

Meditation, A Key To Spiritual Growth

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We all want to be in God's kingdom, no question about that. We all want to be there for the marriage supper with Jesus Christ. We all understand that we have to grow spiritually in order to be at that marriage supper. We have to become like Jesus Christ, become like God in our conduct and our thoughts and our attitudes.

Mr. Armstrong said for years there were three keys to spiritual growth. He said there was prayer; there was study and then there was meditation.

Over the years we've heard a lot of sermons on prayer. We have heard a lot of sermons on Bible study, but the third one wasn't spoken of all that much over the years as I recall. So you have to ask the question, why is that? Why does that third one seem to be ignored or put aside? One reason is, I think, that meditation is harder to grasp.

We know about study, because we learn in school to study. I don't care if you're in grade school or high school or college. You're asked to read a chapter in a book and then write a report. We get used to reading with the idea of okay what is this author trying to say and write down some points and then we construct an essay on that. We've all done that in school, so that's kind of familiar to us.

We know how to pray, which is talking to God. We talk all of the time. We understand that God gives us an outline as to how we ought to pray in Matthew 6. Christ said that this is the manner in which you ought to pray; our Father which art in heaven and then lists some areas that we should be taking to God about. When we first came into the church we heard prayers before services and after services. I had never heard prayers like that. I grew up in the Presbyterian Church and heard the thees and the thous and all of that stuff. Yet you hear prayers in the church and it's like you're talking to God, which is the way it should be.

Meditation, like prayer is a very private and a very quiet exercise. We don't meditate publicly, because we are quiet and you wouldn't know what's on the person's mind. God gives us instruction in His word about meditation. Today we want to look at that critical, critical subject of meditation. The title of the sermon is Meditation is a Key to Spiritual Growth. We are looking in the direction of the Passover, so meditation is critical to preparing ourselves for Passover also.

The first thing we want to do is ask a question, what is meditation? The word meditate appears fourteen times in the Old Testament and twice in the New Testament. Meditation appears nine times in the Old Testament and none in the New Testament. The Hebrew for "meditation" means *to ponder, to study* and notice this last one *to*

imagine. The Greek for “meditate” means *to revolve in the mind*, turn over in the mind. It also means, exactly as the Hebrew *imagine*. Those are important and we’ll come back to them in a bit.

Webster’s Dictionary says about meditation “to reflect on or contemplate.” I think a common sense definition of meditation is just to think deeply about a subject, to look at it from all different angles, to think deeply about a given subject.

That gives us an idea of the meaning of the word meditation. Let’s ask now when and where and how often should we meditate? Let’s go to Psalms 1:1-2. It’s interesting that in David’s very first psalm and in the very first couple of verses he addresses this subject, so it’s obviously important or God wouldn’t have inspired David to do this.

Psalms 1:1. *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*
2) *But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. (KJV)*

We’re going to see later, after the death of Moses God told Joshua to do exactly the same thing, meditation on God’s law day and night. Obviously, if it’s repeated twice in the Bible; once by the leader of the nation of Israel and the other time by the man that replaced Moses, it must be very important to God. We’re told to meditate throughout the day. Let’s go to Genesis 24:63 from the New King James Version and look at Isaac’s example. This one short verse tells us a lot about meditation.

Genesis 24:63. *And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening (NKJV)*

This tells us when and where that he meditated. What can we learn from this? When he went out in the field, obviously what he was doing was getting away from his tent, away from the hubbub of raising a family and kids running around and all of the things that go on in the tent or around the tent or with other tents nearby so he could have privacy and quiet. You are not going to sit down on the sidewalk, cross your legs and meditate in the middle of New York City. That just doesn’t work. He knew to go to a private place. It said at evening. Why would the Bible tell us that? I get up long before sunrise every morning and I watch the sunrise out of our windows that face to the east. Maybe you are blessed to take a walk at sunset. How can we not, when we see a sunset or sunrise think about God? Each one is different and the colors and the clouds and the rotation of the earth. It just helps us focus on God as our Creator and on Jesus Christ, who God says was the One who actually made all of this stuff. You look at God’s creation and you think about what kind of power, what kind of mind and what kind of design God has and the details of it all. There are many other scriptures. The lesson is we are to meditate often and any time that we feel it’s necessary. We should especially meditate if we’re unsure of what to do. If we’re coming up to a crossroads and we can either do this or do that. It might be a job. It might be buying a home or a

car. It might be making a decision about your children or whatever. We should meditate when we're not sure of what to do.

