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Sermon Notes

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Cultivating Biblical Meditation and Prayer, Memorization, and Application

Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. *Daniel 6:10*

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An Encounter with the Living God

- Martyn Lloyd Jones's *Joy Unspeakable*
 - Basic theme: throughout church history, God has poured out on his people surprising revelations of himself to encourage them and strengthen them for the work of evangelism and missions

2 Corinthians 12:2-4 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know-- God knows. ³ And I know that this man-- whether in the

body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows--⁴ was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

- Amazing reports from church history:

Thomas Goodwin: He describes a man and his little child, his son walking down the road and they are walking hand in hand. And the child knows he is the child of his father, and he knows that the father loves him, and he rejoices in that, and he is happy in it. There is no uncertainty about it at all. BUT SUDDENLY the father, moved by some impulse, takes hold of that child and picks him up, fondles him in his arms, kisses him, embraces him, showers his love upon him and then he puts him down again, and they go on walking together.

My goal today is to make you yearn for intimacy with God, and to seek it
BASED ON SCRIPTURE

- The Barrenness of Modern Life
 - Never before have Christians had so many distractions from Christ and from his work in us and around us
 - Our affluence, leisure, and astonishing technology give us more DIVERSIONS from Kingdom business than any other generation in history
 - Corrie ten Boom said, “Beware the barrenness of a busy life.” I would also add, “Beware the barrenness of a shallow life” as well... a life in which we do not reflect on God, God’s word, God’s work
- The Shallowness of the Western Church

Os Guinness on American preaching: “Nowhere else in the Western world are the pews so full of people and the sermons so empty of Biblical truth.”

Shallow preaching comes from shallow Biblical meditation and prayer

- Our Focus: Biblical Meditation Leading to Prayer
 - Many Types of Meditation
 - Non-Christian meditation
 - Rabi Maharaj, *Death of a Guru*
 - Was a Brahmin of the highest castes, descended from generations of Brahmin

priests

- As a Hindu, Rabi gave himself to **mind-emptying meditation**, leading to astonishing flights of psychedelic visions and astral projection, but which left him feeling filthy and empty
- He eventually came to Christ and speaks against this kind of Eastern mysticism and its mind emptying meditation
- Buddhism: practicing total control of the body so the mind can be given wholly over to self-emptying; meditation on conundrums, like, “What’s the sound of one hand clapping?”... goal is Nirvana... emptiness... like a drop in an endless sea
- Hindu meditation seeks to achieve peace and spiritual insight again by emptying the mind, but through sounds or syllables that are endlessly chanted or repeated
- Secularized eastern meditation has become popular in yoga as a body relaxation technique without any real religious goals

Christian meditation has never sought emptiness but FULLNESS in Christ

- Long history of Christian meditation as well (a topic worthy of another day!)
- Many Forms of Prayer... praise, thanksgiving, lament, trouble, hope, confession

Our focus: How we can cultivate a practice of a deep meditation on Scripture that fuels a fervent prayer life

- Scriptural Meditation Displayed and Commanded in Scripture
 - Scriptural Meditation Commanded
 - To Jewish parents

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and

with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

- To Joshua

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Hebrew word translated “meditate” is translated in other places a variety of ways like **moan, growl, utter, speak, muse**

Like if you caught Joshua doing this you could hear inarticulate sounds coming from his mouth as he worked over each word, each syllable carefully

- To Timothy

2 Timothy 2:7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

- Jesus, after the Parable of the Seed and the Soils:

Luke 8:18 Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

- Scripture-based Meditation in Psalm 119

Psalm 119:15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

Psalm 119:97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Psalm 119:148 My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.

- Amazing structure... perfectly designed for our topic
 - all but four vss. mention written word
 - all but four vss. directly addressed to God in prayer
 - perfect illustration of quiet time conversation: God speaks through the Word, the psalmist speaks back in prayer
- The power of meditation on the word of God reflected back to God in prayer displayed again and again
- Meditation promotes understanding // Understanding promotes meditation

--of course, meditation produces deeper understanding

119:99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.

