

Meditation and SOAPS

Enriching your SOAPS experience
through Biblical Meditation

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Like a city on a hill...

The healthy human heart is like a medieval city on a hill with a protective wall around it. Inside the wall is a complete city with castle, throne room and throne. The rightful king rules from the throne, thus establishing and maintaining a kingdom of love, justice and peace. Loved ones stroll through the beautiful city gardens filled with exquisite flowers.

We could elaborate on this idyllic scene, were it not that human hearts almost never look like this. So many heart-cities are severely damaged. Many throne rooms are occupied by despotic and egoistic kings and queens who further the devastation of the city. Suburbs have been ruined during civil wars; gates have been destroyed and the gardens are in a sad state of neglect. How long will the city still be able to withstand the ravages of time and the pressures from the enemies within and without?

The True King needs to come back to His rightful place. The Bride city needs His correcting, cleansing and caring touch.

The city should become a healed haven of heart-fellowship.

How can this become a reality in our journey? One of the most important helps in this regard is for us to learn the discipline of meditating on the Word of God and thus to live as those whose pilgrimages have become living responses to Who He is.

Shall we explore the world of meditation together?

A heart-city being transformed...

My devotional life has undergone a major transformation. The first love between me and my Bridegroom has been deepened and this has impacted every aspect of my life as disciple of Jesus Christ. What has made such a fundamental difference?

First, I learnt to do a daily SOAPS. Second, I learnt how to enrich my daily SOAPS through meditating on the Word of God.

Yes, it is as simple as that. However, it is a matter of profound simplicity and not of over-simplification.

It is also a matter of entering the process of learning a new life-long discipline rather than of adopting a new technique for instant holiness.

If your heart is longing for a long-lasting God-worked transformation, allow me to share how He has led me closer to His heart than ever before.

First, we need to develop the healthy habit of having a daily devotional time using SOAPS. You can learn about this spiritual discipline in the HCFI publication "S.O.A.P.S." that is available on www.hcfglobal.org/discipleship in several languages.

In this document, we will seek to come to a biblical understanding of what it means to meditate. It is essential to avoid confusion between a biblical approach and unhealthy mystical entanglement. I have experienced the definite difference in my own life between the meditation I did as a Zen Buddhist and what I now do as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Then we will explore how we can successfully develop the discipline of biblical meditation as individuals and as groups of believers.

Meditate – a first Biblical word...

Genesis 24:63 And Isaac went out to **meditate** in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels *were* coming. (KJV)
Meditate = śûach: to thoughtfully focus one's thinking on something.

Isaac was probably studying one of the two glorious Books of God as he was musing out in the fields – the Book of Creation. At that time, the second book, the Book of Revelation (the Bible) was not yet complete. What was available, was the grand oral version of God's Book of Revelation that was growing over time. As he was studying the Book of God's Creation, he would have had ample opportunity to get to know God's eternal power and His Godhead more deeply according to Rom 1:20.

One of my hobbies is bird-watching. It is one of the best excuses for glorious times of worship and fellowship with our Creator God. How could I suppress a 'Hallelujah' when I observe one of His magnificently designed feathered works of art? The most intriguing aspect of being out in creation together with Abba Father is the variety, the thoughtfulness and the creativity He put into simply everything He made. What a source of joy and inspiration!

Seriously – are you an experienced student of God's Book of Creation? Have you experienced the thrill of getting to know Him better as you focus your thinking on His handiwork? Is the wonder of His intelligent design filling you with deep awe? When last did you make time to fellowship with Father in the fields?

Meditate – a second Biblical word...

Joshua 1:8 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)

Psalm 1:2 But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he **meditate** day and night. (KJV)

Psalm 63:6 When I remember thee upon my bed, *and* **meditate** on thee in the *night* watches. (KJV)

Psalm 77:12 I will **meditate** also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. (KJV)

Here, meditate = hâgâh: to read the Word of God syllable by syllable to oneself in a low voice; to murmur; by implication to ponder. The murmuring can vary in its expression - mourning, muttering, speaking, talking, singing, growling, roaring, groaning, sighing.

Note the picture that **hâgâh** paints for us:

Day and night the lover of God is focusing his full attention on every detail of the Word of God (Torah), on every bit of truth about the Lord Himself and/or on His works. The one who meditates reads the Word of God thoughtfully in a low voice, syllable by syllable. The purpose is for the Word of God to profoundly impact the reader's entire being and whole life. God promises divinely-defined success to those who join Him in this pilgrimage through His Word, His character and His deeds.