Another time to meditate is especially if we're nervous or unsettled. Sometimes you have a knot in your stomach for some reason. That's the time to meditate. We can ask ourselves, where is this knot in my stomach coming from? What is the cause of it? Sometimes we can identify it. We have an important meeting coming up. We have a test to take or something like that and we're nervous about it.

On the other hand in meditating I've had situations where I don't what the cause is. It's not like there's some crisis down the road. Then you ask who is the prince of the power of the air? Who can put emotions and thoughts in our minds? We all have to watch out for that. Then that can lead to prayer about whatever the cause is. So, you see meditation and prayer go hand in hand.

We should especially meditate if we've sinned. Let's say sometime during the day we've thought some things we shouldn't have thought, said some things we shouldn't have said. Maybe we said something that caused a lack of peace to occur. At the end of the day we can realize that hey, I've screwed up today and God is probably not very happy with me. We can meditate about how I can avoid this in the future. What are my weaknesses that led to this sin that I am now repenting of? So, we spend time meditating on the situations that got us to the point of sin. We see that the time and place of meditation is very similar to that of prayer; quiet where we can focus away from the hubbub of everyday life, whether we live in the city, the Bible talks about your prayer closet; somewhere to isolate ourselves from being interrupted, being distracted just as we would for prayer.

We talked about the when, the where, the how often. It should occur as often as necessary and as David said, every day.

The next thing is what should be the subjects of our meditation? We're going to talk about five. You can probably think of a whole bunch more. Within the limitations of time we're going to talk about five. Before we get to the first one let's understand that what we meditate upon is very important to God. It's like our prayers that are important to God. Our meditations are also. Let's go to Psalms 63:1 from the New Living Translation. The context here is David is running for his life. This was a time when he was out in the dessert of Judah and people were trying to kill him. He has a real problem on his hands here. Notice what he says.

Psalms 63:1. 1 O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. ... (NLT)

This means I want to be near you.

1b) ... My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. (NLT)

Continue in verse 6.

6) I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night. (NLT)

So, David has a real problem. Guess what he does? Rather than wringing his hands and “what if” himself to death his solution was to meditate on God and do so through the night. He meditated on God’s ability to save, God’s wisdom, God’s power. To God David’s problem was minor. It wasn’t a big deal to God. He was meditating so he could get closer to God, have God’s mind, look at God’s power and then come to peace and then sleep. Now let’s turn to Psalms 19:14. David is asking God to guide him in his meditation.

Psalms 19:14. *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. (KJV)*

We see here that David is concerned about the quality of his meditation. You could say the same thing for prayer, too. He wanted to please God with the quality of his meditation. This is one reason frankly why David was a man after God’s own heart, because he meditated on God continually and his meditations were pleasing to God.

Under this point that we are in now let’s look at five different areas from God’s word to tell us what should be the subjects of our meditation.

First Area is God’s Works.

We just read that David meditated on God day and night. Specifically we’re told one of the things that we can meditate on is God’s works. Let’s go to Psalms 143:5. When we say the word works of God, it means what God has done, what Christ has done.

Psalms 143:5. *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands. (KJV)*

The Hebrew word for “muse” means *to ponder*. That’s also a definition of meditate. So, it’s just a different word for the same thing. David says I muse, I think over, I meditate; I ponder your works, on the work of your hands.