--AMAZING REVERSAL... understanding leads to deeper meditations

119:27 Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

Illus.: Reinvesting in the business... successful businesses produce a profit; good businessmen reinvest their earnings back into the business for even greater future profits... like an abandoned silver mine in Arizona that suddenly starts producing silver

119:27 Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

Once you start discovering new things through meditation, you will go down into the tunnel again and again for more silver

3. Understanding promotes obedience // obedience promotes understanding

a. the more of God's Law is written on your heart, the more obedient your life will be

b. YET amazingly, Psalm 119 also reverses it

119:100 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

A life of willing obedience to God affects your heart... it makes your spiritual eyes able to see more and more things in God's law for you're willing to do more and more for God

- Throughout Psalm 119, the role of Prayer is emphasized... "Spiritual begging"

Prayer for Understanding (15 times)

Fifteen times, the Psalmist prays to God for God to teach him Scripture

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law!

Prayer for Obedience (10 times)

Psalm 119:35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.

Summary: Psalm 119 may be the best example in all of Scripture on HOW to cultivate a close link between meditation on the Word of God and Prayer

- Clearest Example and Pattern: Daniel 9

[removed this section... but worthy of your own study!]

Daniel's meditation and prayer is rooted in specific and relevant texts of

Scripture, it is connected with the flow of events in redemptive history, it is carried on by a godly man whose whole life is directed toward serving God; it is humble and broken-hearted, saturated with Scriptural insights, it pleads the promises of God and humbly asks him to do the very thing God said he would do

- Six Good Reasons Why We Should Meditate
 - The Nature of Scripture
 - Scripture is God breathed and perfect, a holy treasure of wisdom that is literally inexhaustible
 - Scripture is infinite in its concepts and connections... some aspects are very difficult and deep... not easy to understand
 - You will never be “done” with a single passage of Scripture; therefore it always rewards diligent thought and prayerful contemplation
 - The Nature of Our Hearts
 - Our hearts are naturally hard, unyielding, resistant to the Word of God
 - Like engraving on a steel wall with a stylus, it takes repetition for us to get it
 - We are also very FORGETFUL... and easily DISTRACTED

Luke 24:25-27 He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”

- The Nature of Salvation
 - Salvation is a process, a daily warfare against sin, led by the Spirit
 - The Spirit speaks to us primarily through Scripture

Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸
do not harden your hearts

- The Nature of Our Changing Lives
 - Scripture constantly has new things to say to us because we are constantly changing, constantly in a new place in our lives
 - The words themselves are the same, but they now have become different because we can hear something new

from them

- The Nature of Our Techno-Crazed World
 - Never in the history of the church have we had so many distractions from the Kingdom of God
 - Our senses are constantly assaulted by input... sights, sounds, information assaulting us, barraging us
 - Cell phones, pagers, wifi internet connection, people are CONSTANTLY taking in input... technology is absolutely ASSAULTING OUR BRAINS
 - We become lazy... we don't need to remember much anymore... just know how to Google it, or "Ask Siri"
 - We can always call if we forget something... the information is always readily available
 - Net effect: reduction of attention span, attack of linear thought, inability to follow a train of thought

With distracted minds and hearts, its much harder than ever to hear the "still small voice" of the Lord

- The Nature of Our Spiritual Work
 - God has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation, and prepared good works

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- God doesn't just prepare the task for us... he clearly prepares US for the task, and Peter's prayer time in Acts 10 is a plain example... God got Peter ready to go into the house of Cornelius by showing him a vision of a sheet with unclean animals
- The Goal of Meditation and Prayer
 - Insight, Leading to...
 - Insight is "Aha" moment... something new, hitting you in a new way

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Psalm 119:130 The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

