

## **Meditation**

This afternoon we're looking at meditation. And we're looking at meditation as a spiritual discipline.

Let's pray together before we dive in:

Father thank you that you aren't a distant God, but that you long to know us, and that you've brought us near by the blood of Jesus. Please help us to take everything that's distracting us, and entrust it into your hands. Please help us to concentrate and reflect on how great you are. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **What is meditation?**

So what is meditation? Have a look at the verse at the top of your sheet. 1 Corinthians 3:18:

*"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (1 Corinthians 3:18)*

I think a good definition would be that to meditate is to "contemplate the Lord's glory". To be actively thinking and reflecting on our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### **Is this Buddhism?**

Now we move on, some of you will be saying to yourselves "isn't meditation a Buddhist practice?". So let's think about that.

Buddhists practice meditation as a way to still the mind. Buddhist tradition teaches that certain meditation techniques were a key to gaining supernatural powers, as well as out of body experiences and interactions with the spirit world.

And our secular culture is interested in Buddhist meditation as a way to improve mental health, they just ignore all the supernatural stuff of course. This is why some Christians are wary of getting involved with secular practises (things like yoga, for example) because of their roots in Buddhism. (Though that's a discussion for another day)

But Christian meditation is not linked to either Buddhist meditation, or it's secular cousin. Our verse from 2 Corinthians shows us four distinctive things about Biblical Meditation.

1. We meditate, not before we're Christians but after we're Christians. Paul says we contemplate the Lord's glory "with unveiled faces". When my parents got married, my mum wore a veil over her face. And it meant her and my dad could sort of see each other but not completely. And there was a point in the wedding where my dad pulled the veil aside, and for the first time, they could see each other face to face. And in the same way, when we put our trust in Jesus for forgiveness, Jesus takes that veil away, and with unveiled faces, we contemplate the Lord's glory. So, meditation isn't something we do to make God like us – We're accepted by God because Jesus did on the cross in our place, saving and securing us completely. Isn't that good news? Doesn't that fill you with joy? Do you want to behold the face of the one who did that for you? That's meditation.
2. I meditate, not to empty my mind but to fill my mind. There is something that we meditate on: "The Lord's glory". The purpose of meditation in the Bible is not to empty or still the mind, but to fill it, with the knowledge of God and of his word.

3. Meditation brings, not a peaceful life but a Godly life. As we meditate, we are transformed. Do you see that? As we see the Lord's glory, we are transformed into his image with ever increasing glory. Do you have that friend who you spend so much time with, that you start to pick up each other's mannerisms? You start talking like each other, finishing each other's sentences, making the same expressions? It's like that with knowing Jesus. As we spend more time gazing, reflecting, contemplating who he is and what he's like, we begin to become more like him. So unlike Buddhist meditation, meditating biblically won't give you a quiet and peaceful life (Jesus' life wasn't very peaceful!). But it will make you more godly, and people will see that in you. Not a peaceful life but a godly life.
4. Meditation is, not by my power but by God's power. This is really important. Biblical meditation is not something we whip up inside ourselves to make us more spiritual. It's something God enables us to do by the power of his Holy Spirit. If I can meditate on Jesus, that is no grounds for pride, or for looking down on other Christians. Because it's not down to me. It's not by my power, but God's power.

We're going to look next at meditation in the Bible, but first I'd like us to get into 2s and 3s and ask each other some discussion questions: [3 minutes]

- Does anything surprise you about Biblical meditation?
- Do you think Biblical meditation is done differently from Buddhist/Secular meditation? How so, and why?

(Ask people to share their thoughts)

## **Meditation in the Bible**

### **Meditate on the word**

It's surprising how often meditation appears in the Bible! We're going to look at only a few examples, but there are many more out there!

First let's look at why we meditate on the word. Meditate on the word.

After Moses dies, God speaks to Joshua, the new leader of the Israelites, and this is one thing God tells Joshua to do.

*"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."* – Joshua 1:8

To obey God's instructions, the Israelites should always meditate on, bring to mind, what he has said. The book of the Law here is probably the first five books of the Bible. It isn't just a list of commandments, it reveals who God is and what he's done for his people by bringing them out of Egypt.

Of course, we are not under the law, we're under God's grace. But if we want to obey God, which if we're Christians, we should, then we also need to meditate on what God has said to us in the Bible. Not only on the commands, but also on who he is and what he has done for us to make us his children.

In Psalm 119, the author says this:

*"Oh, how I love your law!  
I meditate on it all day long.  
Your commands are always with me  
and make me wiser than my enemies.  
I have more insight than all my teachers,  
for I meditate on your statutes.  
I have more understanding than the elders,  
for I obey your precepts."* – Psalm 119:97-100

Not only does meditating on the Word help us to obey God, but it also helps us to grow in wisdom and insight. We can use what is written in the Bible to tell the difference between true and false, right and wrong. But it's hard to do this if we can't call it to mind. In Ephesians 6, Paul describes the Christian life as a fight, and the Sword of the Spirit we carry is the Word of God. So, as we go out into battle, let's have our swords ready, by meditating on what God's Word says.

### **Meditate on what's in front of you**

But there are other ways we can meditate, bring to mind the things of God. We can contemplate the Lord's glory through creation. We can meditate on what's in front of us.

