

Lesson 10 | May 7, 2023

Memorize and Meditate on God's Word

Study Text: Psalm 63:5–8; 77:11–15; 119:9–16, 145–152; Matthew 4:3–4; 1 Timothy 4:15–16; 2 Peter 1:19–21

Central Truth: Meditating on God's Word provides light and strength for the soul.

Key Verse: Psalm 119:48

My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes (KJV).

I honor and love your commands. I meditate on your decrees (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will grasp what is meant by the inspiration of Scripture.
- Students will be eager to study and memorize Scripture.
- Students will tell an acquaintance about meditating on Scripture.

Introducing the Study

Say: Are you aware that the Assemblies of God and other denominations that treasure God's Word have Bible Quiz ministries that promote Scripture memorization among children and youth? This year across the nation many teenagers are memorizing eight complete books of the New Testament (1 and 2 Thessalonians; 1 and 2 Timothy; Titus; 1, 2, and 3 John). Can you imagine such a feat?

Opening Activity—Title

Ask. When was the last time you memorized one or more verses from the Bible? Let's try our hand at memorizing this week's key verse, Psalm 119:48. We'll use the New Living Translation (like our Bible quizzers do). First, let's read it aloud together: "I honor and love your commands. I meditate on your decrees." Now let's take one minute to study it silently individually. After 60 seconds, ask for volunteers to quote it. Affirm every effort.

Say: While we may not all memorize vast portions of Scripture, our minds have large untapped capacities. Devoting ourselves to hiding God's Word in our heart is worth the effort. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Bible memorization brings major benefits to one's life, primarily directing one's thoughts toward God and His ways and building relationship with Him. However, memorizing Scripture is neither an end in itself nor a solution for all problems. It does not eliminate sin—though it is a strong deterrent! It does not by itself make a person more spiritual, and it certainly does not earn extra credit with God. In this lesson, we will explore Bible

memorization and other ways we can experience and reinforce the power of God's Word in our lives.

Part 1—Remember God and His Word

Meditating on God

Psalm 63:5–8; 77:11–15

Say: Last week we talked about setting aside time to commune with God, and we now return to Psalm 63 to learn about David's worship and we get a glimpse of what fueled his many heartfelt, raw, genuine, intimate conversations with God. David spent precious alone time reflecting on the person, nature, character, and works of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christians are right to be wary of worldly meditation practices with roots in pagan worship and godless philosophical systems. But believers should embrace meditation as a biblical discipline for focusing one's mind and thoughts upon God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. David meditated day and night, deepening his relationship and intimacy with the Lord.

The Hebrew verb translated "meditate" in Psalm 63:6 is used by Isaiah to describe the growling of a lion over its prey (Isaiah 31:4). In *Eat This Book*, Eugene Peterson argues that we need to slowly savor every morsel of Scripture, letting it transform us. Like a satisfying morsel of excellent food, David lingered over thoughts of God's perfections and memories of God's interactions with him in the past (both personally, as in Psalm 63, as well as with his people historically, as Psalm 77 emphasizes).

As David meditated, his soul was richly satisfied; joyful praise was spontaneous. He recalled that God has delivered His people by His "strong arm" (77:15, NLT), and David had a deep sense of abiding "in the shadow of thy wings" (63:7, KJV)—a poignant description of a place of trust and security. What blessed assurance and calm confidence David exuded. No wonder he rejoiced, despite the concerns of life. He had lain awake upon his bed consumed not by worry, but by the glory of God's presence.

Resource Packet Item 1: God's Word to the Rescue

Distribute the worksheet and ask volunteers to read the testimonies aloud. Then challenge your class to memorize any of the essential verses they don't already know.

Discuss

? Does the word meditation elicit any particular response from you? Is it negative or positive? Why?

? What aspects of God's character might you need to meditate on? How might you find biblical passages to assist in your meditation on this quality of God?

Memorizing God's Word

Psalm 119:9–16

Say: As a “lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105, KJV), God's Word shows us the way to live. Ultimately it directs us toward living in a way that honors our Creator and displays His image, character, and redemptive purposes in the world. The Psalmist could think of no greater guidance for a young person (or anyone, for that matter) than to take heed, obey, meditate on, recite, and hide in their heart the Word of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 119 extols God's Word. It is written in an acrostic format according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Within each section of eight verses, each verse begins with the same letter of the alphabet. Verses 9–16 all begin with bet, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. All this creative and beautiful writing centers on praising God and treasuring His Word, which reflects His holy character. This section commends Scripture memorization as a deterrent to sin. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (verse 11, KJV).

Of course, this verse does not imply that the one who memorizes Scripture will be sinless. Only Jesus (who certainly memorized a lot of Scripture and used it in His teaching and preaching) is sinless. All other prominent biblical leaders definitely did sin, some (like David himself) quite flagrantly. Psalm 119:11 simply identifies one of the purposes of learning God's Word: to strengthen one's resistance to temptation by fortifying the mind and heart with truth. The Psalmist earnestly desired not to sin against God or wander from His truth. Bible memorization can help keep God's truth ever before our eyes and prominent in our minds.

