

Is it Biblical to Meditate?

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Should Christians meditate? Is it biblical? Isn't meditation and silent reflection wrapped up with Eastern spiritualities or the New Age movement?

You might solely associate meditation with the New Age movement or Eastern spirituality practices but, while individuals from any worldview may practice "meditation" in some form, the Christian spiritual discipline of meditating on scripture is irreconcilable to what other worldviews or spiritualities teach and practice. Different worldviews may use the same terminology, but the contextual meaning behind any specific word may refer to starkly opposing practices.

Donald Whitney laments, "One sad feature of our modern culture is that meditation has become identified more with non-Christian systems of thought than with biblical Christianity... Because meditation is so prominent in many spiritually counterfeit groups and movements, some Christians are uncomfortable with the whole subject and suspicious of those who engage in it. But we must remember that meditation is both commanded by God and modeled by the Godly in Scripture. Just because a cult uses the cross as a symbol does not mean the Church should cease to use it. In the same way, we shouldn't discard or be afraid of scriptural meditations simply because the world has adapted it for its own purposes." [\[1\]](#)

What the Spiritual Discipline of Christian Meditation is *Not*

Christian meditation is NOT:

- Christian meditation is *not* New Age meditation or other form of spirituality where one empties the mind of all thoughts, thinks about whatever comes to mind, or enters into a trance-like state with chanting.
- Christian meditation is *not* secular visualization techniques "to create your own reality" or what some refer to as the "law of attraction."
- Christian meditation is *not* trying to attain to a higher spiritual level or detaching from the world.
- Christian meditation is *not* merging with nature or any other god or becoming one with "god." This is pantheistic or monadic thinking, which sees everything as one or universal, uniting everything and making everything "god."
- Christian meditation is *not* "channeling" with another object or created being.
- Christian meditation is *not* creating one's own meaning for biblical words or passages outside of the biblical context.
- Christian meditation is *not* a means to manipulate God into doing one's bidding.

What the Spiritual Discipline of Christian Meditation *Is*

Christian meditation is reflecting on God's attributes and his interactions with the world as described in the Christian Bible. One scholar defines biblical meditation as the "deep thinking on the

truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.” [iii]

Christian Biblical meditation IS:

- Christian meditation *is* acknowledging God’s presence. The Almighty Creator fills heaven and earth, and yet He exists independently from his creation, including humankind. [iii] God exists outside space and time, and yet in his love He draws near to fellowship with those He created and indwells his people through his Holy Spirit.
- Christian meditation *is* choosing to focus our mind on the words of scripture.
- Christian meditation *is* contemplating, perhaps memorizing, one verse or a small passage from scripture, thinking deeply on each word while keeping context in mind.
- Christian meditation *is* intending to be obedient and faithful to the Heavenly Father by applying his truth within one’s daily life of work, play, worship, and relationships with family, friends, colleagues, or strangers we pass along the way.
- Christian meditation involves praying God’s thoughts from scripture back to Him, asking for wisdom and grace to live out his precepts within our own stories.

The Christian Scriptures Teach the Spiritual Discipline of Meditation

The Christian Bible refers to meditating on God’s words and precepts in many passages. Joshua encourages the Israelites to “*meditate on [God’s Word] day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it*” (Joshua 1:8). For millennia God’s people have prayed, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14). In the psalmist’s conversation with the Lord, he wrote, “*I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways*” (Psalm 119:15).