- Insight shapes the mind, it is a building block, a concept from which the city of truth is erected in your soul brick by brick
- This leads to...
- Increased Faith, Leading to...
 - Faith is LIVING, not set piece
 - It is more like a green plant than like a marble and brass trophy
 - It needs food, and the food of faith is the word of God

Romans 10:17 faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

- New insight feeds FAITH
- Growing faith leads to...
- Hotter Affections, Leading to...
 - Jonathan Edwards said the essence of true religion is in the AFFECTIONS... what we love and what we hate
 - This means our love for God and for His works in the world
 - Hotter passion comes from insight coupled with faith

Psalm 119:97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Psalm 119:104 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

- Hotter affections for God and His word means a more passionate pursuit of holiness and evangelism... so it results in
- Holy Resolutions
 - A passionate time of meditation on God's word and prayer of it to God results in holy resolutions... determinations to walk uprightly

Psalm 119:34 Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

Psalm 119:145 I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees.

- It is from these resolutions that we grow in grace and advance Christ's kingdom through evangelism

An Appeal for Scripture Memorization

Verses That Encourage Memorization

John 15:7-8 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Psalms 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

James 1:22-25 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does.

Proverbs 7:1-3 My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

Objections to Scripture Memorization

- “I don’t have a good memory”
- “It will take too much time”
- “I’m too busy”
- “I’m not very interested”
- “I’ve tried before and it never really worked”
- “I don’t see the benefit of working on it that hard”
- “I read the Bible every day... why do I need to memorize it?”
- “I don’t know what translation to use”
- “I might become prideful”

- “I don’t know how to do it”

Benefits of Scripture Memorization

- Protection from sin and from straying away from God
- Deeper understanding of God’s word: automatic meditation
- Tools for the Holy Spirit to work growth in you: instruction in righteousness, deep conviction of sin
- Constant readiness for evangelism
- Redeeming the time, storing up treasure in heaven
- Material for deep teaching of the word of God to others
- Rich, deep, heartfelt worship
- Enriched prayer life
- Blessed homelife: marriage, and parenting
- Ability to bless others through wise counsel

Memorizing Books Is Better Than Memorizing Individual Verses

[see my pamphlet for why!]

Mechanics of Scripture Memorization:

- *Making the Commitment Before God*
- *Choosing Your First Book*

- 1) Not too long (or too short?)
- 2) One that stirs your passions:

After you have assessed your options, bring various options before the Lord in prayer and listen to His voice. Ask Him to guide you, and He will direct your choice.

- *Surveying the Terrain*

The way you survey the terrain is this:

- 1) Count the number of verses in the entire book.
- 2) Divide that number by the number of verses you will memorize per week. This is how many weeks the book should take you.
- 3) Look at a calendar and determine a tentative finish date.
- 4) Add 10% so as to not feel under tremendous pressure until you get used to this lifestyle (i.e. If you are doing Ephesians—155 verses—at the rate of 6 verses per week, it will take you 26 weeks, or exactly 6 months; add 10%--3 weeks—for a total of 29 weeks).
- 5) Make a covenant before the Lord that, with his help, you will memorize

this book by this date:

- ***Daily Procedures***

Priority of reviewing old verses:

Repetition over time: Saying a verse 100 times in one day is not as helpful as saying it every day for 100 days. The absolute key to successful Scripture memorization is repetition over a long time period. This is how you retain old verses while learning new ones.

Memorizing the verse numbers

Photographing the verses with your eyes

Say it out loud

- ***Long-Term Retention***

RECITE THE ENTIRE BOOK FROM MEMORY FOR 100 CONSECUTIVE DAYS.

“Weeding the garden”: As you recite a book over a long period of time without looking at the Bible, you will gradually begin to make little mistakes or leave verses out. Again, this is why memorizing verse numbers is so essential!!! However, to “weed the garden,” simply take one of your Monday morning times after the 100 days (perhaps every other month) and just read the book by sight all the way through. This will correct errors... this will “weed the garden.”

Now, you are ready to memorize your next book!!!