Memory is cue dependent. The brain stores memories in vast supply, but we could not function if they were all kept active in our minds. Our brains depend on cues to trigger access to those stored memories. Rigorous Bible memorization increases the number of cues that trigger one's brain to bring a passage of Scripture front and center for immediate use, whether as a deterrent to sin or as a word appropriate to the moment. In addition, the Holy Spirit will bring these Scriptures to our memory when we need them (see John 14:26).

Discuss

? What Bible passages or verses spring most naturally to your mind, and when does that happen? Have you memorized any?

? Does the thought of trying to memorize Scripture discourage or frighten you in any way? If so, how might you overcome that?

Part 2—Meditate on Scripture in Stressful Times For Access to God Himself

Psalm 119:145–148

Say: Because Scripture is indeed God’s Word, it is perhaps the most reliable point of access He has given us to himself. Believers are certainly indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth and is our constant Comforter and Advocate, but it is God’s Word which makes us aware of this reality. The Spirit’s most powerful and effective role happens in tandem with the Word of God, and He helps us live upon that sure foundation. In stressful times, we can immerse ourselves in His Word by meditating on Scripture and entering His presence. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 119:145–152 is the nineteenth section of eight verses in this acrostic psalm; thus each verse begins with the nineteenth Hebrew letter, qoph. In this section, God’s Word is extolled as an enduring source of hope and truth in trying times. The Psalmist repeatedly mentions crying out to the Lord. Verse 150 gives a glimpse of the cause of his distress: “Lawless people are coming to attack me” (NLT).

Only God’s Word is mentioned more frequently than the Psalmist’s concerns, resolving every refrain in these first four verses as the counterpoint to distress: “thy statutes,” “thy testimonies,” “thy word,” “thy word” (KJV; “your decrees,” “your laws,” “your words,” “your promise,” NLT). Obedience to, hope in, and meditation upon God’s Word are the go-to solutions in the midst of turmoil. This is true at any hour, though the Psalmist describes a late-night and predawn battle.

It is often at night when the cares of this world can creep in to sabotage the Lord’s peace for us. At times, believers may require medicinal assistance for insomnia, and getting such help is certainly within the purview of trusting in God! But there are times when, like the Psalmist, believers should focus their minds and hearts firmly on God and His Word, crying out to Him and entering His presence. What an ideal time to seek the solace of the Scriptures, and how precious to commit them to memory (whether verbatim or in essence) so that one can call them to mind effectively, even in the dark

Discuss

? What concerns keep you awake at night? How can God’s Word help?

? Do you have a go-to passage of Scripture or spiritual song that often serves to bring you into the Lord’s presence? What is it?

To Be Anchored in Truth

Psalm 119:149–152

Say: In stressful times, another reason to meditate upon Scripture is to be anchored in eternal truth. This discipline draws us close to God relationally, but it also provides us with the unchanging Word of God as a foundation for our lives. One cannot split this psalm down the middle and say one part is relational and one is about truth; both

emphases and both benefits of meditating on Scripture are present. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

A thorough grounding in God's Word means we are anchored in His eternal truth. All thy commandments are truth. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever" (Psalm 119:151–152, KJV).

Meditation is a popular activity touted by psychologists, life coaches, and gurus from around the world. While research supports the health benefits of focused contemplation, such as reduced stress and anxiety, the greatest benefit comes from a meditative focus which is absolutely true and secure: the one true God and His holy Word. This is the prerogative of followers of Jesus Christ. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," says Jesus, "but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35, KJV).

The enduring character of the Word of God is rooted in the eternity of the God who speaks it. "Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth" (Psalm 119:151, KJV). Every spiritual benefit of meditating on Scripture centers on that key relationship with the Lord and what He will do for us in and through His Word. The Psalmist's request is "quicken me" (verse 149, KJV; "Let me be revived," NLT). We receive life out of God's faithful lovingkindness through obedience to His Word. This quickening is only available by meditating on the living God and His living Word.

Resource Packet Item 2: Reading for Spiritual Growth

Distribute the information sheet and encourage students to use it as a guide for meditating on their daily Bible reading during the week.

Discuss

? What aspects of our culture conspire against a sustained focus on God and His Word?

? How might the Lord desire to "quicken" or "revive" you? In what part of your life do you most sense a need for such a revitalizing touch from God?

