

Reclaiming the Lost Art of
Biblical
Meditation

Find True Peace in Jesus



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CHAPTER 1

WHY IS BIBLICAL MEDITATION IMPORTANT?

I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart,
And my spirit makes diligent search.

— Psalm 77:6 NKJV

Harriet Tubman was a spy who, even in moments of extreme danger, demonstrated nothing but raw, calm courage. Born into slavery in the 1820s, Harriet was nearly killed when her master hurled a metal object at her. She staged a daring escape in 1849, then spent years rescuing hundreds out of slavery and leading them to safety. Her code name was Moses, because she never lost a single escapee. During the Civil War, she became a secret agent for the Union Army, working behind enemy lines to scout out the territory. Despite a bounty on her head, she always managed to evade capture.

A devout follower of Christ, Tubman spent much time learning, memorizing, and meditating on various verses in the Bible, such as her beloved Isaiah 16:3: "Hide the fugitives, do not betray the refugees." As she pondered the passages, she turned them into prayers, and in prayer she learned to practice God's presence.

"I prayed all the time," she told her biographer, "about my work, everywhere; I was always talking to the Lord. When I went to the horse trough to wash my face and took up the water in my hands, I said, 'Oh, Lord, wash me, make me clean.' When I took up the towel to wipe my face and hands, I cried, 'Oh, Lord, for Jesus' sake, wipe away all my sins!' When I took up the broom and began to sweep, I groaned, 'Oh, Lord, whatsoever sin there be in my heart, sweep it out, Lord, clear and clean.'" In this way, Harriet forged a personality of action and audacity. She built a mind-set that transcended her background and transformed her life. And we can do the same. As we habitually hide God's Word in our hearts, claim those special verses that seem to have our names on them, ponder and picture them, and turn them into unceasing praise and prayer, we will practice the presence of God — and He will transform us into agents of audacious boldness for His glory.

Let's start with the basics. According to Romans 12:2, we are transformed by the renewing of our minds as God changes the way we think. That verse is part of a chain of thoughts in Romans that provides a biblical basis for understanding the power of meditation. These verses explain what's wrong with our minds, why we struggle with our thoughts, and

how we can bring health and healing to our brainwaves and inner selves.

Without Christ, Our Minds Are Dark Places

Imagine a university where the library is open only on moonless nights and all lights are prohibited. The students have access to all the books, desks, and study carrels, but they must pursue their studies in total blackness. Expensive volumes fill the reading rooms — some of them rare and valuable. Students are free to move among the bookshelves and remove any resources they want. But everything is done in darkness — no lamps, no candles, no flashlights, no light of any kind. Total blackout.

That's a pretty accurate picture of a world trying to learn, trying to think, and trying to meditate without the light of the life of Christ.

Referring to fallen humanity, Paul wrote:

Their *thinking became futile* and their *foolish hearts were darkened*. ... They exchanged the truth about God for a lie. ... Furthermore, just as they *did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God*, so God gave them over to a *depraved mind*. ... They have *no understanding*. (Romans 1:21, 25, 28, 31, emphasis mine)

Without Christ, our thoughts are as dark as midnight. Apart from God's grace in Christ, our minds are corrupt (Titus 1:15), depraved (2 Timothy 3:8), anxious (Deuteronomy 28:65), cunning (Psalm 64:6), closed (Isaiah 44:18), warped (Proverbs 12:8), "puffed up with idle notions" (Colossians 2:18), and "always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). As God said in the days of Noah, without Christ, every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart is only evil all the time (Genesis 6:5).

How can that be? The human brain is the greatest marvel of God's creation — more complex than the largest star or the smallest atom. But it

was corrupted by Satan's lies. Like a finely tuned engine, our brains are designed for only one fuel — Truth. The Truth that comes from God. The Truth that pervades His creation. The Truth found in His perfect character and infallible Word.

Jesus Turns the Light On

The only way to change your life is to change your mind, and that requires changing the lordship and leadership of your heart. When Christ becomes your Savior and Lord, He turns the light on inside you.

That's because Jesus came as the light of the world. Romans 3:22 — 25 says:

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood — to be received by faith.

Romans 5:1 — 2 summarizes it this way:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

When we come to Jesus, He shines His wisdom into our hearts and inspires our thoughts. He helps us focus on God and gain perspective. As Romans 6:17 says, "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart *the pattern of teaching* that has now claimed your allegiance" (emphasis mine).

