

# Biblical Meditation: It's Not What You Think

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Why do I meditate? Because I am a Christian. Therefore, everyday in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God's Word in Holy Scripture is a lost day for me. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

What each man worships in preference to the rest, what he admires and loves above other things, this is God to him. Origen

## 1. We all meditate

- “When people tell me they don't know how to meditate, I reassure them by asking, “Can you worry?” If they know how to worry, they know how to meditate.” Jan Johnson
- "Everyone meditates. Really? Yes. Our minds are constantly dwelling on something." Stephen Yuille
- “Rather, whose delight is in the instruction of the Lord, who meditates on his instruction day and night” (Psalm 1:2 NICOT).
- “I meditate on your precepts . . . I delight in your decrees” (Ps. 119:15–16 NIV).
- “I reach out for your commands, which I love, that I may meditate on your decrees” (Ps. 119:48 NIV).
- “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long” (Ps. 119:97 NIV).
- The Bay Psalm Book (1640) “But in the law . . . is his longing delight.”
- “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?” (Ps. 2:1 NIV)

## 2. Meditation: It is simpler than you think

- “Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow.” (1 Pet. 2:2 NLT)
- To this day I suckle at the Lord's Prayer like a child, and as an old man eat and drink from it and never get my fill. Martin Luther
- Geneva Bible (1560)
- *The Oxford English Dictionary* lists the first published use of the word “meditate” in English as being in Psalm 1:2 in the Geneva Bible, which reads: “In his Law doeth he meditate day and night
- The Old Testament call to meditate was first given to a nomadic people, most of whom were illiterate and could not access printed Bibles. The practice of meditation depicted in the Bible was to be done throughout the day on texts that had been memorized, on truths that had been internalized, on historic events celebrated by the community, and during the divine service when Scripture was read.

## 3. Explore the concept of meditation, not just the word

- Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. Book of Common Prayer

- The light burns long in his study. He does not always remain bent over the pages; he often leans back, closes his eyes over a line he has read again, and its sense diffuses into his blood. Rainer Maria Rilke
  - Kleinig reminds us, "They used many terms to describe different aspects of the one process." The original words have primary meanings like "mutter," "speak," "sing," "think," "ponder," and "remember."
  - For example:
 

77:12 I will consider (hagah) all your works  
and meditate (siach) on all your mighty deeds."
4. Meditation: Three Master Meditators
    - "The mother that God chose for Jesus was immersed in the Scriptures." Peter Williams
    - David "when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night." (Ps. 63:6 NIV)
    - Mary, a couple of dozen clear connections exist between her song and the Old Testament.
    - Jesus, Joachim Jeremias, in his comprehensive portrayal of Jesus in his New Testament Theology, wrote about the role of the Old Testament in Jesus' discipleship: "Jesus lived in the Old Testament. His sayings are incomprehensible unless we recognize this. His last word, according to Mark, was the beginning of Psalm 22, prayed in his Aramaic mother tongue... Numerically, literal and free quotations from the Psalter predominate on the lips of Jesus, and this was evidently his prayer book."
    - "How does he know so much without being schooled?" (John 7:15 MSG).
  5. What do I mean by Meditation on the Bible?
 

"Meditation is delight-driven pondering of Scripture with a receptive heart in the presence of Christ to foster our love of God and others."
  6. Three Categories of Meditation (not methods)
 

Spontaneous meditation this is something every person does.

Group and Church Meditation. Perhaps the single best place to learn Christian meditation is a worship service in church.

Deliberate Meditation. Formal meditation is when you have set aside time to meditate on Scripture. This is a helpful practice, but I believe that one can fulfill the call of Psalm 1 and Joshua 1:8 to meditate and prosper simply through spontaneous meditation and by meditation arising from worship services.
  7. Conclusion
 

It is common today to speak of the unintended consequences of technology. We were designed to live in unbroken fellowship with our creator God and the mental equipment that was designed to facilitate that is often coopted by worries, cares, and self-focused thoughts. Christian meditation is done by reclaiming this mental capacity to allow us to think about the true and the good in the presence of God and thereby allow the divine physician to heal our hearts as well.

This presentation is an adaptation of my book: James C. Wilhoit, *Abide: Putting Down Roots into the Word of Life* (Kindle Direct Publishing, 2023).

## Old Testament Allusions in Mary's Magnificat

In December 2022, Peter J. Williams of Tyndale House (Cambridge, UK) presented a Christmas devotion to an online audience. He focused on how Mary's Song was saturated with Old Testament references. I drew heavily from Peter's work when I created this table, which shows the many connections between the Old Testament and Mary's Song. In this table, the first column shows the verses from Luke 1, the second column has the portion of Mary's Song, and the third column contains the Old Testament allusion or quotation.

46-47	My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior	Ps. 34:2-3 My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me (ESV) Ps. 66:16 Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. Ps. 69:30 I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. Ps. 35:9 Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation.
48	for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed	Ps. 71:17 Let his name be blessed through the ages; his name shall endure longer than the sun. And all the tribes of the earth will be blessed in him; all the nations will pronounce him happy. (NETS) Ps. 30:8 I will rejoice and be glad in your mercy, because you looked upon my humiliation; you saved my soul from dire straits (NETS) Ps. 34:2 My soul will make its boast in the LORD; The humble will hear it and rejoice. (NASB)
49	for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.	Ps. 126:3 The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Ps. 71:19 Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens, you who have done great things. Who is like you, God? Ps. 126:2 Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy... "The LORD has done great things for them."
50	His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.	Deut. 5:10 ...but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. Ps. 89:1 I will sing of the LORD'S great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. Ps. 100:5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.
51-52	He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.	Ps. 89:10 You crushed Rahab like one of the slain; with your strong arm you scattered your enemies. Ps. 147:6 The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground. Ps 75:7 It is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. Job 5:11 The lowly he sets on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.
53	He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.	Ps. 34:10 The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. Ps. 107:9 for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.
54-55	He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.	Ps. 98:3 He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Is. 41:8 But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend Mic. 7:20 You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago.

# BIBLICAL MEDITATION

PRESENT

We meditate in the presence of God. We are spiritually united with Jesus. In meditating, we interact with our risen Lord Jesus and are strengthened, challenged, comforted, and guided by him.

DELIGHT

Meditation grows out of an attraction to and respect for the Word of God. We meditate on what we care about. Since meditation is delight-driven pondering, we should start meditating on the scriptures we already find attractive.

ENGAGE

We engage in a slow, repetitive oral reading of scripture. Make it physical: read aloud, mutter, make up a song or write the passage down, engage your body in the reading process, and read very slowly.