Part 3—Feed on God's Word Spiritual Nourishment

Matthew 4:3–4; 1 Timothy 4:15–16

Say: Earlier we encountered the idea of savoring every morsel of God's Word. Jesus' response to the devil's temptation includes the metaphor of eating it. Similar imagery is present in other parts of the Bible, notably in visions where Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:1) and John (Revelation 10:9–11) are told to eat a scroll. Matthew's account is a little more subtle, but clearly God's Word is every bit as necessary to us as bread. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At the start of His earthly ministry, Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1–11). In the first temptation, the devil sought to use Jesus' extreme hunger after fasting for forty days to tempt Him to perform a miracle to satisfy His own hunger: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread" (verse 3, NLT). However, Jesus rebuffed the devil, targeting the devil's temptation by quoting what God's Word does for us: "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (verse 4, NLT). In other words, we need God's Word to live.

It is significant that Jesus quoted Scripture in every response to the devil. Clearly He had been feeding on God's Word in order to quote it under such extreme conditions. Jesus often taught by quoting or alluding to Scripture and, as His disciples, we must be similarly immersed in the Bible. When we are tempted, God will use the Scriptures we know to help us, making a way to escape (see 1 Corinthians 10:11–13).

Timothy was a young minister Paul had mentored and appointed to combat false teaching in the city of Ephesus. Paul taught him the need for sound doctrine, or teaching, rooted in the Scriptures, instructing him to "focus on reading the Scriptures to the church" (1 Timothy 4:13, NLT). That biblical emphasis is one of "these matters" to which Timothy should give his complete attention, "so that everyone will see your progress" (verse 15, NLT). Focus on the Scriptures is surely in view when Paul tells him to "stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you" (verse 16, NLT). Spiritual vitality, both at the individual and the community level, comes through a healthy diet of feeding on God's Word.

Resource Packet Item 3: New Testament Writers Fed on God's Word

Distribute the worksheet and allow a few minutes to work on it, either individually or in small groups. Then compare answers to the questions.

Discuss

? Ponder together the metaphor of feeding on God's Word. What can you observe about the benefits of memorizing Scripture?

? What can we learn from Jesus' reliance on God's Word when tested by Satan?

Confidence in God's Word

2 Peter 1:19–21

Say: Feeding on God's Word is necessary for spiritual health because of its Spiritual (capital S) origin: It comes from the Holy Spirit of God. Its truths are not of human origin, but "prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

"Prophets" (NLT) or "prophecy" (KJV) refer not only to the writings of those we think of as the classical prophets (Isaiah through Malachi). Since a prophet is anyone who speaks

for God, this term also refers to other genres in Scripture, including the Law and poetic books. Moses, who authored the first five books of the Old Testament, is known as a prophet despite composing primarily legal and narrative literature. The scope of Peter's description includes all Scripture. Paul makes a similar point: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, KJV).

Both 2 Peter 1:21 and 2 Timothy 3:16 assert the divine inspiration of Scripture. This is the foundation of Christian confidence and trust and the reason we can draw spiritual nourishment and life from God's Word. We are not told how such inspiration operated; however, it is clear the Scriptures were written in a variety of ways by a variety of human authors. Inspiration, the Holy Spirit's role in writing the Scriptures, ensures the utter trustworthiness of the Bible. "Those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God" (verse 21, NLT, emphasis added). These passages from Peter and Paul assure us that Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit though written by human hands.

This role of the Spirit today is often referred to as illumination, distinguishing it from His original inspiration of the Bible. Note that we must not claim the same level of inspiration in our reading and interpretation as was present when the Scriptures were written (see verse 20). The Spirit who inspired Scripture also helps us obey the Word. As we seek His guidance, He will take what we have learned in the Scriptures and help us in every area of our lives.

Discuss

? What does God's choice to inspire His Word to be recorded by human hands suggest about believers' responsibility in studying it?

? How can we ensure that solid, responsible Bible study is carried out with the Spirit's illuminating work?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Bible is true, eternal, and originated in the Holy Spirit, who also works through it to transform our lives. It must hold a central place in our hearts and minds, even as it did for Jesus. We cannot live on bread alone; we need the spiritual nourishment that comes from feeding on God's Word. It more than repays the effort required to memorize it. Meditating on it will sustain us in our darkest hours and usher us into the presence of God. Careful attention and obedience to Scripture will help us avoid sin and bring salvation for us and those with whom we share it.

Living It Out Ministry in Action

- Choose a portion of Scripture (perhaps as a class) and set a goal to memorize it in the coming week.
- Identify one matter of concern that sometimes causes you to lose sleep and commit to letting it prompt you to meditate on God and His Word.

- Talk with a neighbor or other acquaintance about meditation focusing on Scripture.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Read the Bible with Wisdom.

Proverbs 8:4–14

Tuesday:

Take In God's Word.

Ezekiel 3:1–10

Wednesday:

Hear the Word of the Lord.

Zechariah 8:9–15

Thursday:

Remember the Commandment of Our Lord.

1 John 2:7–11

Friday:

Continue Faithfully in Christ's Teachings.

2 John 3–11

Saturday:

Work Together for the Truth.

3 John 5–12