

GROW

AN SMBS SERIES

Lesson 9 – The Right Means: Bible Meditation

Teacher Edition



Review: So far we have seen that in order to change, you have to want to change and you have to be given a new nature so that you can change. Next we saw that in order to change, you need God’s help, although God still requires you to put forth effort as well. Then we got a broad overview of God’s masterplan for change: put off, be renewed, put on, and examined what it means to put off sin and what it means to be renewed. We saw that in order to renewed, we must have God’s grace, and that requires humility. That grace then comes through three channels that Scripture clearly gives us: Bible meditation, prayer, and fellowship.

Overview: This lesson will begin our examination of the first means of grace: Bible meditation.

Introduction: “Don’t text and drive.” We hear it all the time, it’s tough not to roll our eyes at the warning. It’s easy to think that it’s not really a problem. But it is. Studies have shown:

1. 1,600,000 accidents per year – National Safety Council
2. 330,000 injuries per year – Harvard Center for Risk Analysis Study
3. 11 teen deaths EVERY DAY – Ins. Institute for Hwy Safety Fatality Facts
4. Nearly 25% of ALL car accidents.¹

We are warned so much about the dangers of texting and driving it can be hard to care. Any time something is repeated over and over it has

¹ <http://www.textinganddrivingsafety.com/texting-and-driving-stats>

the potential to lose impact, but things that are often repeated are normally repeated for a reason.

We face the same danger in our spiritual lives. From the very earliest days of the Christian life, believers are told to read their Bibles and study it for themselves. This mantra is repeated so often that it can easily become white noise. “How do I grow? Right, read the Bible. Didn’t see that one coming!” Although this might seem like a “kindergarten Christianity” lesson, what we are studying is hugely important. It’s a message that needs to be heard again and again: you must study God’s Word to grow!

A. The importance of studying the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16)

1. Scripture is inspired (cf 2 Peter 1:21).

2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 are the two classic texts on a doctrine of inspiration. While 2 Peter addresses the concept of inspiration, 2 Timothy is the only place in the Bible where the word “inspiration” is used. In fact, this verse is the first time the word shows up anywhere in ancient Greek. The word is a compound word, combining two Greek words: *theos* (God) and *pneuma* (breath). Inspiration means, “God breathed” and refers to the process whereby God used certain people to write down his words.

(Illustration) Put your hand in front of your mouth and begin speaking. You will feel air hitting your hand because when you speak, you have to breathe out. Scripture is God breathed in the sense that it is the Holy Spirit speaking (“breathing”) through men. This means that ultimately when we see the words of Scripture, we are seeing the very words of God.

2 Peter 1:21 describes this process for us when it says the Holy spirit carried holy men along. The word that Peter uses for “carried along” is also used in Acts 27:15, 17 to describe the wind filling the sails of a ship and moving the ship along. This illustrates well what inspiration looks like. God did not tell people words verbatim what to write down, but rather he moved in them so that the Holy Spirit directed what they wrote.

It's important to realize that God did not dictate to men what they were to write, but rather that he used their personalities, gifts, and experience to communicate his truth.

(Illustration) Just as the same breath will sound different through a trumpet, flute, or bagpipes, so God used different men with their own unique "sound" to give his message, preserving them from error and infusing their words with the power of his Holy Spirit. This is why Luke sounds very different from John, but very similar to Acts. It's why the sophisticated philosopher Paul sounds different from the country fisherman John. God in his sovereignty used different men with different talents and gifts to give both sophistication and simplicity to reveal his nature and ways to people of all generations.

Since the Bible is the very words of God, what does this mean for us today?

Because Scripture is God-breathed, it is a living book (Hebrews 4:12), the truth of God (John 17:17), and totally sufficient for salvation ([eternal] life) and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Also, because all Scripture is breathed out by God, it is...

2. Scripture is profitable.

God is clear that all Scripture is profitable. This might be a surprising statement. After all, there are long portions of Scripture that many people consider boring. Genealogies are profitable? Leviticus is profitable? Weird, seemingly random stories from the Old Testament are profitable? Scripture is clear, yes, every word of God is profitable.

This does not mean that all Scripture is profitable ***in the same way***. Reading through James will more immediately help a new believer than reading through Leviticus will. But Leviticus does have profit for those who will study it out and ask the Holy Spirit for illumination. Some verses are packed full of truth in such a way that you can spend a week meditating on them, others

have profit as they are considered in their context. For example, Romans 12:1-2 is often preached on and taught, and for good reason. These verses are a highly concentrated dose of truth that provide a lot of material to meditate on. However, if the first verse of your devotions for the day was *“There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite”* (1 Samuel 1:1), you would need to keep reading. Those details are important, but they set up a story and the whole story has profit for the believer.

What are some passages that are difficult to understand and profit from, and why do you think God included those sections?

The profit of Scripture is seen in 4 ways as this verse continues: Scripture teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains.

3. Scripture teaches.

God wants his people to be a thinking people, and he wants their thinking to be controlled and dominated by his thinking as revealed in his word. God wants to reform us by changing our thinking, not simply through some mystical experience. Many Christians look down on “doctrine,” thinking it is only for men stuck in ivory towers with ancient books. But doctrine is simply the teaching of Scripture, and the teaching of Scripture is necessary for our spiritual success.

Do you agree that many Christians look down on doctrine? If so, why do you think this is? What can be done to address it?

4. Scripture reproves.

As we study God’s Word, we find in it God’s standard. When we see God’s standard, we realize we don’t measure up. The word used here for reprove pictures someone who is in the wrong and has been shown they are in the wrong. God’s Word, if we are truly taught by it, will show us how we are wrong (James 1:23-25).