One thing we can meditate on for God’s works is creation. I remember when the Hubble Space Telescope was launched in 1990. It had a problem with a mirror. They had to go up and fix it. Once they got it fixed the pictures that came from that telescope were just awe inspiring. The telescope was the first telescope in the history of mankind to take pictures outside the earth’s atmosphere. The earth’s atmosphere distorts all of those pictures, especially when you’re looking very deep into space and you’re looking at very tiny objects to us here on earth. They printed a book of the pictures a year or two after the pictures came in. It was a thick, coffee table size book. My wife and I

bought one and you just sit there and go page after page in that book. You're looking at these pictures of what's out there right now. They focused the Hubble on one of the darkest areas of the sky, to where even earth-based telescopes, human eye, very little stars were out there. I think they focused it for a week, where the tiniest, faintest light would have time to come in. When they analyzed this dark area of the sky, there were about a hundred million galaxies in that dark area of sky. Each galaxy has a hundred to two hundred billion stars. Probably the most famous picture was the horsehead nebula. It looks like a horse's head. A nebula is just a cloud of gas. This horsehead nebula is an incubator of stars. You can look into the gas and see these little twinkles. Those are stars being formed. This occurred billions of years ago, because it's taken that long for the light to get to us. You sit there and you can't help but think what mind, what power, what ability could design this. It comes from the mind of God. How can we not meditate on God's works? We know that God is the initiator and Christ is the implementer. Those works came from the hands of Jesus Christ. God and Christ share the same mind, which is the mind behind it all. You just look and say wow, what awesomeness!

We can meditate for example on what we find in the Bible about ancient Israel. Look at what happened to ancient Israel where God called a sheep herder, Moses, sent him to this nation and brought that nation out of the most powerful nation on earth at the time, and then parting the Red Sea and taking them through. All of the ten miracles destroyed the major ten gods of Egypt. Look at what God did. We could meditate on what He has done for them.

We could meditate on what God has done for each one of us; our calling. How awesome is it for God to call us when we're nobodies. We have the awesome privilege of being able to pray to God knowing who He is. We have the awesome privilege of knowing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and what He willingly went through on our behalf. Going back and all of us have stories about this, how God dealt with us before we were baptized. In some cases years or decades before we were baptized we can go back and see God working with us to bring us to the point of baptism and coming into His church. How awesome is that?

We can meditate almost continually on God's works.

The Second Area is God's Precepts.

Let's go to Psalms 119:15 where we see about God's precepts. This is also repeated in verse 78, so God says this twice for emphasis.

Psalms 119:15. *I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.*
(KJV)

Notice he says "in" and not on. If you look at the Hebrew for "precept" it means a *mandate from God, a law or a statute*, whatever God mandates, whatever God

commands, whatever God says. When it says here “I will meditate in your precepts,” that means I will meditate from the precepts point of view. I’m inside the precepts so to speak.

For example we know that God is love. God doesn’t have love. He is love. It is in 1 John 4:8.

1 John 4:8. *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (KJV)*

If we look at the Ten Commandments from the standpoint that God is love and we meditate from the precepts point of view, you can go through all ten and see how all ten show love; God’s love for us if we keep those commandments; our love for all those people around us. For example, you shall not covet. Well, if we look at it inside the precept that means if we love other people, we’re not going to covet what they have. We’re not going to want to take what they have. We’re not going to want to diminish them in any stretch of the imagination. You see, when we’re thinking of it in terms of “in the precepts,” it means not looking down on God’s precepts from the outside, but we’re immersed in the precept as we look out from the precept. Look at Psalms 119:97.

Psalms 119:97. *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. (KJV)*

So, we learn about God from God’s precepts. We learn how His mind works from the precepts. When God says keep the Sabbath day, that’s a precept. He says it’s a good thing one out of every seven days to stop what you’re doing, focus on the important things of life, rest, get your mind off the mundane things and focus on Me, God. Look at verse 148 from the New International Version because I think it’s clearer.

148) My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises. (NIV)

David says I’m going to eschew sleep just so I can meditate on what You have promised me. One of those promises is in Hebrews 13:5.

Hebrews 13:5. *... I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (KJV)*

You can meditate on that for a very long time. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, no matter how bleak it might look at times we have a promise from God that says I will never leave you or forsake you.

What are His promises - just salvation and eternal life. So, we can meditate on that. We have so many people that are hurting, so many people that are in pain, people with terminal cancer, people that from a physical standpoint the outlook looks pretty bleak. Yet, at the same time if they meditate on God’s promises, that means that the individual that is sick will ultimately have eternal life in a world far better than what we have today. For those relatives who are grieving because of the illness, they can say the worst thing

that can happen is my mate can die or my mom or dad can die or my child can die, but I will see them again. That's a promise from God. Now let's go to Psalms 139:17-18. We are talking about God's precepts and here is another one.