Sound worthwhile to you?

Meditate – a third Biblical word...

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

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)

Psalm 119:148 Mine eyes anticipate the night watches, that I might **meditate** in thy word.(KJV)

Here, meditate = śîyach: rehearsing the Word of God aloud to oneself; to think upon the Word of God regardless of difficult circumstances; to go over a matter in one's mind. It leads to a response from the core of our being, and might include singing.

This time the audible meditation includes repetition. Not the mindless repetition of the mantra as we find in esoteric mysticism, but the heart deeply depending on the Holy Spirit to illumine the Word of God as one repeatedly weighs and considers the truth of the Bible.

Summary of the meaning of Biblical Meditation:

By combining the meaning of the words translated as 'meditation' in the King James Version of the Bible:

- Focusing our full attention on a specific portion of the Bible
- Repeatedly reading that section of the Bible aloud in a low voice (5-10 repetitions work well in practice)
- Pondering the Scriptures word for word as we read it repeatedly
- Trusting the Holy Spirit to reveal what God wants to say to us
- Writing down what God says so that we can refer to it later on.
- This process is independent of location, situation or frame of mind; it is a matter of Holy Spirit worked self-discipline

Meditation and the Big Picture...

As with all other aspects of our faith, meditation has to fit into the Big Picture of what is really important in life. Our beloved Messiah summarized the Big Picture in two absolutely authoritative statements:

Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength:
this *is* the first commandment.

And the second *is* like, *namely* this,
Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

There is no other commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:29-31; KJV.

Therefore biblical meditation should help us to love God with all we have and are and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Whenever you meditate on Scripture, ask the Holy Spirit to give you answers to four questions:

1. What does God say about loving Him?
2. What does God say about loving my neighbor?
3. What does God say about me?
4. What does God want me to do?

Record your insights and responses prayerfully.

You will find that Biblical meditation will guide you clearly towards loving God, your neighbor and yourself more. As this happens, your heart-city will be fundamentally transformed step by step.

And that is my invitation: join me on this pilgrimage!

Characteristics of Mystic Meditation – the path to avoid

Our pilgrimage in the world of meditation is not without danger. The most significant threat comes from an esoterically mystic approach to meditation which has some or most of these characteristics:

Focus: On the inner self, inner being, inner light, inner guide, inner spirit, the wise ones; the direction is inward – in contrast to how our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to pray: Our Father in Heaven...

Mind: To empty our mind of thoughts; to make our minds calm like an early morning lake surface on a windless day – in contrast to filling our minds with the Word of God

State: Seeking to come to a state of tranquility, of higher awareness and consciousness; to enter into a passive, waiting state; to go into some kind of trance or altered level of consciousness → seeking peace in the emptiness rather than in the personal relationship with Jesus Christ

Goal: unity with the universal energy, with god (impersonal), with the (life) force; enlightenment; inner harmony and peace

The five senses: They have to be by-passed / switched off and be replaced by experiences in the spiritual realm

Openness: Non-discriminatory openness to whatever comes from the invisible realm. The mistaken assumption is that only forces of light will gather if one has good intentions

Visualization: Sometimes visualization techniques are used as part of the experience. This requires a (semi)trance-like state. Often a story is told as springboard. For example, one is encouraged to visualize a beautiful garden (or a future scenario) with wonderful fragrances and vivid color. A spiritual being appears and begins a conversation... Some even claim that Jesus Christ will meet with us there to bring inner healing – a prescription for deception.

Salvation: Self-deliverance, salvation by good works

Sin: Defined as lack of enlightenment; lack of knowledge (gnosis)

Practical notes regarding meditation...

The whole process of meditation can easily take more than 30 to 60 minutes. So you have to set the time aside in your agenda to make it possible.

Remember to try to capture in words what the Holy Spirit reveals to you from the Word about loving God, your neighbor and yourself in a devotional journal.

As you do this, you will gradually develop the skill of capturing the illumination given by the Holy Spirit in words that you can use to share the treasures entrusted to you with others.

These devotional journal notes are your fallible personal efforts to put into words what you believe the Lord has communicated with you and it is for your personal use only.

