

4

TRANSFORMATION

"we are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory." 2 Cor 3:18

MEDITATION AND PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION

Discussion questions:

1. What do you think might be the difference between Christian meditation and the meditation practiced by Eastern Religions?
2. What potential dangers do you see for the Christian who practices the kind of Meditation which invites you to 'empty yourself', to repeat certain words as a 'mantra' or to seek an inward self-consciousness or altered mental state?

Christian meditation is not about emptying our mind or ourselves before God, but rather it means filling ourselves with God and his word. Take a small passage, or even some verses that you have memorised, and make them the locus of your thoughts before God. Instead of unplugging your mind, train your mind to focus on that portion of scripture. Consider its every facet, just in the same way a jeweller might hold a diamond up to the light to see all of its beauty. Listen to how it sounds. Ponder its significance for you or for others. What parts of your life might it impact?

Having meditated upon Scripture, we can then begin praying it. This is a way of allowing God to shape your prayer life through his inspired words. We pray the very words of Scripture back to God, or we might personalise them, shape them and rephrase them into our own words. The Psalms are often particularly helpful. Here we find prayers that give voice to our fears and frustrations, joys and sorrows, exaltation and exasperation; all preserved in Scripture and shared with the people of God through the centuries.

EXERCISE

Open your Bibles to Matthew 5:3-10. At this point in our series, this will be a familiar passage. Today it will become even more familiar because we are going to memorise it!

Prepare (5 minutes)

Have two or three people read the passage out aloud.

3. What patterns can you see in the passage that will help you remember it?
4. What other memory techniques do you know that will help you memorise this passage?

All together, read the passage out aloud, closing your eyes as much as possible. Take another minute or so to quietly memorise the passage.

Some forms of meditation require various posture, relaxation and breathing techniques. These are not 'evil' in themselves, and may even be helpful for some people. The main thing is what takes place between ourselves and God.

The three basic elements of meditation on Scripture are:

1. **Prepare** by memorizing;
2. **Ponder**
3. **Pray**

Psa. 119:97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

⁹⁸ Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.

⁹⁹ I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.

¹⁰⁰ I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

Paul prays for the Ephesians:

3:6 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ponder (5-10 minutes)

Sit quietly now before the Lord and begin to ponder these verses. You may remain with the rest of your group, or you may find your own space.

Consider how various parts of the passage come to light if you emphasize different words. For example, what happens when you emphasize the words *'for they will'* in each verse? What happens if you emphasize some other words.

Deliberate over how these verses might shape your responses to people or situations through the day. If you attended the seminar last week on *Understanding Personality*, review which of the beatitudes particularly resonates with your personality. Reflect on which one is the hardest for you to embrace. Why is that, do you think?

As you continue to ponder these verses, how are your desires shaped by them? How are your hopes shaped by them?

Consider just for a few moments how you are feeling right now about these verses and about this discipline of meditating on them. What's going on, do you think?

Pray (5-10 minutes)

Gather up your musings and meditations and bring them to God in personal prayer.

GROUP REFLECTION

Return to your group and pray together in response to the passage (about 5 minutes).

Then, discuss:

5. How did meditating on these verses go for you?
6. How might meditating on the Bible in this way work to transform you to become more like Christ?

This kind of meditation on the word of God means that our agenda for prayer is set by the Bible, instead of our own immediate desires and concerns. Scripture also gives us model prayers to follow and to mimic; such as the prayers of Jesus, Paul, Daniel, Mary, Moses and Hannah. When we are at a loss as to what to pray, when it seems there are no words or prayers in our heart, the words of Scripture take us to God, even through a difficult time of our lives.

7. What prayers of the Bible have helped you in the past?
8. Do you let God set the agenda when you are praying? How? When do you know that God is setting agenda and when your mind is just aimlessly wandering and you have stopped paying attention to God and to prayer?

HOMEWORK

This week, memorise one other passage of scripture and take time to meditate on it and pray through it.