One cherished passage that teaches meditation on the Lord’s sacred words is Psalm 1:1-3

*Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law, he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.*

The Creator of life gave the words of scripture to humankind as a guide to true fulfillment. One scholar comment on this passage, “Life is lived in futility if its fundamental purpose is never discovered. It is the meaning of human existence which is enshrined in the Torah, and it is the discovery of that meaning which flows from meditation upon Truth, giving understanding of meaning.” [iv]

Suggestions to Practice the Spiritual Discipline of Meditation

- Use a favorite Bible translation
- Choose a specific verse or passage, perhaps from your Bible reading for that day.
- Leave “hurry” behind and read slowly. Ponder each word, keeping the context in mind.
- Write it in your journal; add any conclusions or questions from your reflection
- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom to apply this verse in your life.
- Pray through the text. [See BONUS ARTICLE on the spiritual discipline of praying scripture for additional insight]
- When your mind wanders (and it will), refocus.
- Consider memorizing a verse or portion of the passage.
- Write the passage on an index card, a sticky note, or make a note in your phone. Put it somewhere you will see it throughout the day: the visor of your car, your electronic device or monitor, or a mirror where you get dressed in the morning.
- Possible times to meditate include: during quiet time with the Heavenly Father, while doing chores, during commutes, when taking a walk in nature or a park, while enjoying coffee at a favorite hangout, while digging in the garden or engaging in another favorite hobby, or while falling to sleep at night.
- Suggested scriptures on which to meditate: Psalm 19:1-4; Psalm 63:6-8; Proverbs 3:5-6; Micah 6:8; Philippians 4:4-7.

Practicing the Spiritual Discipline of Meditating on Scripture Deepens a Christian's Relationship with God

When the beloved 20th century German author and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was asked why he meditated on scripture, he responded, “Because I am a Christian.”^[v] God commands Christians to practice the spiritual discipline of meditation, not in the twisted fashion of non-Christian spiritualities, but in beautiful communion with his presence through his holy Word.

This spiritual discipline is an act of worship as one thinks God’s thoughts after Him. It is an avenue for the Creator to pour his grace into the soul and engrave wisdom on the heart. As Christians respond in obedience, they sense renewed joy and strength for the journey to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

^[i] Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, page 47.

^[ii] Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, page 48.

^[iii] See Jeremiah 23:23-24; Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

^[iv] Peter Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*, page 60-62.

^[v] Dietrich Bonhoeffer *Meditating on the Word*, page 22.

BONUS ARTICLE:

How to Practice the Spiritual Discipline of Praying Scripture

Have you ever wanted to connect with another person on a deeper level, but found yourself at a loss for words? Have you ever wanted to voice a passionate conviction, but were unable to articulate your outrage or heartache? Dostoevsky wrote, and as we often discover, “There is immeasurably more left inside than what comes out in words.”

Christians commune with a personal God through prayer. They yearn to have an intimate relationship with their Creator, yet often when they sit or kneel or stand to pray, God’s people find themselves empty of language. At other times, their thoughts are distracted and rambling, “Lord, I’m thankful for who You are... please bless this day... I need to put that load of laundry in the dryer... how could that colleague betray me behind my back? I hope he gets what he deserves! ... I think I left the yogurt sitting out on the kitchen counter... oh yeah, God, protect my spouse and children and friends.”

Although we live in a media-saturated culture, sometimes words fail us. We have immeasurably much more left inside our souls than we can communicate to God with our words.

What is the Spiritual Discipline of Praying Scripture?

The spiritual discipline of praying scripture is the practice of Christians adopting God’s words to inform and shape their own prayers. God penned his words through people who experienced the breadth and depth of human struggles and emotions. In this discipline, Christians give ear and voice through the original biblical writers’ songs, prayers, laments, reflections, and affirmations.

Praying scripture is not:

- Using a Bible concordance to find an isolated scripture verse to infer whatever one thinks is best or specifically desires in answer to prayer.
- A manipulative tool by which someone can force God’s hand to do something.
- Applying an isolated biblical verse out of context while ignoring the biblical genre, which misrepresents the biblical text and distorts God’s intended meaning of a passage. For example, taking a wisdom proverb and claiming it as a promise.

Praying scripture is:

- Praying God’s heart through his own words for our loved ones, our world, and ourselves.
- Personalizing scripture and praying for application within our own life. What was God saying to the original audience? What was God’s intention to teach us about himself or his ways? How can I apply this principle within my own culture and my own life?
- Gradually memorizing individual scriptures to begin to pray without ceasing.