

I. Set Up

A. Welcome, Intro, Special welcome of guests. We are in fifth week of a series called, The Way Forward. We have been exploring how we can lean into God. We understand that the kind of gains we are after – the transformation of our heart – is a work of the Holy Spirit. But we are not passive bystanders. There are things we get called to. As Augustine said, “We cannot do it alone. And God will not do it alone.” Today, Mike will be talking about the value of meditation – a spiritual practice that lives alongside prayer and solitude and Scripture Memory. He will be basing his comments out of Psalm 1. Let me read it for us:

1. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.
2. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.
3. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
4. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
5. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

II. Introduction¹

A. This series is called The Way Forward and it is designed to explore the things we can do to cultivate a vibrant, growing relationship with God. Spiritual growth is its own reward. We get better, and better is better. A life increasingly formed by God – yield to the Holy Spirit – is marked by good things: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control. Life works better with those things!

B. You are here – assuming you weren’t forced by your parents or your spouse – because you want to be close to God. You’d like to know him better. You want him to form and shape you. The question animating this series is: how do we lean in? What can we do.

C. In the first three weeks we looked at confession, prayer and rest. Last week was tenacity – “disciplining ourselves for godliness,” “working out our salvation.” Today the topic is meditation. You might think of this as learning to make space for God. And to set this up, we turn to Psalm 1.

III. As you are turning there, let me remind you that the Book of Psalms was part prayer book and part hymnal.

A. Many Jews would have memorized the Psalms, often by singing them. This would allow them to meditate on them, ruminate on them, ponder and rehearse them.

B. Psalm 1 opens the Book – which is a big deal.² There is a lot we might say about it. Let’s just go with this: It is a wisdom Psalm.

C. There are lots of different kinds of Psalms: praise, lament, imprecatory – all of which have wisdom. But this is a basic wisdom Psalm. In fact, it's so much of a wisdom Psalm that Psalm 1 ends up sounding a lot like Proverbs 1. Both contrast the two paths before us – one that leads to trouble, and the other that not only avoids trouble, but points to God. Both note that the path to trouble is easy but makes life hard, while the path towards God is occasionally hard but brings freedom. Both highlight the importance of God's counsel.

IV. Blessed – this is a big word. It's an intensive plural. It implies that blessings come to those who pick the right path.

V. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers

A. This is classic Hebrew poetry – which is not like English poetry. We rhyme words and follow a certain meter. Hebrew poetry rhymes ideas. Here are told that trouble follows those who: 1) walk in step with the wicked; 2) stand in the way sinners take; and 3) sit in the company of mockers. These are not three different things – it's three ways of saying one thing.

VI. But whose delight - who is enamored with, taken with, smitten by

VII. But whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

A. Think, the Bible. The term used here could specifically refer to: 1) the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament); or 2) the Ten Commandments and the moral, civil and ceremonial code that accompanies it. But this is poetry. You need to be flexible. When the Psalms say, “the trees of the field will clap their hands, it doesn't mean trees grow hands and clap them.” The first goal of Bible study is to figure out what the writer intends to say. To interpret something literally means we pay attention to the rules of literature. The idea is, those who delight in, study and apply the Bible, are doing themselves a big favor.

VIII. But whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

A. Thinks about, ruminates on, the image most people give is of a cow chewing its cud.

IX. Blessed are those whose delight is in the Law of the Lord, and who meditate on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

X. The prayer book of Jesus opens with an admonition to meditate on the Word of God. So, what is meditation? What does it look like? How and why do we do it?

A. Thirty years ago, the idea of Christian meditation was an oxymoron. Christians didn't meditate, that's what Buddhists and New Agers did.

1. I remember being instructed to buy a book called, *Christian Meditation* for my Greek exegesis class. And I asked the professor, Wayne Grudem, what he was thinking. No one had ever suggested to me that I meditate. And somehow I had missed all of the passages – like Psalm 1 – that tell us to.

2. Then I ended up in a Bible study with Robert Coleman. And our who Bible Study would be on a single verse from John 15 – the vine and the branches. “I am the vine and you are the branches. Abide in me.”

B. Today meditation is better understood within the church, in part because it is increasingly common outside it.

1. I listen to a couple weekly podcast from atheists just to know what they are saying. And I also listen to a couple corporate trainers talking about greater performance and excellence and personal productivity, and right now, everyone is talking about meditation, which goes by the term, “mindfulness.”

