

Meditation: What's on Your Mind?

The Bible teaches us about tools we can use to grow spiritually and build our relationship with God. In this third article in a series, we examine the importance of godly thoughts and meditation.

by Don Hooser

What were you *thinking*? What *are* you thinking? What *am I* thinking? God knows very well, and He is concerned.

We had better be concerned!

Our minds are what matter most. We are what we are inwardly.

The Bible has much to say about the human “heart,” a word that can be synonymous with “mind,” but which emphasizes the functions of thought, attitudes, emotions, personality and character. In the King James Version of the Bible, the word “heart” appears 833 times!

God judges us largely by what is taking place in our hearts. “For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 through 7, Jesus Christ made it clear that obeying God with our thoughts is as important as obeying with our words and actions. Thus the *spirit* of the law is as important as the letter of the law. No wonder God hates hypocrisy. Speaking to hypocritical religious leaders, Jesus said, “Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:28).

Thoughts are seldom hidden forever—they usually lead to words and actions. “For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

In the last two issues of *The Good News* we covered the vital spiritual tools of prayer and Bible reading and study. But the quality and effectiveness of our prayers and Bible study are greatly enhanced when we *think carefully or meditate* about what God is saying to us and what we are saying to God. Taking time to really think makes our prayer and Bible study meaningful instead of mechanical, inspiring rather than superficial.

Many kinds of “meditation”

Contemplating and reflecting on a subject is commonly called *meditation*. Of itself, it is not a religious word. The Bible does not

make a major distinction between *thinking* and *meditating*. The Bible was originally written almost entirely in Hebrew and Greek. A particular word may be translated *think* in one English translation and *meditate* in another translation, or with similar words such as *ponder, consider, imagine* or *muse*.

Here is the point: In the Bible, meditation is never portrayed as a religious, mental or

about “the power of positive thinking” is more humanism, faulty psychology and a rage for New Age “mind over matter” rather than anything biblical. Some of this is worshipping the mind rather than the Creator of minds!

For many Christians and non-Christians, meditation is viewed as a mental or religious ritual. This discourages many believers because it makes meditation to be

something awkward and difficult. This may come as a shock to some, but the Bible never mandates that we meditate—just as it never tells us to think—the presumption being that we already do. It does, however, tell us what we are to meditate *about*.

What do you think is the most common type of meditation? Probably it is *worry*. How



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emotional ritual. It simply is directed thinking, reflection, contemplation or concentration. Certainly the *quality* of our thinking can continue to improve, especially when we regularly pray for God’s guidance.

Prayer, Bible study and meditation take *time*. Most people are tempted to neglect these because they feel they are too busy, which is like the life of a young seedling being choked out by too many weeds (Luke 8:14). Find a quiet, comfortable place and take time—*make* time—for God! Our relationship with God needs nurturing, which requires time and communication.

Today we see a virtual mania for all kinds of *unbiblical* meditation. Meditation that is truly Christian is worlds apart from the meditation of Eastern religions (see “Misguided and Mystical Meditation,” page 22).

Even much of what has been written

sad! Instead of worrying about problems (or *possible* problems), we should *pray*! In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus Christ tells us *not to worry*—but to put God first and trust Him for our needs.

There are many constructive types of meditation, such as analysis, planning ahead and problem solving. Meditation should be *practical*! But much thinking, while not evil, is spent on trivial subjects. Beware of wasting your time and life that way.

Sadly, many thoughts are carnal and destructive—dwelling on fears, resentments, jealousy, lusts, pride and the like. God, however, wants all of our thoughts to be clean, wholesome and godly. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). We expel wrong thoughts from our minds by filling them with *right* thoughts. And purity of heart

Misguided and Mystical Meditation

Oriental meditation in general is an attempt to empty the mind, while Christian meditation fills the mind. The first looks *within* (to gain access to the “higher self”) or seeks “mindfulness” of the around (“mother earth” or the “cosmos”) while God’s way is to look *up* in worship and submission (to know and obey God). Eastern contemplation is trance-like detachment, while Christian contemplation is attachment—to God.

The blanking of the mind to achieve “enlightenment” includes “transcendental meditation” (TM), the fad started in 1956 by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Many followers believe in the power of “collective thought”—often called the “Maharishi effect”—whereby many people merely thinking the same thing make something happen! It’s essentially saying, “Who needs God or prayer when we can rely on our minds?”

Satan continues to deceive the world with promises “to make one wise”—“your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5-6). He claims to be “an angel of light,” but in reality only blinds people so they are in spiritual darkness (2 Corinthians 11:14; 4:4).

Secular meditation is commonly recommended for therapeutic relaxation for the mind and body. This can be helpful and harmless, but usually the practitioners are naively tempted to “advance” into the more spiritual philosophies and practices. Before long they may be chanting a mantra and studying Zen mysticism. There are plenty of good ways to relax that have no connection with such Eastern religions as Buddhism, Hinduism or Taoism.

Oriental-type meditation is dangerous. First, it is involvement with false religion, which alienates us from God (see Deuteronomy 12:29-32; 18:9-14). Secondly, any attempt to empty the mind in hopes of some telepathic enlightenment is unwittingly inviting demonic influence (compare Luke 11:24-26).

The current widespread fascination with oriental religion is “nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Speaking through Isaiah to His people who should have known better, God said, “They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans” (Isaiah 2:6, NIV).

can only come about through true spiritual conversion. We need God to heal our “heart” trouble!

Matters to meditate about

Let’s take a closer look at what God tells us to think about. For a more thorough study, you can use a Bible concordance to find and read all the verses that mention such words as *meditate, think, commune, ponder, imagine, remember, examine, watch, etc.*

We find two classic verses on this subject in Philippians 4—“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (verse 4) and “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (verse 8).