5. Scripture corrects.

God doesn't simply stop there, however. He shows us what is wrong, but also how to fix it. As one author put it, "After knocking us down, the Scriptures set us up to walk in the path of righteousness. They wound, uproot, and tear down sin in our lives by reproof; they bind up, plant the seed, and build the foundation for righteousness by correcting."² (Cf Hosea 6:1)

6. Scripture trains.

The final step in this verse that merits our attention is the phrase "training in righteousness." God's Word not only convicts and corrects our sin, it also shows us how to live a fruitful life of righteousness after sin has been dealt with. It "trains us" (same word as is used in Titus 2:11) positively as to how we should live once saved.

Is it possible to read and study Scripture and not have any reproof, correcting training going on? (yes, there are people who study the Bible for their living who don't believe a word of it) ***Why do you think this is and what can be done about it?***

B. The means of studying the Bible.

1. Read the Bible.

A professor of Bible was once asked to give advice on how to read the Bible. He responded somewhat tongue in cheek by saying that the first step to successfully read the Bible was to read the Bible. There is no substitute for reading the Bible, over and over again. Read large chunks. Read small portions. Read an entire book, read three verses. Read in the morning; read in the afternoon; read in the evening. The best way to learn the Bible is to read and read and read. The more you read the Bible, the better you will become at reading the Bible.

The best way to do this is to pick a plan, a place, and a period of time. Decide what you are going to read (if you're just getting

² Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, page 95.

started, try to find a plan through YouVersion), where you will read, and what your plan will be. People are by nature creatures of habit, and you are either in the habit of doing your devotions or in the habit of not doing them.

What practical tips have you found for having a consistent time with God? Where have you gone? When you have met with God? What plans have been helpful?

2. Study the Bible.

When you read the Bible, make sure you are understanding it. A popular opinion about Bible study these days is that Scripture means whatever it means to the listener. It's not uncommon for Bible studies to be run where the question is asked, "What does this passage mean to you?" The problem with this is that Scripture only means one thing! Scripture means what it God intends it to mean, not necessarily what it means to you! The goal of reading our Bibles is to understand what God has said and adjust our thinking to God's Word. In order for this to happen, we have to understand it's original meaning!

This is where studying history, culture, and language comes in. Consider using free resources to check your understanding of a passage. Resources such as blueletterbible.org or biblestudytools.com provide free resources. Consider purchasing your own Bible study tools, such as a good study Bible, a Bible dictionary, or a commentary series. Invest in something that will bring eternal value.

What tools have you found to be especially helpful in studying God's Word?

Don't forget you are in this for the long haul. The Bible has 1,189 chapters in it. Let's say you spend the next forty years of your life studying the Bible. That's 480 months, which means that you would have time to study out three chapters in a month. Imagine how well you would know your Bible if you

spent a week mastering one chapter at a time, reading it over and over and over! The point of this is not that you have to study one chapter a week for the next 40 years of your life, but to realize that you have the potential over the long haul to get to know your Bible a lot better than you might think!

3. Meditate on the Bible.

Psalm 1:2 and Joshua 1:8 both describe the truly successful person as the person who meditates on God's law day and night. The Hebrew word for meditate comes from a verb which has the idea of a low, murmuring sound. One commentary describes the word this way: The Hb. word rendered "meditate" here (הגה) is translated elsewhere in NIV as "plot" (Ps 2:1), "growls" (Isa 31:4), or "lament" (Isa 16:7). The common thread here is an activity that is done aloud. With reference to meditating upon the law, the idea is that one reads or recites the law aloud to oneself. In the ancient world, almost all reading was done aloud."³ Meditating means thinking on something repeatedly, even muttering it to yourself until the message becomes a part of who you are and directs your thinking and actions.

For those who struggle to see how meditation plays out practically, I have good news for you. You meditate all the time! People are constantly thinking about something: books, tv shows, movies, video games, loved ones, hobbies, politics, future plans, the list could go on and on. The trick is to learn to think about Scripture all the time rather than the other things that tend to be on our hearts!

Scripture says we should meditate on Scripture day and night. In what ways can people practically meditate on God's Word throughout the day and during the evening?

³ David Howard, *Joshua* in The New American Commentary. Footnote 71 commenting on Joshua 1:8.

4. Memorize the Bible.

Memorizing the Bible is often associated with kids programs and candy rewards. While not wrong, memorization isn't supposed to just be for kids, it should be for adults, too! Memorization and meditation go together hand in hand. It's hard to meditate on something you can't remember. While keeping verse cards or a Bible app on hand can help, it's nice to be able to have Scripture in your mind. On the other hand, the more you meditate on a passage, the better you come to know it until eventually you have it memorized.

There are numerous plans available to help with memorization. The key is to pick one and to stick with it! Again, memorizing one verse a week for the next 40 years will mean that you have memorized over 2,000 verses! That's a lot of Scripture!

5. Hear preaching on the Bible.

Hearing good preaching about the Bible will do two things. It will increase your knowledge of God's Word. You will learn about books and themes of the Bible, and little by little, bit by bit you will find yourself knowing more about the content of God's Word. But it will also help you see how to study the Bible. Good preaching will model sound Bible study techniques. It will help you to think through a passage and show you what kinds of questions to ask and that types of things should be emphasized.

As you listen to preaching, it is important to make sure that you are listening to sound teaching. The internet has provided a host of quality sermons available for all, but not all sermons should be listened to! Always seek to be discerning of the messages you hear, and be careful of who you choose to listen to. If you have questions about a certain preacher or even certain teachings of that preacher, talk to your pastor or someone who knows God's Word well to get their opinion.