SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
Week Two: Scripture Meditation and Memorization

I. Review and Introduction

Last week we introduced the idea of the spiritual disciplines and discussed the role they play in the Christian life. We defined key terms such as spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual disciplines. We examined key biblical passages related to these terms. We discussed how the spiritual disciplines aid us in the two infinite journeys of sanctification and the Great Commission. We learned that the spiritual disciplines are not ends unto themselves, but are means of grace that the Holy Spirit uses to grow us in Christlikeness. We emphasized that the spiritual disciplines are not legalistic activities, but are gospel practices that are grounded in, and help to further cultivate, our personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

This week, we will look at the spiritual discipline of Bible intake by focusing on two key methods of practicing the discipline: Scripture meditation and memorization. As Don Whitney argues, “No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God’s Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from the milk and meat of Scripture.” Meditation and memorization are not the only methods of Bible intake, but they are probably the two that most evangelicals are least likely to cultivate.

II. Understanding the Disciplines

Many Christians are understandably suspicious of meditation; most meditative practices are human-centered and reflect either secular self-help techniques or an Eastern/New Age worldview. However, biblical meditation is commanded in Scripture and has been a staple of Christian devotional practices throughout church history. Christian meditation is not emptying your mind, but rather is filling your mind with God’s Word and prayerfully considering what it means and how to apply it to your life. Whitney suggests biblical meditation is “letting the Bible brew in your brain.” While it is common to hear evangelicals talk about the importance of Bible study, few talk about the importance of meditating upon what they have studied.

Scripture memorization is less controversial than meditation, but it is also commanded in Scripture and not practiced as commonly as it ought to be by modern believers. The practice itself is fairly self-explanatory: memorizing Bible texts. Memorization is closely related to meditation. As Andy Davis notes,

Memorization is not the same as meditation, but it is almost impossible for someone to memorize a passage of Scripture without somewhat deepening his/her understanding of those verses. Plus, once the passage is memorized, a lifetime of reflection is now available through ongoing review while driving on long trips, while walking on beaches, while conversing with friends, memorized verses can flow from you and cause a deepening of understanding.

Many evangelicals do not memorize Scripture because they are afraid, or they believe they have poor memories, or they are ignorant of its importance, or they are just plain lazy! However, memorization is worth the effort because of how the Lord uses it to shape us for his glory.
III. The Disciplines in the Scriptures

The Goal of all Spiritual Disciplines

Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. (1 Tim. 4:7b-10)

The Bible’s Importance for the Christian Life

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:3; see also Matthew 4:4)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)

The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever. (Psalm 119:160)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Biblical Meditation

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. (Joshua 1:8)

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3)

I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. (Psalm 77:11-12)

I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. (Psalm 119:15-16)

I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes. (Psalm 119:46-48)
Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. (Psalm 119:97-99)

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words. My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise. (Psalm 119:147-148)

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah (Psalm 143:5-6)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

**Scripture Memorization**

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. (Psalm 119:11)

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. (Proverbs 2:1-8)

My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. (Proverbs 7:1-3)

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. (John 15:7-8)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:22-25)

**IV. Practicing the Disciplines**
One reason many Christians may not practice biblical meditation is because they are not sure how to do so. Don Whitney lists seventeen different approaches to Scripture meditation. Some of the more common meditation methods include:

1) Emphasize different words in the text (start with John 3:16)
2) Rewrite the text in your own words (think *The Message* or *The Living Bible*)
3) Look for personal application in the text (avoid total subjectivity!)
4) Ask how the text points to Christ (especially in the Old Testament)
5) Ask what the text teaches us about God and humanity (“Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves” – John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:1)
6) Pray through the text (start with Psalm 119)

When it comes to Scripture memorization, there are many different approaches, each with their own strengths and weaknesses.

1) Extended Scripture Memorization (start with Philippians)
2) Topical Scripture Memorization (start with the Navigators’ Topical Memory System)
3) Life Application Memorization (what are you going through?)
4) Doctrinal Scripture Memorization (what do you want to learn about?)

V. Recommended Resources

Books


Websites


http://www.figure8scripturememory.com/ (Figure 8 Scripture Memorization and Meditation System)

http://fighterverses.com/ (Desiring God Fighter Verses)

Notes:

