

Meditation

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[0:00] Is Christian greatness still possible? Is it still possible for the church today to see a Jonathan Edwards?

! Is it possible for the church today a George Whitefield or an Amy Carmichael or John Calvin or any others of the heroes of our faith?

! Is another great awakening possible? Another reformation? Are we living in the shadows of the past with all of our glory behind us?

Or can we still hope for the church to grow, grow, grow in vigor and holiness and zeal and numbers? And I think the answer is yes.

And I know the answer is yes. But it will all depend on one thing, humanly speaking. And that is how much the people of the church, people like yourself and myself, how much we meditate on the word of God.

[1:10] Meditation is God, the God-given means to greatness in the Christian life. John Bunyan was an ignorant tinker. And that means he worked on pots and pans.

He was an uneducated man. But God made him into a great Christian through meditation. He was in the word. And the word was in him.

And so if you poked him, if you stabbed him, it was said that he would bleed out Bible. Athanasius was one of the fathers of the Christian faith.

And in the fourth century, he fought vehemently against heresy. Five times. He was exiled out of his home, out of his church, out of his country.

And Athanasius fought the world. And by God's grace, Athanasius overcame. Well, what gave him such determination, such vigor, such power in the face of such opposition?

[2:12] It was meditation. It was meditation on the word of God. People said that he meditated more on the entire Bible than any other person meditated on one single book of the Bible.

Well, what was Spurgeon's power? What was Whitefield's power? What was Jonathan Edwards' power? Or what made those men so useful, so great, so imminent in godliness?

And under God's grace, it was meditation. Morris Roberts wrote this in 1990. Our age has been sadly deficient in what may be termed spiritual greatness.

And at the root of this is the modern disease of shallowness. It is not the busy skimming over religious books or careless hastening through religious duties, which makes for a strong Christian faith.

Rather, it is the unhurried meditation on gospel truths and the exposing of our minds to these truths that yields the fruit of a sanctified character.

[3:18] So you have modern shallowness. And then you have the depth that comes from meditation. And if we want to see spiritual greatness again, and if we at Grace Fellowship want to see further advances in the gospel, and I hope that you do, then brothers and sisters, we must absolutely learn how to meditate.

And not only become learners, we must become experts at meditation. Spiritual greatness is still possible. But it's only possible if we learn to meditate on the Word of God.

In these afternoons, we've been going through a series that is entitled Aspects of Spirituality. And these are just different ways that we develop intimacy with God, how we walk with God, how we drink in God.

And meditation is the topic for today. And I just want to ask three simple questions. What is meditation? Why meditate? And how do you do it?

It should be fairly straightforward. First, what is meditation? You might take issue with this definition in some senses, but I'm willing to stand by it.

[4:34] Meditation is listening to God. It's listening to God. God speaks to us in the scriptures. And in meditation, we listen.

We take it to heart. We ponder it. It's more than hearing what God says. Hearing is passive. Listening is active. Parents, you know what it's like to be speaking to your children and they're hearing you, but they're not listening.

The words that you are saying, they're going in one ear and out the other. And they're never taking any time to rest in that space in between. To take root there. Well, meditation is letting God's Word come into our ears, into our hearts.

And resting in our mind. And taking root there. Meditation is not some eerie, mystical experience. It's not reaching oneness with all things. It's not connecting to some great cosmic soul. It's not having some deep, mystic experience of God, with God.

[5:42] It's not an irrational experience where we somehow become in tune with what God's will for our lives is. And what he's saying, especially to me, through some inner compulsion.

It's none of those things. It's listening intently to what God says to us in the Scripture. It's thinking deeply about the implications of God's Word.

And so it's rigorously pondering God's Word when he's speaking it to us. It was that kind of meditation that made Ezra a very useful, godly, great man.

And it's the kind of meditation that we need if we're going to be great Christians. In Ezra 7, Ezra arrives in Jerusalem and it says, The gracious hand of his God was upon him, was on him.

Well, why? Why is God blessing Ezra's ministry? This is what it says. The gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and the observance of the law of God and the teaching, its decrees and laws in Israel.

[6:57] Ezra devoted himself to study. He gave himself as a sacrifice to the study of God's Word. And is there anyone here that will be willing to say, I want to be the next Ezra.