Psalms 139:17. *How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!*

18) If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. (KJV)

The Bible is a scriptural record of God and Christ. When we read the scriptures and study them, they reveal God's thoughts, God's Ideas, God's commandments. They reveal the very thoughts of God. David is saying I go to sleep and I'm thinking about your thoughts. Then it says "when I awake, I am still with you" meaning you can take that a bunch of different ways; when I awake I am still alive, I've got another day. As you get older and you wake up, that's one of the first things I say is God, thanks for another day. What I think David is talking about here is I fell asleep meditating on this subject, whatever it was, and when I wake up my mind's still there. I'm still with You. I'm still meditating about You and Your thoughts.

The Third Area that the Bible tells Us is We Need to Meditate on God's Testimonies.

What's a testimony? The Protestants use that word quite often. The fact is if we testify in court, somebody saw something and so they go to court and testify of what they saw. They give testimony. Notice Psalms 119:99. You see, God has testimonies. It's called the Bible. David says this:

Psalms 119:99. *I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. (KJV)*

The Hebrew word for "testimony" is *a witness*. What David is saying is the Bible is God's witness to us. That's God's testimony to us. What he is saying is I meditate on that, because God doesn't include anything in the Bible by accident. It's there for a reason. When we meditate we should be meditating on the very testimony of God. You see the scriptures reveal who God and Christ are. It tells us about them, what they think, what they've done. The scripture is a reference of that and it reveals who they are. So, one of the things we should meditate on is the witness that God has left us; what God has done; what Christ has done; how they handle certain things. As we know, Christ came in the flesh, so He is an example for us of dealing with the flesh, dealing with the world, dealing with Satan, dealing with those who opposed Him, training the disciples and all of that. That's a record. Then there's a record, of course, of what the Father has done like resurrect Jesus Christ. We see that the Bible is a record or a witness or a testimony of God and Christ and what they've done.

Let's just take an example that we could think about if we want to learn something about good and evil, right and wrong. We could meditate on and contrast and compare the examples of Saul with David. You look into Saul's life. He was called to be king. He did certain things and it didn't end up well. David was called to be king too and he did certain things. Yes, he made some mistakes, one huge one, but he was a man after God's own heart. To meditate on Saul and David, to compare or contrast the two and come away with lessons from that is something that all of us should meditate on.

Of course, there are thousands and thousands of others

The Fourth Area is Meditating on How to Avoid Sin.

As we approach the Passover, that's a big subject for us. Let's go to Psalms 39:3. David, we're told, was a red head. Does that imply that he had a temper? It could well be, because you read the Psalms and he wants to call fire down from heaven on all of his enemies. You read some of those Psalms and I would hate to have David as my enemy. My guess is, yes he had a temper. Notice what he says.

Psalms 39:3. My heart was hot within me ... (KJV)

He was angry. We've all been there. We've just felt the heat come off of us because we were upset about something.

3b) ... while I was musing [meditating] the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, (KJV)

He was smart enough to start meditating about whatever it was that was making him angry. David is telling us here when you're hot, mad just take a step back, sit down and be quiet and meditate on the source of the anger and on why am I angry? Then we see here that we can avoid sin if we meditate before we open our mouth. We've all been there, all done that. Sometimes as the words are coming out of your mouth, your brain is trying to pull them back in. We've all done that. Look at verse 4.

4) Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. (KJV)

He says help me to meditate on my end. Of course, if we're angry and we sin, our end is not going to be good. He says "let me know how frail I am." Well, what he's saying is God help me to meditate on my humanity. I am weak. I am small. There are so many things beyond my control. Even for King David there were forces out there that were trying to kill him and he couldn't change that. All he could do was go to God and say show me how frail I am so I can rely on you to solve the problem, because I can't solve the problem by myself. Of course, we all know at the end of the day we're going to die. In David's case he didn't know. Maybe he was going to die a violent death the next day. He didn't know. The fact is with God and Christ for what they have done for us we can

all have eternal life. So, when David says “make me to know my end,” the end is good. The end is positive if we stay faithful and loyal and obedient and look to God and have faith in God to take care of us and look after us.

