**Meditation**

Welcome back to Centred. We are going to continue our series – Slowing Down to Savour the Savour. And before we get to tonight’s spiritual discipline, I just want to tell you that I’m encouraged. heard from one discussion group in particular last week that everyone challenged each other to practice a daily time of solitude. That’s really, really sweet. It makes me feel good that I’m not the only one rolling stops signs – okay maybe I am – I was thinking after what I shared last week, it’s a good thing I’m teaching on slowing down and not submitting to authority (laughs).

Okay, and just one other disclaimer – last week we considered solitude and how Jesus modelled this right – the importance of getting away to be with God.

Before we go any further, I think it’s helpful to know that among the spiritual disciplines, among the ‘means of grace’ – the practices of Jesus, there are two categories.

These categories are abstinence and engagement. Essentially, Jesus modelled abstaining – to forgo doing something, and he also modelled engaging – to participate, to immerse yourself with God somehow.

What’s interesting is typically the sins we commit (how we wrong God) – these are best counteracted with the spiritual discipline that is opposite to it. So, the big buckets of sin (yeah, I know I should have big buckets on the screen – come on I don’t want to be gloomy) that are often considered sins of commission and sins of omission. You did something you shouldn’t have, or you didn’t do something you should have. You understand? So, say you lust after someone or your greedy – these are sins of commission – a good practice to help overcome this would be to abstain.

This is not to say that if you plug in the proper spiritual discipline, you’ll stop sinning. These are just helpful suggestions – practices that correspond with the principles of Jesus. And, as we saw last week with solitude - which is an example of abstinence – the purpose of it is to engage with God. Abstinence makes way for engagement. They go hand in hand.

So, if solitude is arguably the most important spiritual discipline for abstinence, which is most important for engagement?

Why did Jesus often withdraw? To be with God. Tonight, we’re going to consider meditation.

I want to be clear that we’re considering Biblical meditation, not Eastern meditation. And by eastern meditation, what I mean is what a lot of our culture is doing. Now here’s the similarity – both do so out of a realization that we’re being swept off our feet by external affairs, our minds are harassed and there’s this need to escape and re-align.

Now the difference lies in the purpose. Eastern meditation stresses detachment. You’re to get away from the world so that you can merge with your cosmic mind -you’re coming into an effortless state. Biblical meditation, meanwhile, is about attachment – there is focussed attention, you’re re-finding your inner wholeness. Eastern meditation is about being God, Biblical meditation is about knowing God.

What I find most interesting is how people adapt back into society after practicing meditation. If you’ve ever chatted with someone after they’ve come from doing eastern meditation – usually it’s a big shock for them to be around people again because they’ve just come from a place of sheer isolation (like Tom Hanks in Cast Away). The difference with someone who just practiced Biblical meditation (and I’m sure some of you can attest to this) is you actually come back into the world with greater perspective and greater balance. That’s because you just came from a place not of isolation, but engagement with God.

Richard Foster says, **“meditation is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word.”**

The primary way that we hear God’s voice is how? The Word of God (Come on, this is a Baptist church, don’t worry my Pentecostals, you’ll get your moment – keep listening).

It’s the Word of God though, right.

John, one of the four gospel writers, the very first thing that he says in his biography of Jesus’ life is “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.He was with God in the beginning.”

Who was with God in the beginning? The Word was. And, who does the Word refer to? The Word refers to Jesus.

And then John goes on to say in verse 14, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling place among us.” God became human – He took on flesh as Jesus. That’s important, but what I want to point out is how Jesus embodies the “Word.”

And if Jesus embodies the Word, the primary way that we get to know Him is through the Bible. The whole thing – because it all points to Christ. That’s likely a refresher, but and an important place to start.

So, if meditation is “the ability to heard God’s voice, and obey His word,” let me ask you a question. Are you hearing God’s voice? I don’t necessarily mean audibly – I mean, have you felt God directing you, convicting you or affirming you in your life through His Word?

Often, we’re learning lots. I’ve told you before how impressed I am in our group bringing our Bibles each week – there is a real emphasis on Biblical literacy. The problem is there can be a real emphasis on Biblical literacy and not on Biblical meditation.

What you can end up doing in your quiet time, your devotions, your solitude is you jump from a fairly academic study of the Bible to prayer, both are good things but there is a middle ground – there is a need for meditation.

Perhaps you’re like me, and you enjoy following a plan for your Bible reading – I’ve crafted one up to get through the Bible once and the Psalms and Provers a couple times in 2020. As helpful as that can be – if we’re not careful coming to the Word of God with our own agenda can put us in control, and what happens is we don’t end up shaping the Bible.

John Ortberg says that **“the goal is not for us to get through the scriptures. The goal is to get the scriptures through us.”**

Paul says that Christ gave himself up for us, his bride, the church, and he goes on to say in Ephesians 5:26 that Jesus makes us holy by washing us with water through the Word. The Bible is what nourishes us – it’s what we’re to bathe in.

