

## Mastication and Meditation – The value of memorization.

You have to masticate to meditate.

Let me start with the value of meditation, though. We're not talking about yogis and eastern practices, though. We're talking about the intentional work of focusing our minds on a particular truth about God and life from the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "to meditate" has the connotation of speaking or having a conversation. I think this is a good way to think about what meditation is. Imagine a scenario in which you have done the work on a passage we've looked at and you've identified a verse or a couple of verses from that passage that the Holy Spirit has highlighted to you as having immediate and practical importance to your life. So you take that verse and you say it aloud over and over again. You turn it into a prayer of conversation between you and God.

For instance, this morning I was reading Leviticus. I've made it a practice to ask the Lord to highlight something in the reading for my own spirit. This morning I underlined a part of 26:13: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect." That last part of the sentence was what I wrote at the top of my daily diary with the intention of thinking about it all day long. To speak it aloud. To pray it (and I did write a prayer related to it underneath). Why is this a practice of mine? Let's go back to Psalm 1, which we've talked about before

*Psalm 1:1-3 (ESV) Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.  
3 He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.*

The meditation of passages and verses does two things here: it defends and offends. First, it defends us from the counsel of the wicked, the way of sinners, and the seat of scoffers. If you haven't noticed, we are being bombarded constantly by all three in the news media, social media, and sometimes even in the relationships that we have with coworkers, family members, or friends. I am acutely aware of this dynamic because I have decades of ridiculous dialogue trapped in my memory from movies, TV shows, and cartoons all wanting to jump out of my mouth during conversations I have with people. I've long been convinced that what people need more from me than a cheap laugh or a witty retort is the truth of God's word inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Now, I know that can sound a little stuffy and holier than thou, but I think that's primarily because we seldom look at our every day goings in and out, our ordinary lives, as places where God can meet us and use us to impact other people. I'm not a huge fan of The Message except as a commentary and I love Peterson's commentary on Romans 12:1 which says in the ESV, "I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship." Peterson explains it like this: "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him." I love the image of "your everyday, ordinary life" which is where we spend 99% of our time! But those times and places are ripe for God to reach into, to speak into, and through you. I sometimes think to myself, "does this person need a funny line from The Big Lebowski or a word from God?" But if all I have to give is the former, I've missed out on an opportunity to see God at work. Through me! So meditation, mulling over a passage or a verse or even a phrase from a verse defends me from counsel, ways, and seats of people I don't want to be like.

Secondly, there's an offensive way to view this passage and I don't mean, "oh, that's offensive" (though most folks who are not born again will be offended by the truth of Scripture.) If we meditate, if our delight is in the words of God, you know what he does? He plants us, waters us, and makes us fruitful. So we meditate. We get the Word into our system making it a part of us at a spiritual-molecular level.

I'll mention a few ways Donald Whitney in his book "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life" says we can meditate:

1. Select a passage.
2. Repeat it in different ways (I am the resurrection and the life...)
3. Rewrite it in your own words.
4. Look for applications of the text.
5. Pray through the text.

Richard Foster says in his book The Celebration of Discipline that another way to meditate is to picture yourself in the scene of a narrative passage or being present in a church to hear the letters read aloud for the first time.

Now, let me spend a bit of time encouraging you in the one discipline that will accelerate your meditation more than any other. Memorization is the path toward meditation. I've been promoting memorization for almost 15 years and I know it's the discipline that supplies the most groans from people because it seems too hard. But if we can remember movie lines, or what the batting average of our favorite baseball player is, or a poem, or a speech, or anything like that, we can memorize Scripture.

In 2010 I started meeting with a guy from the Navigators. (Dennis story). One of the first verses I memorized was this:

*Joshua 1:8 (ESV) - This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful 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.*

The value of memorization is that the Bible is never far from your thoughts or your mouth.

Navigators method:

1. READ the context of each verse you memorize.
2. GAIN a clear understanding of what each verse actually means. Read the verse in other Bible translations or paraphrases.
3. READ the verse through several times, aloud or in a whisper. This will help you grasp the verse as a whole. Each time you read it, say the topic, reference, verse, and then the reference again.
4. LEARN the topic and reference, then learn the first phrase of the verse. Once you have learned the topic, reference, and the first phrase and have repeated them several times, continue adding more phrases after you can quote correctly what you have already learned.
5. PRAY over each verse and think about how it applies to your daily life.

The key to memorization is simple and requires three things: review, review, review.

Try TMS and see what happens.