I want to be the next person to devote myself, give myself as a lamb to the slaughter, to study God's Word. I am going to know it. I'm going to know it through and through and I'm going to have a deep acquaintance with it.

And I'm going to make it my ambition to know the Word of God. It's that kind of meditation that will change a person.

And it's that kind of meditation that will change Grace Fellowship Church. And we need that kind of meditation. Not the thoughtless emptying of the mind, which is what modern meditation is, but the thorough, rigorous pondering of the Word of God as we have it in our Bibles.

Well, that's what meditation is. That's biblical meditation. So why meditate? Why meditate? Why do it? Well, there's too many reasons to be exhaustive today.

[8:09] I started out with six or seven. And basically, I've had to cut it down to at least two. And there's probably a lot more. So we just have two reasons why you should meditate.

And the first is this. That meditation is the fountain of overflowing worship. It's the fountain of overflowing worship.

Why are you alive? Why did God create you? What is your purpose in life? One word, worship.

You were made for God's glory. You aren't alive to get stuff for yourself. You're not alive to make a better life for yourself. You're not alive to live the American dream so that you can have a nice house and good times with your family.

You were created for God's praise. The heavens exist to declare the glory of God. And you exist to declare the glory of God. God is the sun.

[9:11] And you are a planet that is going around the sun. He's first. He's primary. And you are on the periphery.

You are on the outside. And he is on the inside. And young people, if you are ever going to understand life, if you're going to ever understand what you are about, you have to understand this. You'll never get life right. You'll be constantly standing in front of the mirror and worshiping the thing that you see in the mirror. And that's not why you were created. You'll live a small life if you do that. But you were made for so much more. You were made for your concern to reach as far as God's glory reaches. So God says through Isaiah, bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory.

God made you so that you would shine a light on his glory. He made you to make him look good. So it isn't about you. It isn't about you.

[10:17] It's about him. Now, brothers and sisters, why did God save you? Peter tells us. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that, so that, what?

You may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light. So how are you doing at that?

Are you fulfilling God's purpose for your life? Are you fulfilling God's purpose for your salvation? Are you declaring the praises of him who called you out of darkness, out of pitch darkness, to live in his wonderful light?

And you say, well, I'm not doing well. I'm not doing well. I need to do that better. I know that. I know I should be all about worship, but I'm not. But there's days that go by and I don't praise him and I don't thank him.

I know my prayers should be overflowing, brimming over with praise, but they're not. They're full of requests. They're absent of praise. What do I do?

[11:29] What can I do? Repent. Repent and God will forgive you. If you aren't praising him, then you're like clouds without rain.

You're like a stubborn child. You're holding promise, but coming to nothing. So repent and go to Jesus and ask him to forgive you.

Hold on to Jesus and his life and his death. And your sins will be washed away. It's white as snow. All those days of not praising God will be washed away.

They'll be cleansed and they'll be cleaned. And then after repenting, begin to meditate. Begin to meditate. Meditation is the fountain of overflowing praise.

Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 119. Psalm 119. Verse 163.

[12:36] Psalm 119. Verse 163. I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law. Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.

Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws. The psalmist, I don't think, is actually saying that seven set times a day he praises him. It might be that.

But seven is the number of fullness. It's the number of completion. It's the number of constant activity. And so I think he's saying, I constantly praise you. Praise is always bubbling out, overflowing out of my heart.

Why? Well, look at it. Because for your righteous laws. I love your law. The psalmist loved God's law.

He delighted in it. He said, if you read through Psalm 119, it's sweeter than honey. It's more precious than gold. Much more precious than pure gold. He stayed up all the night pondering it.

[13:39] He meditated on it night and day. He set his heart on God's commandments. He said, oh, how I love your law. I meditate on it all day long. He held fast to his statutes.

He ran in the path of God's commands. And the psalmist, he gave himself body and soul, mind and strength with emotional abandonment to knowing, to studying, to loving, to learning God's law.

And what was the result? Seven times a day, I praise you for your righteous laws. It's constant, overflowing worship. Look down at verse 171.

May my lips overflow with praise. For you teach me your decrees. May my tongue sing of your word. For all your commands are righteous. You see the psalmist's heart opened up to you.

His heart is aching to overflow with praise. And his lips are longing to praise God, to sing praise. So meditation gave birth to praise.