We’re not just acquiring information.

That’s what meditation is, now let’s flush out a little more as to why we should meditate.

Quite simply we should meditate because it’s a practice of Jesus. This is what he did. And it paid off for him, the times he was tempted, when the Spirit led him into the wilderness in Matthew 4, he combatted the Devil with scripture. And, when he was on the cross – he recited what David had said, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). Jesus bled scripture. So, shouldn’t we?

Psalm 1 is really interesting one because this is considered to be the book of prayer in the Bible, and yet this Psalm isn’t a prayer at all: it’s about meditation:

1 Blessed is the one
    who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
    or sit in the company of mockers,
**2**but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
    and who **meditates** on his law day and night.

This person is blessed, I want to be blessed, don’t you? The Psalmist then goes on to contrast the person who meditate as being like a tree planted by water to the wicked person who is like chaff. We don’t have time to really get into this full analogy, but I just want you to know that a tree planted by water refers to someone who is nourished even when it barely rains. Circumstances don’t faze you. If you’ve meditated then you’ve let God shape you, you’ve developed a character of substance – this is what gives you deep convictions, and this is what allows you to explain difficult concepts in simple words – because you’ve meditated.

A person who meditates is a person who can preach the gospel to themselves. This is part of the reason why we’re going to be splashing in the odd gospel-centric sermon throughout this series so that you’re reminded to that.

You need to remind yourself that you’ve been justified by faith. It’s not that you’ve forgot, it’s that your heart forgets at times and a good indicator is if you’ve been living with guilt or regret. Reminding yourself that you’ve been freely justified by faith frees you of this. Reminding yourself that God is sanctifying you – he who began a good work in you will carry it out unto completion, this will ensure you don’t give up on yourself. Reminding yourself that you’ve been adopted into the family of God should free you from fears and insecurities – you have a purpose. And reminding yourself of the future restoration – your resurrection to come, this should enable you to not be afraid of death.

Do you see the benefits of meditating – just on what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do alone is so crucial.

So, the last question becomes, how?

How do you effectively meditate on the scriptures?

Well, that academic study, don’t get me wrong – it is very important.

You see, this is another way that we make mistakes with meditation. We jump right to what this means for our lives – what can I get out of it?

The problem is unless you understand the context, your meditations won’t be grounded in what God is saying about the passage.

In his book ‘Prayer’ Tim Keller shares how upon finding how he got cancer, him and his wife took it upon themselves to pray more diligently and more regularly. In doing so, given, as I’ve already pointed out that the Psalms are often considered to be the prayer book of the Bible, Keller went through and wrote out in his own words the purpose and meaning of each Psalm.

You may not have the Biblical knowledge of Tim Keller, but you do have access to commentaries, and pastors at your church. Ultimately, the questions that you always have to be answering are: what is the author’s intent? And, what role does this text play in the greater Biblical narrative, like how does it point to Jesus?

Once you get these down, then you can let the text slowly wash over you. Slowly, is the key, we can’t meditate fast. Biblical meditation has been defined as to mutter or to ponder and question thoroughly. Take your time. You can’t microwave maturity. A slow cooker is always better.

I like the instructions that spiritual director Katherine Rhodes gives, she says, **“Listen for a word or a phrase that changes you – something that clutches your attention and invites you to linger with it. Don’t analyze it. Just listen to it.”** (I’m going to read that one more time)

Don’t analyze it, at this point the hope is that you’ve already done that and now you’re trying to be sensitive to what the Holy Spirit has for you (I told you I wouldn’t forget you Pentecostals). Look for what comes off the page when you read. Ask the question, what happens when this truth is forgotten? Is there any radical action needed? Consider too the timing of the insight, perhaps there is some relevance from it for your life right now.

So, asking application questions from a text is one of the primary ways to meditate, I’m just going to highlight a few other common practices. All of these by the way would follow under what is known as ‘Lacto Devina.’

You can also just take one important verse from a passage and think it through, so you go through it and try to emphasize every word. You’re not necessarily making sense of every word, but again you’re considering how it might be directing you.

Another way to meditate on a passage in the Bible is to paraphrase. So, you read a story in the Bible, over and over again, then you close it up and see if you could tell someone. You may miss details, and so you have to keep going back until your satisfied with your synopsis.

The last method of meditation that I want us to consider is memorization This might be the most commonly practiced, and it’s pretty self-explanatory. You’re going over a text enough times until you’re able to recite it. You might even try to add to your repertoire of verses, or you might build on that verse with the one that follows and work your way to a chapter or a book in the Bible.

I would just cation you with scripture memorization in the same way that I would with Bible reading plans that it’s not about following your agenda to see how many verses you can do– ticking off the box for Psalm 23 – but that it’s really a means for God to get into us.