

Title: A week of John 3:16-21
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West Valley Presbyterian Church
02-14-2016

Introduction

When we hear “meditation”, we think of Eastern meditation. [lotus image]

There is also Christian meditation, which I’m going to talk about today. You may ask “isn’t all meditation the same?” Well no. The goal of eastern meditation is to empty yourself but the goal of Christian meditation is to fill the self with God. This is better picture of Christian meditation.

[man in pew image]

In the Bible

Meditation is mentioned a number of time in the Bible. The first mention is in Genesis 24:63
“⁶³ He [Isaac] went out to the field one evening to meditate.”ⁱ

Meditation occurs 19 times in Psalms. Psalms starts out in Psalms 1:1-2

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I meditate on your preceptsⁱⁱ (Ps 119:15)

I meditate on all your works (Ps 143:5)

We meditate on your unfailing love.(Ps 48:9)

When we get to the NT we see different words used but the setup says meditation:

In Matthew 14:13 we hear of Jesus “¹³ He [Jesus] withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.”ⁱⁱⁱ

For me, the first verse in Psalms that speaks of meditation is very meaningful to me. [slide]

¹Happy are those ... whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.”^{iv}

When I was considering going to Seminary and was praying about it, the Spirit lead me to this verse as confirmation to what other people were telling me. When I read it I said to myself “I can do that. I can meditate or study the law of the Lord, the scriptures day and night. And God promises that I will be happy if I do this.” I enrolled and I’ve been happy.

Why should we meditate, besides being instructed to do so in the Bible. Thomas à Kempis says that in meditation we are growing into what he calls “a familiar friendship with Jesus.” (Foster, 19). So it is to grow closer to Jesus and to hear what God is telling us. That is the purpose of meditation.

Benefits of Meditation

Foster says the benefits of meditation are: [slide]

- Fills your mind with God - Not the same as eastern mediation – not an attempt to empty the mind but to fill the mind Luke 11:24–26 (paraphrase)
 - “²⁴“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’²⁵ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.”^v
- Attaches yourself to the mind of God - Christian meditation leads us to the inner wholeness necessary to give ourselves to God freely. (Foster, 21).
- Very Simple - “Thomas Merton, [A [Trappist](#) monk and [mystic](#)] writes, ‘Meditation is really very simple and there is not much need of elaborate techniques to teach us how to go about it.’” (Foster 21).
- Redirects our lives so that we can deal with human life successfully (Foster, 22)
- Gives us actual contact and communion with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Foster 22).

This may be new to you. Foster says to “Let me suggest we take an experiential attitude toward spiritual realities. ... experiment with it to see if it is true or not.” (Foster, 23).

I do not want to turn this into just knowing about meditation, We need to try it.

How to mediate: [slide]

- Learn by doing
- Choose a time of day: experienced folks can do it any time.
Beginners should set aside a time of day. First thing in the morning, lunch hour, after dinner, last thing at night. Sitting in your driveway before leaving for work, when you pull in at night.
- Set aside enough time - say 10-20 minutes.
- Select a place: Foster says find a place that is quiet and free from interruption.
 - No telephone should be nearby.
 - Somewhere with a pleasant view If it is possible.
 - It is best to have one designated place rather than hunting for a different spot each day.
- Take a Posture?
 - In one sense posture makes no difference at all;
 - In another sense, however, posture is of utmost importance. The body, the mind, and the spirit are inseparable. Tension in the spirit is telegraphed in body language.
 - I would suggest sitting – no slouching. Foster “the aim is to center the attention of the body, the emotions, the mind, and the spirit upon “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).
- There are different types of meditation. This morning I’m going to focus upon one type: the Meditation upon Scripture. (Foster, 29).
 - Select one or more versus – 10 at max.
 - Read the verse out loud. Slowing, not rushing. Savor the words.
 - You may feel that you know what the verse says, you’ve read it a million times before. But do you know what it means? Do you know what God wants you to hear today, now?
 - As you hear the words of the passage, you will discern nuances and associations that are often overlooked when the passage is read silently.^{vi}
 - We break it open by read the passage more than once. With each reading, read it differently. Stress the nouns, or verbs or prepositions.
 - Now when you read the verse, vary how you read it. For example, emphasize a different word. For example,:^{vii} [slide]

“For God so loved the world”

Notice how a slight change brings out a different flavor to the verse.

- Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you to what God wants to say to you now.
- We want to let the Word of God dwell in our lives^{viii} Dwelling is not something quick. Occupying happens quickly, Dwelling takes some time.
- After reading the passage, pause and ponder it. What is it saying to your right now.
- After a time of meditation, read it out loud again.
- Scripture contains eternal wisdom held in the shell of human words. We want to “break open” these words and hear what God has to say.
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This morning we are going to practice this. We are going to take 5 verses. Read them out loud, have a couple of minutes of silence when we all ponder what the Spirit has led us to.

I’ve done this in class many times and it always amazes me how people always hear something and how different what they hear is from what I hear.

For some, the time of silence will seem like a long time. You’re probably looking at your watch this moment wondering when I am going to be done talking so that we can get onto the next thing.

I feel that pressure. I feel that I am being controlled by habit. I feel that I am being controlled by the little hint of gratification that there is yet another email or text message or facebook post for me consume.

- The enemies of meditation are noise, hurry, and crowds. Carl Jung once remarked “*Hurry is not of the Devil; it is the Devil*” (Foster, 15).

Put the devil out of your mind for next few minutes.

For the time of silence, we need to focus on the now. We must let that other stuff go for now. There is no next thing.

I've asked Peggy and Nathan to read a brief meditation on our passage. I have no idea of what they are going to say. But I trust them. It is the same way that we come to meditation. We have no idea of what the Holy Spirit is going to say to us. We need to trust. We need to be open to what we hear. We need to have faith that what we are going to hear will be for our good.

They will each read the passage, give us time to mediate on it, and then to share what they have heard.

For our exercise I've chosen a passage with a very familiar beginning verse—John 3:16-21. It will not be up on the screen because I want you close your eyes and to listen it.

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Peggy...

Nathan...

After mediating on John 3:16–21, do you now see a new meaning in it?

Assignment for the week

God is not done speaking to you through John 3:16–21. He has more to say. Bonhoeffer, when talking about meditation upon scripture recommended spending a whole week on a single text!" (Foster, 29).

This is what I would like us to do—spend an entire week on one text.

Notice that John 3:16–21 is printed in your bulletin. Take it home with you. Tear it off the rest of the stuff. Put it where you can see it this next week. In your shirt pocket, on your bathroom mirror, in the dash on your car, on the dinner table. When you see it, remember to meditate on it.

Foster says ... "However, meditation is not a single act, nor can it be completed the way one completes the building of a chair. It is a way of life. You will be constantly learning and growing as you plumb the inner depths." (Foster, 32).

Conclusion

Frederick W. Faber (19th Century English [hymn](#) writer and theologian) writes: [slide]

Only to sit and think of God,
 Oh what a joy it is!
 To think the thought, to breathe the Name
 Earth has no higher bliss. (Foster, 23)

Please join me in prayer.

Dear Jesus.

- We practice spiritual disciplines to know you better.
- We practice spiritual disciplines to grow closer to you
- We practice spiritual disciplines to learn your will for our lives.

We thank you that this is easy to do and that you have sent the Holy Spirit to assist us. With the Holy Spirit helping us we can only succeed. Be with us this week as ponder your word and as it comes to dwell within us.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

John 3:16–21

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.^{ix}

Sources

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of discipline : the path to spiritual growth*. 20th anniversary ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.

i *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ge 24:63.

ii *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ps 119:15.

iii *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 14:13.

iv *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ps 1:2.

v *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Lk 11:24–26.

vi <http://iblp.org/questions/how-can-i-meditate-scripture>

vii <http://iblp.org/questions/how-can-i-meditate-scripture>

viii <http://iblp.org/questions/how-can-i-meditate-scripture>

ix *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jn 3:16–21.