C. And as we learn more and more about the downsides of technology – an article in the *Wall Street Journal* called, “How Smart Phones Hijack our Minds” – went viral about two weeks ago. When I read it I thought, I guess I knew that.

D. Another article came out later this week on the fact that we are losing the weekend. We went from Sabbath to Sunday to Weekend, and now the Weekend is going away.

E. So there is a growing awareness that we need to lower the noise and the stimulation. And meditation helps with that.

XI. So what is it? What is meditation? Let me answer that by saying:

A. It is one of the practices the Bible encourages – as we see not only in Psalm 1, but in other passages such as:³

1. Ps. 27:4 reads: One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in his temple.

2. Ps. 77: 5f: I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said, ‘Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart. Then my spirit made a diligent search. . . . I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder [meditate] all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds;

3. And it’s not just the Psalms. Many other places call for it, such as Joshua 1:8: 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.

B. Meditation is one of the habits we can develop to lean in to God. It is one of the things we do that positions us for God to do what only He can do.

C. Christian meditation involves focusing on God, or as an aspect of his character, or a promise from Scripture. It is about ruminating on it, resting in it, letting the implications and insights wash over us.

1. It is not simply letting our mind wander –it is not being mentally passive,

2. It is not emptying our mind. In this sense, Christian meditation is quite different than Eastern meditation, where the goal is to empty your mind. And you often have a mantra to help you block out the noise and distractions.
3. It is not an effort to go deep inside our out mind to uncover the things we know but haven't accessed yet – to tap into our intuition. I recently read a book on Solitude written for the marketplace, and that appears to be the underlying goal.
4. Christian meditation begins by focusing on God and His Word. It is a very focused effort.
5. That said, it doesn't necessarily end there. It involves slowly reading or rehearsing a biblical truth, seeking the things above⁴ but it often bleeds into prayer or praise. In fact, I would even say, it's hard to tell where meditation stops and prayer starts.

D. Meditation is a close cousin to solitude, silence, listening, prayer, the Lectio Divina format of reading the Bible.

E. It is hard. My experience is that meditation is a bit like driving your kids to school. I did this for 10 years. I did it because, though on most days not much happened, on some days it did. And I was willing to do it for a month for the one time they talked.

XII. How do we learn to meditate? How do I develop this skill?

A. You need to get quiet. Calm your heart and racing mind by drawing into God's presence. The only rule would be: do whatever is most conducive to concentration. So find a time and place where this is possible – which means quite and unlikely to be interrupted.

B. Select a passage or a truth. It is ideal if it's something you have memorized. If it isn't, write it out.

C. I find it helpful to have a sheet of paper next to me to scribble the things that flood my mind so I can forget about them.

D. Do what you can to move into the text. Really think about it. Imagine Jesus speaking the words, or on the cross. Recreate that scene in your mind. Allow it to carry you into prayer and worship.

XIII. OK – enough said. I want us to take a few minutes – arguably not enough, but a few, and make space for meditation as we move into communion.

XIV. In a moment I am going to turn things over to the campus pastors. And we are going to use Isaiah 53 to settle ourselves. And then I am going to encourage you to focus on :

XV. Let's turn now to Isaiah 53. Let these words wash over you. You can close your eyes if that is best, or watch the images on the screen. But give this your deepest attention.

A. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

B. **4** Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

C. **7** He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested. For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

D. **10** Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

XVI.

XVII. Wrap Up:

A. Over the course of this series, we've encouraged you to take various steps. We said: pick a service; get into some sort of small group; find a way to serve.

B. We have invited you to prayer times –

C. We have also held out the possibility of a Spiritual Check-in. We have been investing a lot more time and attention on this and people have found it helpful. Let me encourage you to take the small step of meeting with someone for an hour to talk about where you are at and what next steps for you might look like.

¹ Thanks to Sam Storms for his article, 10 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHRISTIAN MEDITATION, from which much of this sermon was based.

² Jerome called Psalm 1 “the preface of the Holy Spirit.”

³ In addition, consider numerous other exhortations and examples of meditation on God's word from Psalm 119:23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 103, 148.

⁴ Col. 3:1