The supreme focus of our attention and adoration should be our awesome Creator God! We tend to be *self-conscious* when we need to be *God-conscious*. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).

Meditate on your Maker and Master. Contemplate His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. Be filled with gratitude for His goodness, grace and glory. Ponder His perfection, personality and providence. *Be in awe* of God.

Meditate on God’s words and works

Read and meditate on God’s revelation to mankind, the Holy Scriptures. This is truly *listening* to God.

How appropriate that the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119 with its 176 verses, is totally devoted to praising God for His Word and His laws. “I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways” (verse 15). “Oh, how I love

Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (verse 97). “My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word” (verse 148).

We can learn much about our loving Designer and Creator by contemplating His incredible creation (Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1-4; 139:13-18; Job 38-39). One great way to meditate is to spend time outdoors marveling at God’s flora and fauna!

We should also ponder our relationship with God and His plan and purpose for our lives. David beautifully expressed this in Psalm 8: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (verses 3-4, New International Version).

When to have spiritual meditation

Ideally, we should meditate every day and night about God and the things of God! Psalm 1:2 speaks of a righteous man whose “delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.” Make time to pause and meditate about what you are reading in the Bible to gain spiritual understanding and inspiration.

Think of the parallel between eating and spiritual nourishment. Food is better digested when we eat slowly and chew it well. To digest and absorb God’s Word, we need to “chew” *it* well and relish each morsel. It’s interesting that the word *ruminant* can refer either to a ruminant mammal chewing its cud or to turning a matter over and over in one’s mind.

As we reflect on God’s truth, we absorb, internalize and personalize God’s words and ways. Rather than words engraved in stone or written on paper, God’s laws become written on our hearts! (Hebrews 8:10).

The foremost reason for meditating on God’s Word should be to analyze how we can *apply and practice* what we are learning. “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall

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What Should We Meditate About?

What are some of the things we might meditate on to get our minds more attuned to God's way of thinking? Here's a short list to get you started:



- God's astounding creative power as revealed through His creation.
- How God is a Father to us.
- God's awesome plan as revealed by His Holy Days.
- Jesus Christ's sacrifice.
- What the Kingdom of God will be like, both in the Millennium and beyond.
- Jesus Christ's perfect example of what God wants us to be.
- Jesus Christ's teachings—how can we best live by them?
- The blessings that come from obeying God's laws.
- The curses that come from disobeying those laws.
- How to overcome various sins.
- The many promises in the Bible.
- The experiences of biblical figures—what can we learn from them?
- Read any section of the Bible and ask, What does God want me to learn from this?

God's Word is filled with subjects on which we can meditate. The important thing is that we set aside time to do so, and in so doing learn to see things as God does. As He tells us in Isaiah 55:9, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." What a privilege and blessing it is to have many of those thoughts written down for us in the Bible!

—Scott Ashley

meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8, emphasis added throughout).

God's Word, the gift of the Holy Spirit is necessary for deep spiritual understanding.

Once we recognize sins we must confess them to God and seek His forgiveness. We find an inspiring example of repentance, confession and prayer in Psalm 51,

People tend to believe it doesn't matter if thoughts are sinful, as long as they don't act on them—because no one knows their thoughts. But Someone does. God knows every thought of every person.

And intersperse your prayer with meditation. Then your worship is a two-way conversation with God. Pray and meditate about God's solutions when you have problems. And meditate with thanksgiving as you count your blessings.

Meditation should include self-examination

Spiritual growth requires introspection to discover the sins and faults that we need to remove (compare 1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5). Pray for God to help you see yourself the way God sees you. Fasting for humility can help like a spiritual mirror.

As we evaluate ourselves and do this "soul-searching" based on the standards of

written by King David: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (verses 2, 10).

When meditating on God's Word, we should use it as a mirror to help us see what we need to change.

Danger of mind-manipulation

Now for a strong word of warning. Consider the powerful influence of modern media in manipulating our thoughts. For example, no matter how long a movie lasts, it usually keeps our full attention. And with all of today's technological realism, we viewers vicariously experience and respond to everything in the drama.

Television and movie producers often have an agenda for shaping the values of the audiences. If they want us to sympathize with an atheist with an immoral lifestyle and be disgusted with a sincere Christian family man, they can easily manipulate our feelings in that direction (compare Isaiah 5:20). And ultimately behind all evil influences and deception is a real Satan the devil (1 John 5:19; 2 Corinthians 11:3, 14).

Rather than be naive about the dangers, we must protect our minds from being infected with spiritual pollution—garbage in, garbage out, as they say. When we are repeatedly exposed to evil such as immoral sex, pornography, violence and foul language, our consciences become insensitive and our personal standards are pulled down. Actions become habits and habits become addictions.

We can all regularly pray the request in Psalm 119:37—"Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way." We can ask ourselves, what movies and TV shows would Jesus Christ watch? What music would He listen to? What books and magazines would He read or look at? And what would He be thinking about?

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23, NIV). Rule your heart! Better yet, let God rule your heart!

God reads minds

People tend to believe it doesn't matter if thoughts are sinful, as long as they don't act on them—because no one knows their thoughts. But *Someone does*. God knows every thought of every person (see Psalm 139). And He holds us accountable for our thoughts as well as our words and ways (see Matthew 5).

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 the apostle Paul speaks of the spiritual warfare we should be waging. He says we must be "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (verse 5). That is impossible humanly speaking, but not when we allow God to work through us. Along with Paul, we can say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

May the conclusion of the beautiful Psalm 19 in verse 14 be our prayer: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer." GN