[14:47] And brothers and sisters, the scriptures, the Bible is full of reasons for you to worship God. So it's like that underground oil in the Gulf of Mexico that we're seeing so much of.

The word is full of oil that is ready to set our hearts on fire with praise. But that oil needs to be tapped.

If you dig down deep into the well, under the surface of the word, praise will overflow. Praise will bubble out and fill your life.

Just as now oil is, unfortunately, overflowing in the Gulf and filling the Gulf. So meditation is the well that digs down deep into God's word.

And so you're not going to hit oil if you stay on the surface. And so if you're reading the word of God and you're just checking it off your list and I've done it for the day. And you're scanning your Bible.

[15:48] You are not going to have any reason to praise God. It's only you have to dig down deep. And that means it's work. You have to get under the surface.

But when you do, your life will be changed. Praise will overflow in your heart. And so you'll find a million reasons to praise God.

You'll find a million reasons to praise God right when you're sitting there reading and meditating on the word of God. And you will find reasons to seven times a day praise him as you're walking through life and you see God's glory shining in creation.

Like we saw in Sunday school. You'll see his glory shining in providence. And you will overflow in praise. And it begins with meditation.

The creation without the scripture. It doesn't give us very much to praise God about. We don't know who or what we're praising. But when we combine the creation and now our hearts and our minds have been transformed by the word of God, we have every reason to praise God for everything that we see.

[17:00] Well, why meditate? It's the wellhead. It's the spring of overflowing worship. The second reason is it's the hot coals of evangelism.

It's the hot coals of evangelism. So you're going camping. You put your fire in the fire pit there. And after a while, the fire goes down and there's nothing there but some red hot coals.

How much work does it take to get that fire going again? Not much. Not much at all. You just stir up the coals a little bit. You throw a few twigs on there. And you're going to get a fire again.

And meditation is the hot coals of evangelism. Listen to Jeremiah. Jeremiah 20. If I say I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, his word in my heart.

That's meditation. His word in my heart like a fire is like a fire. A fire shut up in my bones. And so Jeremiah is meditating on the word of God.

[18:07] He's heard the word of God. He's listened to it. And now it's ruminating there inside of him. It was in his heart. And he said it was like a fire in my bones. It wanted to get out.

It wanted to burst into flames. And I can't contain it. So where does the fire for evangelism come? Well, it comes from meditation. Brothers and sisters, don't we want that fire?

You want to be better evangelists, don't you? You want to be bold and you want to be wise and you want to be ready in season and out of season to give a reason for the hope that is in you.

And meditation is the answer. Meditation sets that fire in you. And so through meditation, we see the all-consuming glory of God.

When you study the scriptures long enough, your eyes begin to open and your view gets bigger and you see that God must be praised. He has to be worshipped.

[19:11] And he has to have my life. He must have my life. He's too worthy for me to do anything else. And others must know God's glory. And so through meditation, we begin to see the ugliness of sin.

And the wrath that is due that. And how appropriate that wrath is. And then we begin to experience. We begin to feel God's holiness and God's majesty.

And then we begin to experience God's grace and his beauty as he presents Jesus Christ as a beautiful savior for this horrible sin that is in my life.

In meditation, it tunes our heart. You tune a musical instrument. And meditation tunes our hearts so that it's synchronized with God's.

It's playing in harmony with God's heart. And we begin to see that God is on a mission. Do you see that in our world? God is on a mission. He sent his son and now the gospel must be proclaimed to every nation, every people, every tribe.

[20:23] And God is going forth. He's powerfully advancing his kingdom. And one day, people from every nation and every tribe and every language will stand before the throne and sing hail to the lamb.

That is going to happen. God is moving that forward. And by meditation, we become in tune with what God is doing in our world. And we want to join him as he goes forward.

And so the fire begins to burn inside of you. And it doesn't take very much for those hot coals to burst into fire. And to flame. And so you won't have to look for the perfect situation to evangelize. You'll be creating the situations. And just the slightest dry tender that comes in contact with your heart will make you burn right.

So you can say, you'll start saying to yourself, how can I do this better? How can I say something about Jesus in this circumstance? And it's going to come out. Because what is inside of you will come out.