The Fifth Area is How Can I Be More Like God and Christ?

We know the scripture by heart in Philippians 2:5. It says:

Philippians 2:5. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (KJV)*

We know God and Christ have the same mind. Christ, you see, was on the earth and we have a record of what He did on this earth; how He handled situations. He admonished us in His very first sermon rather than return evil for evil, you should turn the other cheek. Rather than whine and complain, you should walk the extra mile. That tells us certain things. We need, as we approach the Passover, to ask the question, how can I know if I have the mind of Christ? As we take that Passover, we want to answer that question. Look at Proverbs 4:26. This is an instruction for all of us as we get closer to Passover. Solomon says:

Proverbs 4:26. *Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. (KJV)*

The Hebrew word for “ponder” means *to weigh*. In other words we can look back on the day. We may be praying our evening prayers or we may be meditating at the end of the day and asking God how did I do today? If I have my day on a scale with the good things over hear that I did and the bad things over hear that I did, how does that measure out? How am I doing today? How could I have been more like Christ and follow the example that He set on this earth; as a mate for those who are married, as a friend, as an employee or in my case as an elder? How do I measure up to Jesus Christ and the example that He set on this earth? Sometimes we may have had a sticky situation. Maybe we lost our temper. Who knows? We could meditate on if Christ was in my shoes and this guy said that which sent me into orbit, how would Christ have handled that and how would it have been different than the way I handled that? Look at Colossians 3:10. You see, this is one of the mandates from God that as Christians we must follow and grow in.

Colossians 3:10. *And have put on the new man, which is renewed [made new] in knowledge after the image of him [Jesus Christ] that created him: (KJV)*

This means the new man. We see here that we have to be renewed in the knowledge of Christ, meaning we study and look how Christ handled things; what His thoughts were, what His actions were. By studying we have knowledge of how Christ behaved and then we can put that into practice. When He was confronted by the Pharisees how did He handle that? When He was captured and knew He was going to die, how did He handle that? When He was confronted by Satan, how did He handle that? In order to

do that we have to have knowledge in the scripture and the examples that we have recorded in scripture of in this case, Jesus Christ.

We have seen only five subjects that we can meditate on. You can think of many more – fifteen, twenty, fifty, I don't know. These are just five to get started on.

In the remainder of the sermon we want to talk about why does God want us to meditate? What are the benefits of meditation? We're going to talk about five of them. Why is it one of the big three; prayer, study, meditation? What are the benefits of meditation?

The First Benefit is Meditation Helps Us in Applying God's Law.

You see, it's one thing to read God's law, you shall not covet, but it's another thing to put it into practice. How do we do that? Meditation helps us overcome our carnality, our human nature. Let's go to Joshua 1:1 where God talked to Joshua after the death of Moses and He told him about meditation.

Joshua 1:1. *Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, (KJV)*

Continue in verses 6-8.

6) Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

7) Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

8) This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. (KJV)

This tells us, as God was telling Joshua, He says I want you to think about My law and I want you to think about how you apply it in your life.

We talked earlier about anger. Let's take somebody who has a problem with anger; maybe they have a short fuse. We've all been there, all done that. Let's go to Ephesians 4:26 from the New Living Translation. How to apply God's law – meditation helps us to do this. Paul is speaking to the church at Ephesus and to us today.

Ephesians 4:26. *And "don't sin by letting anger gain control over you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, (NLT)*

There is a principle there. Let's say we got mad during the day and let's say we went to bed mad and let's say we woke up mad. In meditating about that we can meditate on how could I have stopped my anger before the sun went down? How could I have let it go through the night and then into the next day? What could I have done differently to stop my anger? We could also meditate on what are my triggers that cause me to get angry in the first place? What is it about this incident that we would say "pressed my button" and off I went? What are my biggest triggers? Then we can meditate on how can I avoid getting angry when somebody pulls one of my triggers and sets me off? So, we meditate on how the incident occurred, what caused it, what was said, what my reactions were. We begin to analyze it and meditate on it and see where we went wrong and how we can change our behavior and, more importantly, how we can change our mind so it doesn't happen again.

