

Series: Draw Near

Title: The Spiritual Discipline of Meditation

Text: Psalm 19 (Special Emphasis - Psalm 19:14)

Additional Scriptures: Matt. 11:15, Matt. 7:7-8, Psalm 63:1, Psalm 22, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Psalm 104:34, Hebrews 13:20-21, Psalm 119:20, Psalm 130:5-7, Psalm 119:99-100, Nehemiah 8:10, Psalm 119:14-17, Psalm 119:18-19, Ephesians 1:17-18, Hebrews 11:6

Sermon Summary: This message begins the Spiritual Disciplines series which will help us focus on the vertical relationship we are to have with God! A fair amount of time is spent at the beginning explaining the importance of spiritual disciplines. The first spiritual discipline studied is meditation. There are three main points to this message: Meditation's Explanation, Meditation's Emphasis, and Meditation's Effects. While the concept of meditation was well known to the writers and the people of Biblical times, the Judeo/Christian understanding is not so well known in today's world, therefore a good bit of explanation is taken from the writings of Dr. Richard Foster in his book "Celebration of Discipline!"

Full Sermon Notes:

"There is no other so sure and steady, my hope is held in Your hand
When castles crumble and breath is fleeting, upon this rock I will stand" Such powerful lyrics!
Our hope really is in Jesus' hands and our feet only find stable footing when we are standing on the rock of ages, Jesus. Today we're going to talk about the importance of meditating on the things of God and especially His Word, in order to find that sure footing, in a rather wobbly world filled with noisiness and clutter! Let's pray and ask God to help us learn how to listen for and discern His voice in all of this! Pray!

The theme of this series of sermons on **Relationships** is found in the first part of James 4:8...

James 4:8a Come near to God and he will come near to you...

Coming near to God happens when, by practicing the spiritual disciplines, we place ourselves in a position to allow The Holy Spirit to bring God's love, God's grace, God's forgiveness, God's mercy, God's guidance, God's wisdom, God's strength, God's peace, and so much more, into our lives! For the next 12 weeks, with the exception of Easter, we're going to be focusing on how practicing the spiritual disciplines can deepen and build our relationship with God! We'll be talking about the disciplines of prayer, study, fasting, solitude, and a host of others.

The basic dictionary definition of discipline is this...

discipline |¹disəplɪn|

1 the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience, the controlled behavior resulting from such training, activity or experience that provides mental or physical training, a system of rules of conduct

Notice the world's definition of discipline does not even mention spirituality. But listen to this stark statement by Dr. Elton Trueblood...

“The greatest problems in our time are not technological, political, or economic. the greatest problems are moral and spiritual, and unless we make some progress in these realms, we may not even survive!” Elton Trueblood 1976

Dr. Richard Foster, a Quaker professor, writer, and well respected theologian, wrote a book called “Celebration of Discipline.” We have this book out front and you can get it at our cost! I will quote from him a bunch today and some throughout this series. You can also pick up the laminated reading plan for free and we have another free resource, a wonderful tool that Zach came up with to guide you as you meditate on the Bible readings for this week. Okay, Foster says...

“those who have heard the distant call deep within and who desire to explore the world of the Spiritual Disciplines are immediately faced with two difficulties. The first is philosophic. The materialistic base of our age has become so pervasive that it has given people grave doubts about their ability to reach beyond the physical world. Many first rate scientists have passed beyond such doubts, knowing that we cannot be confined to a space-time box. But the average person is influenced by popular science which is a generation behind the times and is prejudiced against the nonmaterial world. The second difficulty is a practical one. We simply do not know how to go about exploring the inward life...Today there is an abysmal ignorance of the most simple and practical aspects of nearly all the classic Spiritual Disciplines.” Richard Foster

And with that said, It is my hope that this series of sermons will begin to erase the ignorance and open our eyes to the extreme need of our generation to pursue Spiritual discipline.

Foster also says...

“God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.” pg 7

He goes on to use the analogy of a farmer who prepares the ground and then plants the seed. The farmer can water, weed and fertilize, but he cannot grow the seed into a plant. Spiritually speaking, when we practice the spiritual disciplines we are allowing the seeds of God’s Word to be planted into our hearts where God grows them and allows them to eventually bear the fruits of righteousness! With this in mind, we will talk today about the discipline of meditation! Meditation can help you learn things, figure things out, create things, dream of and envision possibilities. Spiritual meditation allows God to speak to your heart and gives you divine direction based on the truths of His Word. Meditation is vital for drawing near to God! So let’s look at...