[21:28] And meditation puts the fire of the gospel inside of you. And I have no doubt that God is growing us in this area. But if we are ever going to be the evangelists that we could be, that we should be, then we have to begin meditating on the word of God.

Because meditation is the hot coals of evangelism. Well, we could say so much more. Meditation is the fertile soil that bears good fruit, according to Psalm 1.

Meditation provides protection against Satan's temptations. Jesus in the wilderness teaches us that. He understood the word of God and knew how to apply it in every situation.

Meditation is the birthplace of wisdom. Psalm 19 says, the statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. So if you want to live a life of overflowing worship, of ready evangelism, of faithful, wise, fruitful living, then become an expert in meditation.

So don't dabble in it like Ezra. Give yourself to it. Devote yourself to it. And if you do, God will transform you. The word of God is powerful. It's like a hammer.

[22:43] It's like a fire. And meditation, by God's grace, will come into your heart and will break up that hard heart and will cause that coldness to become warm again.

And through meditation, with God's grace, by the help of the Holy Spirit, the word is unleashed in your life. So do you see why you should meditate?

Why you should want to meditate? The third question is, how do you do it? This is our final point. How do you do it? First, make it a habit.

Make it a habit. You don't naturally begin something like meditation, do you? You're not going to just fall into it one day. You're not going to accidentally start. And that means you're going to have to impose it upon yourself.

Parents, you know what it is to impose something on your children, don't you? They don't want to pick up their room. They don't want to come home by 11 o'clock.

[23:47] But you impose your rules upon them and you make them do it for their own good. So you make someone do something for their own good. That's what we're talking about. And so we're very good at imposing other things on other people.

And now it's time to impose something on ourselves. It's time that we impose meditation. So make yourself begin. That kind of sounds unspiritual.

Pray about it. Think about. Repent. And then make yourself begin. Say what I've done so far, it isn't good enough.

This quickly scanning the Bible and not really getting anything out of it, it's not what God wants. It isn't good enough. I need to improve. Pray for strength.

Pray for a heart that loves the Word of God. And then ask God for help and then do it. Wake up early enough so that you can have some unhurried time before the beginning of your day.

[24:52] No one else can do it for you. Your pastors can't. Your spouse can't. Your parents can't. You have to impose meditation upon your life.

How do you do it? You impose it upon yourself. And you get rid of distractions. You get rid of distractions. It's so hard to meditate in this world today.

It's very busy. I know that. I don't think it's ever been really particularly easy to find time to meditate. But all of God's eminent great servants have made time to do it.

And we must do the same. And so there's so much to distract us in this world. But we need to get rid of the distractions. If you're going to do it, you have to get rid of them.

And so distractions could be other people. It's hard to meditate when you have people going in and out of the room. It could be TV. It could be email.

[26:01] It could be the internet. It could be simply the place where you're doing it. If you think about this. If you're sitting in your living room. And your living room is a mess. And you're just looking. If you can't ignore the mess.

And all you're thinking about is this place needs cleaned up. Then go somewhere else. Or clean it up the night before. Get rid of the distraction.

Perhaps it's just your physical position. This might sound mundane. But it's just how you're seated, where you're at. It's distracting. Charles Spurgeon told of an encounter with an Armenian brother. He had one time. And the Armenian brother said, I've read the Bible scores of times on my knees. And I've never seen election. And Spurgeon answered, I think you read the Bible in a very uncomfortable position.

If you would have read it in an easy chair. You would have understood it better. And that's just to say. Don't let anything distract you.

[27:04] Keep you from reading and understanding the Word of God. Even if it's the way that you're sitting. Where you're at while you're doing it. You have to let the Bible speak to you.

You have to let God speak to you through the Word. And you have to be in a receptive position to hear it. And you can't hear it if you have a hundred distractions going on around you. Well, how do you do it?

You do it prayerfully. Join meditation and prayer. Who knows the meaning of a book better than its author? And who knows the meaning of the Bible better than God?

And so talk to God as He talks to you. How do you do it worshipfully? You do it worshipfully. If meditation isn't culminating in praise, then something's wrong.

Something's missing. You're missing the point. Every bit of this book, from Genesis to Revelation, is designed to show us God and His glory.

[28:05] It's designed to point to Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. And so, read it. Relish what you find. Think about what you've found. And then praise God for it.

