

The Necessity of Meditation: When Skimming Through Just Won't Do

Steve Burchett

Do you ever find yourself scanning quickly through a lengthy email? Do you ever *not* do that? What about other reading in your life? Are you able to read and think about a subject for an extended period? Jon Bloom points to one of the reasons so many of us have a hard time remaining focused when reading: "Unfortunately, the internet is teaching us how not to read. We are becoming information scanners, quickly browsing but not digesting very much. We are losing patience for deeper, more reflective reading" ("Ten Reasons to Memorize Big Chunks of the Bible," desiringgod.org).



Perhaps you will do yourself no harm if you can't concentrate for more than a few minutes when reading an email or a novel or someone's blog. But Scripture is different. Psalm 1:1-3 could not be clearer.

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

Mediation — thinking carefully about a portion of Scripture for an extended period of time with the goal of understanding and applying that text — is necessary for godliness and stability in the life of a believer. Note the powerful effects of meditation that are mentioned in Psalm 119:97-104.

Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.
I have more understanding than all my teachers

for your testimonies are my meditation.
I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
I do not turn aside from your rules,
for you have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

A believer's protracted meditation on Scripture has an astounding intellectual effect (wisdom and understanding that surpasses his enemies, teachers, and the aged), a thorough moral effect (avoids evil; obeys), and a deep-seated emotional effect (loves God's word; finds Scripture immensely pleasurable). Meditation is a supremely beneficial discipline for a Christian!

How is it done? Here are a few ideas:

1. *Think hard about what you are reading when you are reading the Bible.* Have a strategy for Bible reading, but be more concerned about lingering and reflecting on what you are reading versus getting through your Bible reading plan "on schedule."
2. *Pick something from what you are reading in the Bible to think about during the day.* Perhaps there is a verse that you're trying to figure out. Or maybe there is a promise you need to remember to get you through.
3. *Read (or listen to) a portion of Scripture a few times a week over the next month.* For example, if you read Philippians three or four times a week for a month, you'll be astonished how well you will know that letter, and you'll have much to ponder.
4. *Listen intently and look at the text whenever Scripture is being taught.* You have at least a weekly opportunity to meditate like this. Even if the presentation is sometimes "dry," you can still think deeply to understand the text.
5. *Aim to memorize a verse each day, reviewing previous verses memorized as much as possible.* The goal isn't to coldly repeat back the verses, but to reflect on them deeply, to understand what the Lord is saying, to know him more, and to respond appropriately.

"Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors." (Psalm 119:24)