1. Meditation’s Explanation

What does meditation really mean? In our text, towards the end of Psalm chapter 19 we find this statement:

Psalm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

So what is the meaning of meditation anyway? The dictionary definition you'll find on the web is this...

meditate |^l medə, tāt| verb

To think deeply or focus one's mind for a period of time

I know that is a very basic meaning. But it's a good basic definition. Kids, I'm glad you're here this morning. Let me help you with this word. In my simple, ADHD mind I think of meditation as concentration! Meditation is sort of like reading something and then taking a moment to concentrate on what it means. Taking a little time to daydream about the possibilities and the applications to your life! In other words, what does this mean for me? When you read something, think about what word stuck out in your mind, and what sticks with you five minutes later. The Psalmist prayed that his meditation, his thoughts and his mind's focus, his heart's focus, would be pleasing to God. The Psalmist also wanted his words to be pleasing to God. Remember this, if your heart is right, right words will follow! Foster gives the following definition of Meditation from a Biblical viewpoint...

"Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word." pg 17

That's so good! We're going to go with that definition today!

"The ability to hear God's voice and obey his word."

Foster goes on to tell us this...

"The Bible uses two different Hebrew words (הִשָּׁבַח and חִשְׁבֹּן) to convey the idea of meditation, and together they are used some fifty-eight times. These words have various meanings: listening to God's word, reflecting on God's works, rehearsing God's deeds, ruminating on God's law, and more. In each case there is stress upon changed behavior as a result of our encounter with the living God. Repentance and obedience are essential features in any biblical understanding of meditation." pg 15

Before we go any further, I want to quickly distinguish the differences between the Jewish-Christian, known as Judeo-Christian, view on meditation and the Eastern view, which is the most common in the U.S. today. I'm not an expert on the subject so I will once again turn to Dr. Foster...

"... Eastern forms of meditation stress the need to become detached from the world. There is an emphasis upon losing personhood and individuality and merging with the Cosmic Mind. There is a longing to be released from the burdens and pains of this life and be caught up into the

effortless, suspended bliss of Nirvana. Personal identity is lost in a pool of cosmic consciousness. Detachment is the final goal of Eastern religion. It is an escaping from the miserable wheel of existence. There is no God to be attached to or to hear from. Zen and Yoga are popular forms of this approach. Transcendental Meditation has the same Buddhist roots but in its Western form is something of an aberration. In its popular form, TM is meditation for the materialist. You do not need to believe in the spiritual realm in the least to practice it. It is merely a method of controlling the brain waves in order to improve your physiological and emotional well-being. More advanced forms of TM do involve the spiritual nature, and then it takes on exactly the same characteristics as all other Eastern religions. Christian meditation goes far beyond the notion of detachment. There is need for detachment... But we must go on to attachment. The detachment from the confusion all around us is in order to have a richer attachment to God and to other human beings."

Let me put it this way: The goal of meditation for some is to empty the mind, but as followers of Christ we have the goal to fill our minds with the things of God!

That concept is so important because it sets the foundation for our message today. You see, your definition of meditation will determine your focus in meditation, your goals for meditation and your results after meditation. Meditation is meal time for the soul, medicine for the soul, inspiration for the soul and motivation for the soul! God wants so much for things to be okay with your soul. When I speak of your soul, I'm speaking of the part of you that truly embodies who you are, what you think, what you believe, and what you choose to pursue in this life. In meditation, God's voice speaks to those who have spiritual ears to hear. Jesus often said:

Matthew 11:15 He who has ears, let him hear.

And Jesus also told us this...

Matthew 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Matthew 7:8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

So what does seeking, asking and knocking look like in the spiritual world? There's a lot of people who want God's wisdom, direction, guidance, power, and strength, but they don't want it enough to seek it, to spend time asking, or to make the effort to knock on the door which stands at the entryway to the things of God! They think God should just give it to them without any effort. Now let me say this: When it comes to salvation, the forgiveness, mercy and grace of God, we don't deserve those things, we can't earn those things by good works, and we can't purchase them, but we do have to ask for them to receive them. If we aren't willing to humble ourselves and admit we need those things from God then our pride will rob us of their benefits. God paid the price for our salvation when He sent His Son Jesus to this world to be our Savior! So all we have to do is ask, and receive! That's a one and done! When it comes to Spiritual growth, we ask and receive, but this asking and receiving is not a one and done! It's a daily ask

and receive! If you have no desire to grow spiritually or to know God's wisdom, you won't ask for it or place yourself in a position to receive it. The Psalmist understood this. Listen to his words...