Take your delight before His throne and tell Him how much you are enjoying all that He is. How do you meditate? Use sanctified imagination.

This could get some people into trouble. So, listen carefully. The imagination is not over the Word of God. But God has given us an imagination. And we are to use it to understand the Word of God.

And to apply it to ourselves. So, when you're reading of Paul and the shipwreck and Acts, put yourself in the story. Just imagine that.

Imagine the winds blowing for days on end. And imagine the cramped quarters of all these people on this ship. And what would it be like to not know where you're going?

[29:13] To have no power over where you're headed? And at any moment, the ship could go under. And put yourself, chain yourself, as it were, next to Paul. And think about what that would be like.

Imagine frightened soldiers. And sailors. And a desperate captain trying to save his ship. What would it be like? What would it smell like?

What would it sound like? And imagine those final moments when the ship breaks apart. And every man is grabbing a piece of wood. And imagine the waves.

And the sand. And the seaweed. And the rocks. And imagine what Paul could have been feeling. What he was thinking. Put yourself in that position.

Get into the story. Think about it. Brothers and sisters, God gave us an imagination. And we are to use it to understand his word. It doesn't. It's not over the scripture.

[30:13] We're not to add things that are contrary to it. But. This is God's story. And it happened in a time and a place. And it's not that hard to imagine what it would be like.

So put yourself in the disciples' shoes. Think about how many dusty roads they walk down. We don't like driving on a hot summer day with no air conditioning.

Imagine walking all the time. Dust in your throat and in your mouth. And think about Jesus talking to you. Think about.

You're walking as a group. And you hear. James and John behind you. They're having that old argument again. About who's going to be first.

Who's going to be the top dog. In the kingdom of God. And imagine your own heart's response. Have you ever thought of that? We're so easy at reading the scripture.

[31:12] And thinking. Oh. I can't believe they had that argument. But think if you were there. Who are. And how easy would it be? It would be so easy, wouldn't it? To say, who do they think they are?

And it's really easy to imagine you joining in the argument. Isn't it? Well, imagine Jesus stopping and asking. What are you arguing about?

And when he looked at you. How would you feel? What would you think? The Bible is a story. It's God's story. And so every good story.

And the Bible is a good story. It's a true good story. Asks us to use our imagination. And so don't let the words sit there dead on the page.

Whatever you do. Don't let them sit there. Pray over them. Think about them. Dig into them. Write. Pray. Imagine. And then worship.

[32 : 13] C.S. Lewis put it like this. I believe that many who find that nothing happens when they sit down to a book of devotion. Would find that their heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology.

With a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand. It's the thoughtful, thorough, hard work of meditation that brings out worship. That makes the heart sing.

And so will you meditate? Yes or no? And if you say yes. When will you begin? Will you begin tonight?

Will you begin tomorrow morning? Will you do it? Do what it takes to wake up early enough. To spend time with God and His Word. Will you do what it takes?

What will you do? Will you study God's Word or will you ignore it? Will you make it a box to check off?

[33 : 14] What will you do? Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Bible.

Thank you that you have given us the Bible in a language that we can understand. That we can appreciate. That we can study.

That we have so many good translations available to us. When there are so many people. Thousands of people.

Thousands of languages. Where the Bible is not heard. Where Jesus is not known. And too often we sit with our eight or nine or ten Bibles on our shelves in our house.

And we don't meditate on them. We take them for granted. Will you please forgive us? Will you please put within us a desire to study the Scripture.

[34 : 27] A desire to do the hard work that is necessary for change to happen? And Holy Spirit, we know that we don't have the ability to do this. We don't have the ability to put the desire to meditate.

We have a sinful nature that is enmity to God. And does not like the Word of God.

Holy Spirit, please overcome our opposition. And give us a love, a thirst, and a desire for the Scripture. Will you sanctify your people?

Will you give us a passion for the things that are on your heart? Will you give us a passion for your Word? Will you help us to realize the truly important things in life?

They're not things that money can buy. It's you. And it's you speaking to us through the Word. And it's your Son, and it's following Him.

[35 : 42] Will you help us to not throw away the better things for trifles? Will you teach us to meditate and change us with it? In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. Let's stand and we'll sing hymn 674, Holy Bible, Book Divine, Precious Treasure, You're Mine.