

MOODY DISTANCE LEARNING

The Discipline of Meditation

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Greg Wheatley: God's will for your life. That's what we're studying on Radio School of the Bible this _____. My name is Greg Wheatley and our instructor for this quarter is Dr. Bill Thrasher, Professor of Bible and Theology in the Graduate School at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Well we're being encouraged these days as we talk about God's will for our life. Being encouraged to find out more about what it means to walk in fellowship with Him as Christians. To walk in the light as we read in I John. So let's continue on that track and see what we have for today. Here's Dr. Bill Thrasher.

Dr. Bill Thrasher: Yes Greg, just a brief review in regard to structurally where we are. We're talking about this truth that a person who wants to know God's will must respond to the revelation of God's character. That involves presenting their bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice, learns to walk by the Spirit and walk in the light which we've been talking about the last couple times, as well as listening to God. Listening to God, we'd said we need to know how God speaks and we mentioned four ways that God speaks, one primary way and three secondary ways.

The primary way being through scripture, secondarily through the promptings of the spirit, through people, through circumstances, all of which need to be subservient and scrutinized through the glasses of scripture. Now not only do we need to listen to God and we talked a little bit also about discerning the leading of the spirit, today I'd like to talk about meditating on scripture because that is the primary in which God speaks. There is a few verses that I'd like to read and remind us of, that is in regard that give us the promises that are connected with this discipline of meditating on scripture. We read in Ezra 7, the last part of verse 9 of that chapter, "The good hand of his God was upon him. The good hand of his God was upon him."

And it tells us the reason, verse 10, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." Says, "God's good hand was upon him," which we know that that's what brings success is it says when God's good hand was upon Joseph, he was able to make him prosper. That is success in God's eyes, not necessarily success always in the world's eyes. Obviously a person could be successful and yet be martyred because they fulfill God's purpose for their life.

We talked about what success is when we looked at the life of Jesus, how he could say at the end of his life, I accomplished the will of God. I did all that you told me to do, is what I'm paraphrasing John 17:4. But it says, "The good hand of God was upon him." That was his success for a while because he set his heart to study the law of the Lord, to practice it and teach His statutes and ordinance in Israel.

Now that same principle is reiterated in Joshua 1:8 and 9 where it says, "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 success. Haven't I commanded you to be strong and courageous? Do not tremble or be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

And then Psalm 1, we read a similar theme. God in His grace gives us repetition when _____ wants to reiterate a certain principle to us. And He talks about the godly man. "But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law he meditates day and night and he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither and whatever he does he prospers." Certainly confirmed also in the New Testament when it talks about a person who's not just a hearer only but also a doer of God's word, James 1:25. "That person will be blessed in all that he does." So the promises connected with this discipline of meditating upon the scripture.

Now I wanna talk a little bit just briefly about the priority of it and basically just tell a couple of brief stories about a couple things the Lord used in my own life. One was a quote from an older man, toward the end of his life, he held, he was holding the Bible up in the air and he said, "You know, man I wish I'd read this book more and other books less." And that was so powerfully used in my life at that particular time—I was a student—that I never have forgotten it. And I think it was somewhat confirmed.

I was reading a biography of George Mueller, *George Mueller of Bristol* was the name of it, written by A.T. Pierson. And a very wonderful biography. The biographer wrote, A.T. Pierson wrote that God convicted George Mueller who was an individual who founded orphanages over there in England. And his probably known as a man of faith more than anything else because of his great capacity to believe God. In fact there was a book written called *Answers to Prayer* that reports on the answers to prayer that he knew in his life. Evidently told and I'm read that he recorded over 50,000 specific answers to prayer in his life.

Well just marvelous man of faith but as I read his biography I saw him more as a man who delighted in God's word, delighted in God, delighted in God's word. Well God convicted him in the first few years of his Christian life that he gave greater attention to Christian books than he did to God's word. So he dealt with that in his own soul in life and his biographer said in the 92nd year of his life, for every one page he had read in other books, proportionally he had read 10 pages of the scriptures. And I thought that was one of the most amazing statistics I'd ever read.

And I certainly have never thought to keep any records nor would I necessarily advise anybody else to do so. But it has showed me to make this item of my reading a prayer, to commit it to the Lord. "Lord, guide me to the books you want me to read." I find that some books are worth reading one time. Some books I may, I'll never get to in the will of God. Other books are worth reading and re-reading. Some books are worth skimming.

