

## Psalm 119:105-112 MEDITATING ON THE BIBLE

As Christians, we deeply value the Scriptures, don't we? We know the importance of reading the Bible regularly. More than reading it, we are encouraged to study it, looking into its context and background, deepening our understanding of what God is saying to us. The Bible shapes our values, our relationships and our understanding of the world. As we continue to grow in our faith, we diligently seek to put its principles and precepts into practice.

As our psalmist this morning says, "Your word is a lantern to my feet: and a light to my path", and "Your commands are my inheritance for ever: they are the joy of my heart. I have set my heart to fulfil your statutes: always, even to the end."

"They are a joy to my heart!" That's inspiring, isn't it?

In the Gospel reading this morning, we have the familiar parable of the sower. If we distilled the message from that parable into a single sentence, it would be that Jesus is looking for believers who not only hear his words, but understand them and put them into practice.

If we've been a Christian a long time, we'll know and love the Scriptures. But if we're honest, I suspect we may not always be able to echo the psalmist's words: "They are a joy to my heart." At times, even the Bible can feel a bit stale - like anything we become very familiar with.

Is it possible to reignite our love for the Scriptures if that has waned? I believe it is.

In our contemporary society, our adversary the devil majors in three things. -noise, hurrying and crowds. If he can keep us distracted by clamour and noise, occupied by the rush and busyness of life, and constantly interacting with other people – he has won a major victory. The busyness of life can mean we have little time for God and for his Word.

If we hope to move beyond the superficiality of our culture – and often the superficiality of our religious culture, we must be willing to rediscover silence and meditation. And then we need to bring the art of meditation to the reading of the Scriptures.

Having said that, the word "meditation" can sometimes make Christians uneasy. It brings to mind a picture of a shaved, orange clad monk, sitting cross-legged on the floor, chanting "OHMMMM". They equate it with eastern religions and transcendental meditation. In reality, eastern meditation and Christian meditation are poles apart. Eastern meditation encourages the emptying of the mind, whereas Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind with God.

The discipline of meditating on God’s word can be found throughout the Scriptures. It’s mentioned something like 58 times in the Old Testament alone. In the Psalms, we find three different Hebrew words that we translate ‘meditate’. They have various related meanings:

1. In Ps 1:2, we read “**...on his law he meditates day & night,**” The Hebrew word (*hagah*) means to ponder, or murmur in pleasure.
2. In Ps 119:99 we read “**...I meditate on your statutes.**” The Hebrew word (*sichah*) means to reflect with deep devotion.
3. Then in Ps 19:14 The Hebrew word literally means a musical notation - “**May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight O Lord.**” So meditation is like a musical repetition of God’s word.

Though the words are used in different contexts, what is always evident, is that the end result of meditating on the Bible is a changed life. Repentance and obedience are essential in any Biblical understanding of meditation.

So many of the Biblical figures practised meditation: Isaac, Eli, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, David. These were people who were close to God’s heart. Not because they had special abilities but simply because they were willing to draw aside with him and listen.

And of course Jesus himself modelled this discipline. We know from the Gospels that he constantly sought time alone with God, away from the crowds and the demands of his ministry. He often went up on a mountain, or to a lonely place to pray.

Meditating on the Bible heightens our ability to hear God’s voice and obey him. It builds a deeper, more intimate friendship with our Lord, where we learn to recognise his voice and respond to it. We can only do this in the quietness and depth of silently contemplating his Word. God rarely grabs a megaphone and shouts at us to get our attention. His is a “still, small voice” and unless we are quiet ourselves, we won’t hear it.

But once we do begin to hear God speak to us, it is life changing! The Bible comes alive. Instead of being a dusty, hard to understand book that sits on our shelf, it becomes something we delight to read – because God actually SPEAKS to us through it. I have lost count of the number of times I’ve read a passage from the Bible in a time of difficulty, and it’s been as if God has penned those words especially for me. It gives me goosebumps!

Once we learn to hear the voice of God in times of quiet meditation on the Bible, we then more easily recognise his voice in the rush of our everyday lives.

Our walk with God is meant to be an intimate one. A close friendship. He longs to be able to talk to us – for us to talk to him. To be available for him to send to others to touch

them with his love and grace. Meditation on the Scriptures opens the door to this intimate friendship with Jesus.

Say we're convinced that we'd like to begin the practice of meditating on the Bible. Where do we start? How do we do it?

It's very difficult to learn how to meditate from a book or by listening to a talk. We learn to meditate by meditating. Having said that, though, some simple suggestions can help.

When we're learning to meditate, it's best to set aside a time of the day when we know we'll be undisturbed – and for a decent length of time. And of course, we need to find a quiet place.

We need to become still and let go of the things that crowd our minds, so we can be aware of presence of God within us and around us. Sometimes it helps to have a focus as we become conscious of God's presence. A candle can remind us of the presence of Jesus. A flower or a picture might be helpful for some people. Many people find meditative breathing is helpful. Whatever we might use to help us focus on Jesus, the main thing is that we centre the mind, the emotions, the body and the spirit on Jesus.

One means of meditating on the Bible is to select a short section. A thought. A verse, even just part of a verse.

Suppose we choose to meditate on Jesus words, "My peace I leave with you." (John 14:27) The aim is not so much to study the words, but to experience their reality. We engage our imagination and contemplate the truth that Jesus is filling us with his peace. We might imagine leaving our fears and worries at the foot of the cross, and his peace flowing into us. Our spirit and emotions become awakened to the inflowing of God's peace. Rather than analysing and dissecting God's peace, we enter into it. That's meditating on that verse.

Another approach is to enter into a biblical story, such as the prodigal son. Imagine the homecoming scene and yourself as a participant in the story. Engage your emotions. See the scene in your mind's eye – the dusty ground. The pens for the goats. The water troughs. Hear the bleating of the animals. Imagine the heat of the sun on your back, and the manure laden scent on the breeze.

Stand next to the father, as for the umpteenth time, he stares down the road, longing for his son. Share the leap of his heart, as he sees a figure in the distance, his growing excitement as he wonders if it is his son.

Enter into the celebration as the father recognises the son, and runs out to meet him. As he issues instructions to hold a great feast.

Then bring yourself into the story. The son has gone off to clean up. You are left with the father. You know that the father in this story is God. He is your father too. And he's looking at you. He puts his hands on your shoulders and looks into your eyes. What does he say to you? What do you have to say to him? Perhaps write it down!

Our imaginations are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. As we enter into quiet, reflective times like this, as we enter into Scripture stories in the security of God's embrace, we'll find they can be wonderful catalysts for God to speak into our lives.

Meditating on the Bible is listening, sensing and heeding the voice of God. It is being transformed into his likeness. It is hearing his voice and obeying his word. It is living a life that is pleasing to God. It is experiencing the abundant life that Jesus promised those who follow him.

If this is a discipline you haven't explored, can I commend it to you? Practiced on a regular basis it makes an amazing difference to our walk with God, and to our love for his Word.

We will soon be shouting with the psalmist, "they are a joy to my heart!"

Let's pray.