And as you begin... **KISS THE OLD BOOK GOODBYE!** (We all have a limit to what we can retain)

APPLICATION

Putting the Truth to Work

Daniel Doriani

I. God-Centered Application... Knowing God!!

John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

Jeremiah 9:23-24 This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands

and knows me

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy

“Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion

A. God Is Speaking to Us

Matthew 22:31-32 But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' ? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

- Goal: Salvation in Christ... Justification, Sanctification, Glorification

1 Timothy 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers

II. Seven Biblical Sources of Application

A. Rules

Definition: “Rules summon obedience to specific commands. They require definite actions in narrowly defined cases.”

Problem: Seemingly easy to apply, the application becomes a challenge when the specific circumstances no longer exist in today’s world or in our lives.

Examples:

- 1) The Goring Bull (Exodus 21:28-30)
- 2) Meat Sacrificed to Idols (1 Corinthians 8-10)
- 3) Bribes Given to Judges (Deuteronomy 16:18-20)

B. Ideals

Definition: Ideals or principles guide a wide range of behavior without specifying particular deeds.

Problems: The specific application of the ideal can be challenging given the circumstances. How does one “Honor father and mother” at age 4, age 14, age 24, age 34, age 44, or age 64?

Examples:

- 1) “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:39)
- 2) “*Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness...*” (Matthew 6:33)
- 3) “*Be holy because I am holy.*” (Leviticus 11:44)

- 4) *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”* (Romans 12:18)
- 5) *“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”* (Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, 12:7)
- 6) *“To obey is better than sacrifice.”* (1 Samuel 15:22)

C. Doctrine

Definition: Doctrines state the cardinal truths of the faith, the fundamentals of a Christian belief system.

Problems: These are the most practical texts. “If Doctrine X is true, what follows?”

Examples:

- 1) *“At the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will be like the angels in heaven.”* (Matthew 22:30)
- 2) *“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”* (Romans 8:9)
- 3) *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.”* (1 Timothy 1:15)
- 4) *“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”* (1 Samuel 15:29)
- 5) *“God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.”* (1 John 1:5)

D. Redemptive Acts in Narrative

Definition: The central character in every Bible story is God, and some aspect of His redemptive purpose attaches to the main theme of every narrative. The interpreter should ask, “What was God seeking to accomplish here?” Focus first on the redeeming work of God, and the divine self-revelation embedded in it. Even in human responses, there is a lesson about God and His purpose.

Problems: It is not always easy to determine God’s redemptive purpose in the OT stories.

Examples:

- 1) The Crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 3-4)
- 2) Josiah Finds the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22)

E. Exemplary Acts in Narrative

Definition: Seeking to determine from narrative accounts proper and improper human responses to the person, commands, and plans of God so that we may be exhorted or warned.

Problems: Turning every account into a man-centered moralistic lesson.

Examples:

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

F. Biblical Images or Symbols

Definition: Lifting out the images and symbols God used to communicate His nature, purposes, and expectations to His people.

Problems: Rightly interpreting those symbols and applying them today.

Examples:

- 1) The Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:15)
- 2) The Tabernacle (Exodus 25-26; Hebrews 9)
- 3) The Lord's Supper
- 4) Baptism
- 5) Prophetic symbolic actions (Hosea marries a prostitute)

G. Songs and Prayers

Definition: Learning from the Book of Psalms and from songs and prayers in the Bible how to approach God.

Source: The Book of Psalms

Luther: "The Psalms teach us to speak with earnestness, to open the heart and pour out what lies on the bottom of it. They instruct us to speak earnestly amid storms and winds of every kind."

III. Four Aspects of Application

- 1) What should I do? That is, what is my **DUTY**?
- 2) Who should I be? That is, how can I become the person or obtain the **CHARACTER** that lets me do what is right?
- 3) To what causes should we devote our life energy? That is, what **GOALS** should we pursue?
- 4) How can we distinguish truth from error? That is, how can we gain **DISCERNMENT**?