But as my prayers, Lord help the strength of my time and my effort be given to your word and meditation upon your scriptures. You know there's a spiritual battle. It's harder quite frankly in a leisure moment to read this book than another book. There's a spiritual battle around this book. There are promises connected with scriptures that aren't connected with any other book.

And so I don't think a person just accidently sorta runs into the right choice and that's when I say, you know make that a prayer. It's easy to be misguided and so I appreciated since the testimony of that older godly man. "I wish I'd read this book more and other books less." Let this be the priority.

Now in regard to the practice of reading God's word, meditating upon God's word, certainly one could break down the discipline in regard to Bible reading, Bible study, Bible memory and I'm encouraging our listeners to do what they're already doing or to make that a discipline in their life. Now sometimes it helps to know what exactly is the goal had in mind when they do it. As far as like Bible reading I could think of at least two different ways to go about it. One way could be like reading just to get an overview and therefore you're reading sorta somewhat quickly and skimming and maybe even have a set guide that you're gonna read so much a day and read through the Bible, that that may be an approach.

Another is more like devotional Bible reading where you're reading, you just feel free to stop at a certain point when something hits you and you pick up there the next day. So that'd sorta be two different purposes. In regard to Bible study, I appreciate what one person said, the best way to study the Bible is to study the Bible. He was saying that you really have to do it and certainly there are course that are available if a person needed help. But the idea of learning to study a verse of scripture, learning to study a chapter of scripture, learning to study a book of scripture or learning to study a topic or learning to study a word by Bible study.

Also the idea of Bible memory, I have found these three words somewhat keep me on track in regard to Bible memory, do it meaningfully. That is certainly as an adult, try to understand what you're memorizing. I think there can be advantage of a child sometimes putting word in their mind or they don't fully understand at that time and God can use later. But as an adult, to try to – well God tells me to treasure his word in my heart and so it's not just having words but words that I'm at least attempting to understand, do it meaningfully. Also do it strategically.

In other words one's heart has an appetite for certain portions of God's word given time because of the certain struggles. And I think that's what scripture talks about, the sword of the spirit and spiritual warfare being the word of God and the word there meaning *ramah*, which speaks of specific words that meet specific needs that you can use at specific times. And so all of us need to build an arsenal of *ramah* that help me. So do it strategically and then third, do it prayerfully.

You know meditation is just simply talking to God about His word with a desire that your life come into agreement with His word. That's what meditation is. It's for everybody. It's not optional. It's not just for certain people with certain temperaments or personalities but it's for all of us. And it's essential, it's just talking to God about His word with a desire that your life come into agreement.

It's okay that you may forget some things you memorized. You may need to memorize those again and work them through your life again. That's okay. Because the way to review scripture I think is to do it prayerfully. The ultimate goal is not to just being able to quote that scripture but the ultimate goal is Lord is my life in agreement with that scripture.

Greg Wheatley: You know Dr. Thrasher, this is not a series on Bible study per se but since we're on this and how it relates to God's will, what about the approach to scripture reading? You mentioned the devotional approach. What about if we're in a passage, let's say in the Old Testament, Exodus and we come to a passage that is clearly historical but there's one little section in there that seems to apply to our life. The temptation or I shouldn't even put it that way, sometimes the tendency is to say well, that's God speaking to me. The validity of that approach, do you find that that's okay?

Dr. Bill Thrasher: Yeah, that's an excellent question. Certainly as one person would say, you know all the Bible is written for us. It's not all written directly to us. And I think that the key is let's say God gave a promise to Abraham, well there may be some promises that are unique to Abraham and for Abraham alone. I think the key is to look what do I share in common with the individual who received this word, this promise?

Now there's some things, promises God gave to the apostles. Well, I share something in common with them. I'm a child of God; they're a child of God. There are things I don't share in common with them. There were unique promises given to an apostle. There may be a unique promise given to Abraham. Now when I see God calming Abraham of his fear, there can be things that can directly apply to my situation and my fear. So I think one can go into two extremes, one, sort of ignoring the context, the other sort of depersonalizing the Bible.

Greg Wheatley: Never applying it.

Dr. Bill Thrasher: Both extremes would be wrong.

Greg Wheatley: Very helpful. I think that's where a lot of us are sometimes and so thank you for that insight. Well that's all our time today. It goes quickly and I'm glad you've joined us. Our instructor is Dr. Bill Thrasher, Professor of Bible and Theology in Moody's Graduate School. I'm Greg Wheatley and we'll see you next time on Radio School of the Bible.

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