truth is different. It is essential for your spiritual health (and even survival), but it does not happen apart from you making it happen.

This practice—this labor of thinking about the Bible’s message—is known as meditation. It is your soul breathing, the renewing of your mind through diligent reflection upon the meaning and application of Scripture. It is the practice of reading while asking yourself, “What does this mean? What does this require me to think about God, others, or myself? What does it require me to do, stop doing, or change?”

In a society addicted to noise and the various forms of effortless media stimulation, meditation is not easy. It requires mental energy, patience, persistence, and time spent in silence and solitude. It requires the conviction that a daily period of quiet reflection on the biblical message must be a top priority in your schedule.

Light Displaces Darkness

God promises to displace darkness with light. When Paul said, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2), he was essentially telling Christians to push out more and more darkness by bringing in more and more light.

The ongoing entrance of light—the ever-increasing knowledge of God’s will—was Paul’s hope and prayer for the Christians in Colossae:

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it [i.e., their faith in Christ and love for other believers, Col. 1:4], we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding . . .” (Col. 1:10).

The question is, *why* was Paul so interested in their growth in the knowledge of God’s will? He continues, “. . . so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:11). Paul did not think these Christians knew all they needed to know just because they had believed in Jesus. Their day-by-day pursuit of holiness depended on their being continually filled with the knowledge of God’s will. He wanted them to be “*increasing* in the knowledge of God.”

Do you truly want to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”? If so, you must be willing to exercise your mind in the labor of meditation. You must permit your soul to breathe. “A wise man will hear and *increase in learning*” (Prov. 1:5).

I have heard it said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing but expecting different results. If this is even close to correct, then you are insane if you continue in your spiritual and intellectual laziness while expecting to change the way you respond to temptation. You must *make* change if you are going to *experience* change.

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