We Still Struggle with Shadows

Yet, even after receiving Christ as our Savior, we still struggle with our thoughts. Dark shadows dance on the walls of our minds. We are conflicted. Paul himself admitted in Romans 7:23 that his sinful nature waged war "*against the law of my mind ... making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me*" (emphasis mine).

We can easily relate to Paul's confession, for this is the universal testimony of every believer. We may be followers of Christ for many years, but we still struggle with thoughts that are anxious, covetous, lustful, angry, resentful, fearful, or depressed.

The process of spiritual growth involves increasing the wattage of the light that shines in our hearts and minds — and that light comes only from our Lord:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Let the Holy Spirit Govern Our Minds

To help with this wattage increase, we have a Master Electrician — the Holy Spirit. He understands the wiring of our minds. He knows when the lines are overloaded and when we are about to blow a fuse — or already have! He understands when our energy runs low, our emotions short-circuit, or the bulbs just simply burn out. He is able to switch currents from negative to positive.

It's all described in Romans 8, one of the most power-packed chapters in the Bible. Here we learn how the Holy Spirit takes the redemption of Christ and uses it to rewire our hearts with biblical truth. The Spirit grounds us in the Word. He is the great Transformer.

Romans 8:5 — 6 says:

Those who live according the flesh have their *minds set* on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their *minds set* on what the Spirit desires. The *mind governed by the flesh* is death, but the *mind governed by the Spirit* is life and peace. (emphasis mine)

Jesus of Nazareth died and rose again to illuminate our minds with His light; and as the Spirit governs our thought lives we experience both life and light. This is resurrection thinking. This is biblical thinking, and this is where meditation comes in.

We Are Transformed Daily as God Renews Our Minds

Do you want to have greater resistance to temptation, more wisdom in decision making, and increased influence among your friends? Each of these skills is rooted in your mental patterns and in meditation.

We must remember that rewiring our minds is an ongoing spiritual operation. Though we are redeemed at Calvary, the process of repairing the mind isn't a onetime event. It's a process, which is explained in Romans 12:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice ... Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by *the renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. (verses 1 — 2, emphasis mine)

To fulfill God's good plan and accomplish His will, we must stop thinking the way the world thinks and start thinking the way He does.

How? With biblical meditation. It's our greatest tool and most effective technique.

As we ponder, picture, and personalize God's Word, we begin looking at life through His lens, viewing the world from His perspective. Our thoughts become happier and holier and brighter — and so do we.

We practice biblical meditation by noting, quoting, and devoting ourselves to whatever passage of Scripture we're reading or studying, based on the premise that God's Word is flawless, faultless, and unfailing. Meditation helps and heals the mind while shoring up the soul. It lessens anxiety, reduces stress, and generates peace.

It's springtime as I'm writing this, and last night my wife, Katrina, and I had supper on our back porch. The birds were fluttering around the bird feeders, and the geraniums were blooming in the pots. We talked about meditation, and Katrina recalled that Isaac was the first person in the Bible who is specifically said to have meditated. Genesis 24:63 says, "He [Isaac] went out to the field one evening to meditate."

"I wonder what he meditated about," Katrina said. "The Bible hadn't yet been written, so he didn't have much tangible Scripture. But he was surrounded by the beauty of God's creation, he had a godly heritage, and his spiritual experiences in life had been rich. He was the miracle son of Abraham and Sarah, born in fulfillment of divine promises. As a youth, he'd experienced the sacrifice of Mount Moriah, and he had heard the voice of an angel. He knew God's promise for his descendants, though he still had no wife and was grieving over the death of his mother.

"I suppose he simply reviewed his life," continued Katrina, "composed his heart, thought about God, listened to the birds and brooks, prayed some, and wondered by faith what God was going to do with him."

Interestingly, Isaac's meditation was interrupted by the arrival of a caravan returning from Mesopotamia and bearing the woman who would soon become his wife.

As we meditate, God guides and changes our thoughts, helps us process

our griefs and sorrows, enables us to soak up the wonder of His greatness, and prepares us for what He has planned for us. That's what He did for the heroes of Scripture, and that's what He'll do for us.

As we end this chapter, why not turn this old hymn into a personal prayer?