The beauty of this is that meditation helps us walk through potential problems before they happen. If we meditate on something that caused us to sin in the past and we see how we could have handled it different than the way we did by doing it God's way, what that does is very important. It resets our mind from our carnal reaction to reacting God's way. By meditating on situations that have occurred, our weaknesses, our faults, our shortcomings what we do is reset our mind so that we don't fall into that same pattern over and over and over again. So, meditating really helps us apply God's law and helps us keep from repeating our sins and our faults and our shortcomings.

The Second Benefit is Meditation Gives Us Understanding.

There are three words that we need to differentiate; knowledge, understanding and wisdom. They're not the same. A lot of people just mush them all together, but they're not. The Bible tells us that understanding is knowing true knowledge from false knowledge. I can remember when I was a kid before television people would say if it's in the newspaper, it has to be true. Then later when television came on, well I saw it on television. It has to be true. Some advertisements use that. Now it's multiplied a thousand times with the internet. Well, if it's on the internet, it has to be true. There are all kinds of stuff out on the internet, or in the newspapers or on television. You see, understanding helps us to know the true knowledge from false knowledge. That is understanding. Wisdom is the application of understanding.

This is a humorous example, which happened in the church I want to say twelve to fifteen years ago. It was in the early summer. There were some bloggers that came out and said, and it was true, that Mars was going to pass closer to the earth than it had been in two to three hundred years. And so, these bloggers said that when that happens, and I think it was going to happen in August or September around the Feast time, that Mars was going to be as big in the sky as the moon is. That was put out there. I can't tell you the number of emails I got from people in the church that believed it. They were saying do you know what's going to happen? People called me, talked to me or sent emails about it. They wondered if this was a sign of the end times; the signs

in the sky and all of this kind of thing. The point is if you know anything about the physics of the universe and the orbits of the planets around the sun relative to the earth, you know that can't happen. Obviously, God could move Mars, but we're talking about its normal orbit. Yet, that was thrown out there like you throw spaghetti on a wall and a certain amount of it is going to stick and it stuck. People believed it just because it was out there.

We have to come to understanding, which meditation gives us. It allows us to differentiate truth from falsehood. Let's go to Psalms 49:3 from the New King James Version. Notice what David says here, because he starts off with wisdom.

Psalms 49:3. My mouth shall speak wisdom (NKJV)

You see, that's the application of understanding.

3b) ... and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding. (NKJV)

By meditating we get understanding and then we can later speak of our understanding of truth from fiction and then that becomes wisdom in how we conduct our life. It's interesting here. The Hebrew word for "understanding" is *skillfulness*. That's one of the definitions. Let's say you, whether it's a man or a woman doesn't make any difference, decided to bake a cake; got all of the ingredients; mixed them all together; chilled the bowl; set the oven; did all of the things you need to do; put it in and then at the required time pulled it out and it was a disaster. The consistency was bad. The taste was bad and all of that. Then what do you do? Well, you go back and you meditate. We do it almost unconsciously. Okay, did I get the right ingredients? Were they fresh, the right kind? Did I follow the instructions correctly? Did I mix them in the proper proportions? Did I chill the bowl? Did I preheat the oven? All of that stuff.

By meditating, you see, we can often find the answer to why it didn't turn out the way we wanted it to turn out. As a result we become more skillful. Meditation allows us to be more skillful and it allows us not to repeat the same mistake. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting a different outcome. Well, by meditating we can figure out where I went wrong. This can be whether it's baking a cake or a personal relationship. The principles are the same. You see, meditation gives us understanding. It makes us more skillful in navigating our way through life.

The Third Benefit is Meditation Helps Us Set a Godly Example.

In other words if we meditate on our life and on situations and how did I do today and all of that, it gives us a greater awareness of how we come across to other people. Sometimes all of us come to the realization that I didn't come across very good in a certain instance. I didn't say what I meant to say or I had a scowl on my face or I did this or did that. By meditating it gives us an awareness of how we come across as a

human being. Look at 1 Timothy 4:13-15. Timothy was a young minister and Paul is giving him some instruction. It's very wise advice.