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

The lost art of meditation is one of the most powerful ways of growing in your spiritual relationship with God, and you can learn this art if you are willing! Now that we know what Meditation's explanation is, let's look at...

2. Meditation's Emphasis

Our text is Psalm 19 and it emphasizes and focuses on some very important things. Let's see what those things are. The first is...

God's Amazing Creation

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Psalm 19:2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

Psalm 19:3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

Psalm 19:4 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,

Psalm 19:5 which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

Psalm 19:6 It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.

So when you meditate on creation, the voice of the Creator can be heard. How many of you have spent time watching a beautiful sunrise/sunset, walking in the mountains, along the sea shore, or taking a boat ride through the beautiful lakes and marshes of our area? If you take the time to meditate on the beauty and complexity of creation I believe God will speak to your heart! Why? When you look at a piece of artwork you can always see a bit of the artist in their art! You can see the artist's heart in their art! Creation is God-Art, and creation is the natural revelation of God to humankind. But the beauty of meditation is that it explores more than one emphasis, and takes more than one avenue to see and experience God! So we move from natural revelation to God's written revelation which we are encouraged to focus on as we study His laws, statutes, precepts, commands and ordinances.

God's Amazing Revelation

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

Psalm 19:8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

Psalm 19:9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring for ever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

Psalm 19:10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

Psalm 19:11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

God has revealed His precious Word to us in the 66 books of the Bible. Written by 40 plus authors over thousands of years, it is absolutely amazing how consistent, constant, and correct it is when it comes to the principles of life, relationships with God and man, morality, integrity, justice, truth, eternity, you name it, and there's principles in the Bible to cover it. You won't find specific forms of modern media mentioned in the Bible, but the Godly principles to govern our use of the internet, social media, and entertainment options, are specific and unambiguous! And when it comes to our moral behavior, Congress can pass whatever laws they want to, but man's laws will never supersede or nullify God's truth! Never! And when we meditate on God's amazing written revelation, it will inevitably lead us to the living revelation, Jesus, the Word in the flesh who came to provide something we should all meditate on and is the one of the most important things emphasized in the Old and New Testament...

God's Amazing Salvation

Psalm 19:12 Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

The Psalmist asked an interesting question. Who can discern his errors? Whose errors is he talking about? He's talking about his own errors! Psalm 19 is attributed to King David. He knows his position in the world is privileged. He knows very few would ever question him or say that he had made an error. But King David knows that as God's servant, having been warned by the Word of God of right and wrong, David is asking the question, "Who can discern my errors?" And he knows the answer: God can! So David immediately asked God to forgive his hidden faults.

Why? If no one knew about them, why did they matter? Well, they may have been hidden to the world, but they weren't hidden to God and David knew that full well! You can fool people, but God knows the hidden truth and yet is still willing to forgive those who will admit, they're a sinner, believe God wants to forgive them, and humbly asks God's forgiveness! People sometimes ask me how people of the Old Testament can be saved since Jesus had not yet come and died on the Cross for people's sins. It's simple really. We believe the Messiah, The Lamb of God, The Son of God came, past tense and died to give us salvation. People like King David believed the Messiah, The Lamb of God, The Son of God, would come, future tense, and die to give them salvation! You can see this when you meditate on the Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillment in the New Testament!

Listen to these statements and tell me if you think they are from the Old or the New Testament:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me..."

“He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.”
“...they have pierced my hands and my feet.”
“They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”

These statements all come from The Old Testament Book of Psalm 22! When I meditate on the prophecies about Jesus in the Psalms and in Isaiah, I am amazed at the truth of God’s Salvation for us in Jesus Christ!

What happens when we meditate and emphasize God's creation, His revelation, and His salvation? We begin to realize...

3. Meditation's Effects

Meditation is not just a spiritual exercise to do, meditation has effects! It has a purpose, an end, a goal! Foster says...

“What happens in meditation is that we create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart.” Pg 20

And remember what God’s Word says...

1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?

And when we allow Jesus to create that space inside our heart for His Holy Spirit to live, some amazing things happen! From that space, He begins to change every corner of our lives! We begin to experience...