*May the mind of Christ, my Savior,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.*

For a free downloadable group study guide for this book as well as free personal audio meditation guides, visit www.robertjmorgan.com/meditation.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL MEDITATION:

Focusing on the Wonder of God and Gaining Perspective

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands.

— Psalm 143:5 nkjv

In her book *Lessons I Learned in the Dark*, Jennifer Rothschild describes her fear of flying after the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001. Threats to airlines were a daily reality, she said, yet she was scheduled to fly every weekend that fall. She was fearful, and the atmosphere in airports and planes was tense. "I remember getting on my knees before

God and telling Him that I was fearful," she wrote. "Immediately, this verse came to my mind: 'When I am afraid, I will trust in you' (Psalm 56:3)."

Jennifer began claiming and contemplating that verse. "God knows that sometimes fear and trust share the same heartbeat," she said. "As I meditated on the verse, I suddenly realized that *I am afraid* describes a condition and that *I will trust* describes a volition. The verse is definitive: My volition can change my condition."

By meditating on Psalm 56:3, Jennifer found the courage and peace she needed for every trip. She discovered the secret of replacing the lower thoughts of fear with the higher thoughts of faith.

Here, then, is another definition of biblical meditation: it's the act of claiming and contemplating specific passages God gives us during life's events. In meditation, God's thoughts lift our hearts to a heavenly level. It's how we shift our focus from the lowlands of our problems to the highlands of His perspective.

Three passages in the Bible talk about exchanging our "lower" thoughts for God's "higher" ones — Isaiah 55, Colossians 3, and James 3.

God's Thoughts Are Not Our Thoughts

In Isaiah 55:8 the Lord tells us, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."

In other words, God does not think as we do. He views things from an eternal angle. The Creator of the human brain enjoys an infinite mind that instantly grasps every detail of everything in every way, in every place, from every side, at every time — whether past, present, or future. God cannot learn anything new, and He can never misunderstand. Nothing in heaven escapes His notice, nor is anything on earth beyond His knowledge. His mind is never overwhelmed by the largest mystery, and it never overlooks the tiniest molecule.

God knows the temperature of every star, the composition of every planet, the size of every galaxy, and the course of every comet. He knows the shape of each snowflake and the design of every seashell. He understands the mysteries of the depths below and the heights above. He knows what lies beyond the galaxies and beyond the grave. His wisdom is as high as the heavens, as deep as the oceans, as broad as the cosmos, and as long as eternity. And His thoughts are not our thoughts.

God has instant access to every fact of reality and to every factor of every decision. His intelligence is limitless, His brilliance boundless, His perception unfailing and unerring. He neither panics nor puzzles over the problems of His creation, for His thoughts are not our thoughts.

His plans are foolproof. His reflections are reviving. His intuition is unerring. The Lord will never forget or forsake you. In His omniscience, it is simply impossible. He knows all about you — every ancestor in your family tree, every strand in your DNA, every quirk in your personality, every bump and bruise in your childhood, and every trial, tragedy, hurt, and heartache you've ever encountered or ever will. He numbers both your steps and the very hairs of your head. He sees every rejection and failure. He rejoices in every victory and records all your faithful deeds.

According to Psalm 139, our God searches us and knows us. He sees when we sit and when we rise; He perceives our thoughts from afar. He discerns our going out and our lying down and is familiar with all our ways. How precious are all His thoughts (Psalm 139:1–3, 17)!

God's thoughts are higher than ours, but He has sent His thoughts down to us in ink drops that fall from heaven like raindrops in a drought. Isaiah 55 continues:

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (verses 10–11)

God has sent His thoughts down to us in an infallible, understandable, incredible Book. And by meditating on His thoughts as encoded in the Bible, our lives will be watered with His Word. His thoughts will seep in like rainwater soaking a garden; they are designed to nurture and produce a crop of heavenly blessings. Verse 12 says: "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands."

But that's not all! As we meditate on His thoughts, the barren places of our lives begin to flourish. Verse 13 continues, "Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever."

Though we will never fully understand the thoughts of God, meditation allows us to thrive by aligning our thoughts more closely with His. The Lord is patient, because He knows the outcome. He is cheerful, for He has a plan. He is all-powerful, so He isn't afraid. And as we contemplate Him through His Word, we grow in our own patience, cheerfulness, and courage.

(Continues...)

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