For example, your notes could look something like this:

Date. *Scripture for meditation: Psalm 1:1-3 (I find it helpful to actually write out the portion of Scripture for meditation)*

Loving God: *I am the One that holds the key to the Psalms, the best handbook ever on prayer. My Torah points the way of life and blessedness as nobody or nothing else can. Yes, Lord, I worship You as the key-holder, as the One Who has the way of Life – You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life – Hallelujah!*

Loving Neighbor: *I want people to be encouraged to be diligent in seeking my company. Watch out for the bad influences some people can have on you – the scorners and doubters, for example. Forgive me, Father for not inspiring others to be diligent to seek You. Please show me how I can do this in my next chat with my friend Roberto.*

Me: *I want you to be diligent in seeking Me. Learn from Me how to pray using the Psalms. Lord, forgive me for neglecting the Psalms. Teach me more as I meditate in the coming week.*

Meditation and SOAPS

Where do we find the Scripture portions to meditate on? One fruitful source can be the Sunday sermons in your local church. Another source could be Scripture verses shared with you on various occasions by others, especially those that really touched your heart.

In my life, the most important source of Scripture to meditate on comes from my systematic Bible reading plan. Soon after Jesus Christ convinced me that I needed to repent from my sin and follow Him, I was introduced to a systematic Bible reading plan that I have been using. How does it work? Subdivide the Bible into several sections that make sense to you.

Then you read through the Bible one chapter at a time moving from one section to the next. When you have finished your reading for the day, put an extra bookmark in your Bible at the place of the next chapter you should read. Simply continue where you left off. Even if you have not read the Bible for some days, just continue where your marker is.

After you have prayerfully read your chapter(s) of the day, meditate on the verse(s) that jumped out at you while reading.

Often our schedule is so full that we do not have time to meditate every day. Then it is very helpful to use the SOAPS approach which is mentioned at the beginning of this document. SOAPS can be done daily in fifteen to twenty minutes. Explanation of SOAPS can be downloaded from www.hcglobal.org/discipleship

Spending time alone with God every day, that is where the powerful spiritual food is!

Meditation and Jesus Christ...

Biblical Meditation has two unique characteristics:

- The way you meditate on Scripture
- The questions you ask about loving God, about loving your neighbor as yourself and about obedience to Him.

This is the key concept: Meditation builds your love relationship with God as the first priority in your life.

It is vitally important, especially for those of us who are activists, workaholics and no-nonsense-let-us-get-the-job-done persons. Many healthcare workers belong to this category. Are you also one of them?

In addition to SOAPS and Biblical Meditation, we also need to study the Bible in depth. Use some of the many good books that have been written about Bible Study methods to help you make the most of your Bible Study. If you do not have one yet, get yourself a good Study Bible, such as the NKJV Study Bible or the ESV Study Bible.

I find it helpful to set aside an extra block of two hours or so for such a time of Bible Study at least once a week. Healthcare believers will do well to study the anatomy chapter of the Bible – 1 Corinthians 12. Other topical Bible studies that are relevant to healthcare include: shalom, health and healing, curses and blessings, the role of the blood, forgiveness, suffering, encouragement, biblical view of human beings, the Ten Commandments and their implications for healthcare ethics, the meaning of 'ruling over the earth' and thus also over healthcare.

God wants to us to be filled with both the Living Word and the Written Word. Are you going to give Him the time to do it and thus transform your life from the inside outwards?

Meditation – enriching prayer times...

Next time your Bible Study / Prayer / Cell / Discovery Group meets, invite them to a Biblical Meditation Meeting. Keep in mind:

1. Prayerfully select a short portion of Scripture to meditate on
2. Explain to the group what Biblical Meditation is
3. Set five to ten minutes apart for the group members to have a time of personal meditation on the portion of Scripture.
4. Then call everybody together for a time of prayer
5. Begin by praying back to God what He has revealed to you in answer to the question: What does God say about loving Him in this portion of Scripture? Pray short one topic prayers. Allow others in the group to add short prayers on the same topic. Then move on to the next topic. This will almost always lead to worship, repentance, adoration and a deeper appreciation and knowing of who the Lord is. Be patient with those who are not yet ready to do this.
6. Next, pray about what the Holy Spirit revealed about loving our neighbor. He will apply the truth of the Word to relevant situations in your lives.
7. Finally pray about loving yourselves. This means giving due attention to your life so that you can faithfully fulfill the purpose for which God created you.
8. You will notice that it is quite difficult to stick to only one point for prayer at a time. Do not hesitate to remind participants to concentrate on one topic at a time and to pray for it until all aspects are covered before moving on to the next subject. As prayer leader you might ask questions like: “Any more prayers about this point? Anybody have an appropriate Scripture that you would like to read or a relevant thought or impression you want to share?” When they are finished with one point, say: “Shall we move on?”
9. Continue until all three key questions have been covered.
10. Your group will come back for more!

Resources

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