In Psalm 8 King David says this:

*"When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,*

*which you have set in place,  
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
human beings that you care for them?" Psalm 8:3-4*

In this psalm of praise David, when he looks up at the sky and sees the vastness of the cosmos **is** struck by how mighty God is, and he ponders "why is a God so big, so powerful, concerned with people like me who are so small?"

And we can ponder the greatness of God as well when we look at the night sky, or the fine attention to detail in nature.

Also, when Jesus taught, he used pictures from everyday experience to show us truths about God. This is how Jesus taught us not to worry:

*"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" – Matthew 6:26*

So when you're out walking and you see birds flying, or flowers growing, you can remember that God is a provider, and there's no need to worry because he is in control.

### **Meditate on what's behind you**

So we can meditate on the Word, and on what's in front of us. But the Bible shows us a third way to meditate. We can also meditate on what is behind us.

When King David is in distress, he says this:

*"I remember the days of long ago;  
I meditate on all your works  
and consider what your hands have done." – Psalm 143:5*

When David is exhausted running from his enemies, he remembers what God has done for him in the past and he chooses to trust him. And we can do this too. I don't know about you, but I don't always feel like I've been spiritually thriving. But when I look back, I can remember about 5 big events and experiences that God has put into my life to grow me and make me more like Jesus, and some of them were not nice at the time! But looking back on them helps me to worship him, and to continue to trust him.

So, we can meditate on the word, we can meditate on what's in front of us, and we can meditate on what's behind us.

Let's spend 5 more minutes in our 2s and 3s discussing these questions:

- Are there any Bible verses that you like to meditate on? When do you do this?
- Is there anything in your life that reminds you of something about God?
- Do you have any stories from your past that remind you of something about God?

### **How can I meditate well?**

So, how can we meditate well? On one level, there's an easy answer to this question: Whatever you're doing, use it as a chance to reflect on God and worship him. But practically "Just think about God more" isn't very helpful is it!

Something I noticed in studying Christian disciplines is that they tend to fit together a little bit like a spider's web. Practising discipline in one area is like having one set of strings on the web, and the strings do two things: firstly they catch food, and second they hold up other parts of the web.

So if we want to grow in our capacity to meditate as Christians, it might help us to focus on disciplines like these:

- First there are disciplines of learning (Top left): For example, learning what a Bible passage means by receiving good teaching, helps us to later reflect on what that means for us day to day.
- Also there are disciplines of self-awareness (Bottom left): perhaps you come to pray to God, but you've got all these thoughts bouncing round your head. What might help you is to practise capturing those thoughts, maybe writing them down or speaking them aloud, and handing them over to God, so you can focus your mind on him.
- Or there are disciplines of abstinence (Right): cutting out things which are unhelpful. Maybe having your phone or TV on in front of you distracts you from focussing on God – well perhaps removing those distractions is an area of discipline which will help you to meditate well.

Maybe there's something in this web that catches your eye.

But in the same way, intentionally practising meditation will help you with other Christian disciplines.

Perhaps you're disciplined at reading your Bible every day, but it's hard to remember what you read the next day. You could intentionally spend time meditating in your Bible reading. Rather than reading chapter by chapter, you could read heading by heading. Intentionally leave time to reflect and talk to God about what you are reading.

Christian meditation is not meant to be something we only do on our own. We can help each other to contemplate the Lord's glory by talking about him. At the moment I'm meeting up Sam Lenton during the week, and we're reading Ecclesiastes together. We spend time apart reading and studying the passage, then we come together and share what we learned and pray together. Maybe you could ask someone from church to do this with you and meditate together. Maybe you and a friend could agree to read through a part of the Bible together, and then arrange to go for a walk or a coffee and share what God spoke to you about. Maybe you could find a way to meditate together with your family.

There's no "right" way to meditate as a Christian, and I'm expecting it will look different for each of us. Maybe you find it easier to focus on God with some light music in the background, or maybe you find that distracting and you prefer silence. Maybe you will find it easier to meditate on short Bible verses, or maybe you find it easier to meditate on huge swathes of the Bible at once. Maybe you find it easier to receive reminders by seeing things, or listening, or reading, or by moving around or body posture. All of these are good. But the purpose of them is the same: Meditate on the Word of God; Meditate on what's in front of you; and Meditate on what's behind you. Look for things to help you do those things really well.

Let's turn into our groups again for some more questions: [5 minutes]

- When do we find it easiest to meditate on the things of God?
- How might the tendency to do everything quickly affect our ability to meditate?
- Have you considered practicing meditation intentionally? What practical steps could you take to do this?

### **Meditation Practical**

For the last [10] minutes, we're going to spend some time meditating together. If you were in the sermon last week, please can you read 2 Peter 1:12-21 together.

- Remember - what is the passage basically saying?
- What is God saying to me personally through this passage?
- How am I going to respond?

If you haven't listened to last week's sermon, tomorrow John will be preaching from \_\_\_\_\_. Please turn there in your Bibles, read it together and ask each other these questions:

- What stands out to me from this passage?
- What questions do I have about it?
- How might this be speaking into my life?

Thank you everyone for taking part, we're coming to the end of the session. If any of you have questions or reflections, now is a great time to share those.

We've reached the end of our time together. If you'd like to use the space to continue to reflect and pray, you're welcome to.