Freedom From Bondage

Psalm 19:13 Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

The Psalmist David meditated on the things of God because he did not want to have willful sin in his life. He knew he wasn't perfect, but he also knew that being human and weak was not an excuse for sin. He did not want to willfully sin. He wanted to live a stronger life so that with God's help sin would not rule over him. He knew that willful sin would lead to great transgressions...transgression that would not only destroy his own life, but which would have devastating effects on those around him. So his goal was to learn, through meditating on God's laws, precepts, and truths, how to live free from the bondage to sin and at the same time glorify God with his life! And then the last verse of our text gives us yet another effect of meditation. We begin...

To Be Pleasing to God

Psalm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

One of the goals for Christian meditation is to connect with God in such a way that it pleases Him. Why are we concerned with pleasing Him if our salvation is a gift that cannot be earned? When you love someone you want to be pleasing to them!! The Psalmist says this in Psalm 104...

Psalm 104:34 I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.

So are these the only two goals of Christian meditation? "What about knowing God's will, and having great knowledge, and being successful, and I can think of many other things!" Yes there are so many good goals and ends for Christian meditation. The writer of Hebrews sums it up for us this way...

Hebrews 13:20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,
Hebrews 13:21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

In other words, if your meditation leads you to let God set you free from the chains of sin and help you to live a life that pleases Him, the goals of meditation will have exceeded expectations and the effects will be apparent and widespread! In what ways? King David, in our text says you will have a...

Revived Soul

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul...

David certainly understood the need for a revived soul! Want to be able to sing, "It is well with my soul?" Meditate on God's perfect law, His precepts! The writer of Psalm 119, whom we are not sure of their identity, wrote these fabulously inspired words....

Psalm 119:20 My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.

What consumes your soul? What do you long for? If you're consumed with selfish and sinful desires of this world, those things will end up consuming your soul in a detrimental way. On the other hand, if you are consumed with a desire for God's Word, His ways, and His will, your soul will find true satisfaction!

Psalm 130:5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.

Psalm 130:6 My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Psalm 130:7 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.

Our text gives another effect I'm especially grateful for...

Wisdom for the Simple

Psalm 19:7... The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

You may not have degrees from Yale or Harvard, but when you meditate on the statutes of the Lord, you will become really, really smart! How smart? Check this out in Psalm 119...

Psalm 119:99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.

Psalm 119:100 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

David then gives an effect of meditation I think we all need...

A Joyful Heart

Psalm 19:8a The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart...

In this world today, I need that! The Joy of the Lord! I want that! I'm sure willing to spend some time meditating if I can have more of the Joy of the Lord. Why do we need the Joy of the Lord? The Prophet Nehemiah was reading the Word of God to the exiles of Israel who had returned to Jerusalem, and they began to weep over their sin. Listen to what Nehemiah told them...

Nehemiah 8:10 ... This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Nehemiah was reminding the people that our joy and our strength are found in the fact that God is a merciful, forgiving, and gracious God who will help us and give us the power to live according to His Word and in His will!

The writer of Psalm 119 put it this way...

Psalm 119:14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

Psalm 119:15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

Psalm 119:16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

Psalm 119:17 Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word.

Meditation on God's Word will make crystal clear the distinction between living by the world's standards and God's. In fact our text says you will have...

Eyes that See

Psalm 19:8 The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

And in Psalm 119...

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Psalm 119:19 I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.

Paul put it this way in his letter to the church at Ephesus...

Ephesians 1:17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Ephesians 1:18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...

And finally the Psalmist David gives us two effects of meditating on God's Word that go hand in hand...

Warnings and Rewards

Psalm 19:9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring for ever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

Psalm 19:10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

Psalm 19:11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

When we meditate on God's Word, His laws, His precepts we are warned about things that may bring temporary pleasure, but will bring hurt, harm and destruction! And when we meditate on God's Word we are shown the paths to walk on that will bring Godly rewards which are meaningful in this life and last for an eternity!

God's Word tells us in Hebrews that...

Hebrews 11:6 ...He rewards those who earnestly seek him.

And what are those rewards to those who would spend the time to seek God in the discipline of meditation? Well, the greatest is a personal, one on one relationship and fellowship with God Almighty. And this leads to all kinds of rewards...You experience God's love and forgiveness, you get His strength, and His wisdom! You learn things, you figure things out, you dream things and envision possibilities, God speaks to your heart and gives you divine direction based on the truths of His Word. Who wouldn't want those things?

Let's pray!