1 Timothy 4:13. *Til I come, give attendance to reading ... (KJV)*

What was he going to read? Was it Time magazine? No, he was going to read the scrolls, God's word.

13b) ... to exhortation [his preaching], to doctrine. (KJV)

Understand God's teaching.

14) Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. (KJV)

Don't neglect the holy spirit and don't neglect your ordination as an elder.

15) Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. (KJV)

Paul is saying if you meditate on setting a Godly example of being more like God and Jesus Christ, then if you internalize that and do it, people are going to say about you that I see Christ in him. I see God in him by his conduct, by the words that are spoken.

Let me give you an example. This didn't come from somebody in the church. It goes back in the 70's. We had a son that was at that time five or six years old. I traveled all over the country and worked for a company out of Boston. I was in Illinois in the middle of the state and went to call on a dealer. I met the manager and we talked a little bit. He said why don't we go over to the house? We can talk there in private and have a cup of coffee. I said great. So, I went over to his house, which wasn't far away. He got the coffee. We were sitting in his living room and talked about ten minutes. It was a business meeting. All of a sudden this cute little three or four year old girl comes toddling out and walks up to him. Of course in the church back then we were taught to rule with a rod of iron. Spanking solved all of the child rearing problems and the parents were in authority. Of course, me coming out of the military, I jumped right into that. I was the drill sergeant of our son. This little girl walked out and I expected him to kind of shush her off and say look we're having an important business meeting. Go play somewhere. He didn't. He looked down at her and gave her a kiss on the top of the head and she kissed him on the cheek. He pulled her up into his lap and introduced me to her. She gave a sweet hello and I said hello to her and made a comment about her dress or something like that. Then I expected him to kick her off of his knee and off she went. No. We stayed there and talked maybe ten minutes and she was just so snuggling up to him. She put her head on his chest. She would kiss him and he would kiss her. We were carrying on this business meeting. The thought hit me like a bolt of lightning. This is the way it ought to be done, not authority and ruling with a rod of iron,

but goodness, kindness, gentleness, patience, forbearance. I started thinking that in the back of my head while we were doing business and she was sitting there. After ten minutes she got tired of sitting in his lap and she toddled off to her bedroom to play. That stayed with me for the rest of that day, for the rest of that trip. I meditated on it on the way home in the airplane. I said to myself I want to be a father like him. Of course, through meditation you realize that's the way God is. We have a wrong concept here. God doesn't have a hammer just waiting to whack us when we step across the line. It was a defining moment really and it came from somebody not in the church. This man was following God's law without even knowing it. That's just the way he and his daughter related.

As we meditate on our lives and how to set a Godly example, we can become more like God and Christ. We can follow their example better.

The Fourth Benefit is Meditation Promotes Physical Health.

We don't often think about that. I'm going to quote shortly from Dr. Dean Ornish. He's an American physician and researcher. If you remember in the 70's and 80's, he was on television a lot. He was quoted a lot, because he presented an alternative to bypass surgery, open heart surgery when people's arteries were clogged. He presented a lifestyle change that was an alternative to surgery. He was quite famous and has written several books. In fact, we were talking about that one with our family doctor, who I highly respect as a knowledgeable expert. I asked him, what would you do if you faced heart bypass surgery? Would you do it or not? He said I would immediately go on the Ornish diet and I wouldn't have surgery. He said but the problem is what my patients want is a pill. They don't want to change their lifestyle. They don't want to eat differently, exercise and change their method of thinking. They just want me to give them a pill and off they go and the problem is solved. This is from an internet interview and the subject, of course, is meditation. "Meditation is great for your heart, as well as for the rest of your body. Meditation can take you into a deeper state of relaxation that is more profound even than sleep. This deep relaxation allows the heart to begin healing. Many studies have documented that the regular practice of meditation may lower blood pressure, reduce the frequency of irregular heartbeats and even lower cholesterol levels independent of diet." Can you imagine just what's going on in your mind? "Meditation is an important part of my program for reversing heart disease."

We see here that meditation quiets the body. It quiets the mind. It allows the body and the mind to heal. It provides an environment for healing, physically and spiritually.

The Fifth Benefit is Meditation Helps Overcome Fear and Worry.

This is a big one given what's going on in the world today, what's going on in the church today. Let's go to Acts 1:8. We're breaking in. Christ is speaking here to the disciples prior to Pentecost..

Acts 1:8. *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: ... (KJV)*

That's Pentecost. They didn't know it at the time or how it was going to come.

8b) ... and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (KJV)

The apostles indeed did that. Now let's go to John 14:16-17. We read this on Passover evening. We need to understand here that Christ knew that within a short period of time he was going to be taken captive. He was going to be tortured and murdered. Notice what He says even in this circumstance.

John 14:16. *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he [it] may abide with you forever;
17) Even the Spirit of truth; whom [which] the world cannot receive, because it seeth him [it] not, neither knoweth him [it]: but ye know him [it]; for he [it] dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. (KJV)*

Here is the key in verse 18.

18) I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. (KJV)

This means through God's holy spirit. That will give us comfort in times of trouble. One of the techniques that I've used up to this very day is what the psychologists call guided imagery. Remember when Aaron was anointed high priest. He had his holy garments on and they anointed him with oil, not like we do for healing with a little dab on the forehead. They had a vial of oil and they poured it over his head. I don't know how much oil that was. Maybe it was a pint or a quart. It was a bunch. We are told that the oil ran down his head, dropped off of his beard, went down his clothing and dropped off by the fringes of the clothing onto the ground. We know that oil is a symbol of God's holy spirit. Sometimes to remove fear or to be at peace we can go in a quiet place, sit down and take ourselves back to that moment with Aaron and just imagine God's holy spirit coming down over us from our head down over our face, over our shoulders and stomach, that has a knot in it or something, down our legs and to the feet and into the ground. I have done that. We know that it's not oil. It's God's spirit that is doing this. We are asking God to do this and imagining in our mind the analogy with Aaron. Look at verse 27.

27) Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (KJV)

He was facing imminent capture, torture and death.

My wife and I have applied that many times in our life. I remember when my wife's mid-back started hurting. She had an x-ray and the doctor said your upper back and lower back are fine, but your mid-back is the back of a ninety year old woman. It's deteriorating. They decided to have either an MRI or a cat scan to figure what's going on in there. We got a call from our family doctor from Philadelphia. He was at a conference, but was concerned enough to call. He told her that she had bone cancer in that area. Bone cancer is a very painful thing and the outcome is not good on any level. We went that day and the next day wrestling with the fact that she had bone cancer. You can imagine the turmoil. We've all been through that. Finally, I just said God you have to help us out here. Help me out, because I need to be an example to my wife. I have to be strong for her. So, I sat down and quieted myself and remembered the oil and asked God please just wash away fear, doubt, anxiety, concern and went through that. At the end of that time I was at peace, because I remembered this is all comes down to. Go to Romans 8:28. I finally came to internalize this scripture; not just read it but make it part of you.

Romans 8:28. *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (KJV)*

We knew we were called. We knew that we loved God with all of our hearts. The conclusion that you draw is that no matter what happens going forward it is for our ultimate benefit. It's for our good. Then beyond that if she were to die, then we would see each other again under far better circumstances. That went on for about forty-eight hours until we got a call from the doctor and he said it was a misread scan. You do not have bone cancer. I'll take it whether they misread the scan or whether the scan wasn't right or whether she had bone cancer and now she doesn't. God knows that. The fact is we'll take that.

The point I'm making is that meditation can give us great peace in a time of crisis.

So, we've seen here five blessings that God gives us when we meditate. We've seen that meditation has great physical benefits. It relaxes the mind. It relaxes the body. It has many health benefits. More importantly meditation has tremendous spiritual benefits. It focuses our attention on what's important. It gives us Godly insight into our lives and to God's word that cannot be obtained any other way than through meditation.

Let's remember meditation is a critical key to spiritual growth. Let's put this neglected key back into our lives so that we can grow spiritually between now and the Passover.