

Our Lost Treasure by Fran Paris

# MEDITATION

Why is God so adamant about this? Why does the Lord give us such a strong exhortation to meditate in His Word? Because He knows that the one who "eats and drinks deeply" of the Scriptures will discover the *greatest treasure* known to man. A treasure more valuable than any you'll find buried on a desert island or hidden in the ruins of a lost civilization.

And you don't have to climb the tallest mountain or search the depths of the sea to find it – this treasure can be found without journeying farther than your own back yard. And it's the only treasure that won't diminish as you spend it. The more you partake of its pleasure – the larger it grows!



For this is the eternal treasure of God's Word, and here is the promise He makes to all who diligently search for godly wisdom and understanding: *"How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast."* (Prov. 3:13-18)

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The search for "lost treasure" has captivated mankind for thousands of years. In the past, men abandoned their homes and families to travel the world in search of gold, silver, and precious jewels. There was no guarantee they'd ever find the gold they were seeking, but the lure of such great wealth seemed worth the risk. They were willing to lay down their lives in hopes of gaining prosperity, security, and the chance for an "abundant" life.

Yet the treasure they were seeking was an earthly treasure. Its benefits might last a lifetime – but certainly not for an eternity. These men were willing to die for a *temporary* treasure – yet some of us who are blessed to have an *eternal* treasure right at our fingertips leave it unopened and ignored!

Would you get more excited about discovering gold in your back yard than you would about finding the riches of the Lord hidden in Scripture? God has promised to give us a treasure that's *greater* than any the world can offer, but this treasure doesn't just fall from Heaven into our waiting hands. The Bible says *these* riches are stored up for those who *diligently seek* after Him.

"You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jer. 29:13) I believe this verse is referring to one of the simplest but most neglected spiritual practices – the godly practice of *meditation*. The simple exercise of reading and *dwelling* upon the truth and wisdom stored up in the Word of God. And when we practice godly meditation, God's Word is going to explode with a richness of wisdom and spiritual fire within our souls.



## Search The Scriptures

Too often it seems we're only motivated to pursue God when we encounter a problem in our daily walk. We search the Scriptures – but only when we're troubled and in need of divine comfort. Instead of pursuing the knowledge of God *first* and *foremost*, we wait until we get into a dilemma and then appeal to the Lord for a way out. But that's putting the cart before the horse!

We need to eat and drink of the Scriptures daily so we'll have a reservoir of godly wisdom stored within our hearts and minds. Then, instead of embarking on a desperate search for guidance at the eleventh hour, we can just draw from that great reservoir of wisdom and understanding the Lord has deposited within us.

Over and over in the book of Proverbs, God pleads with us to discover the richness of His Word: *"Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live; acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!... Love her, and she will watch over you.... Prize her, and she will exalt you;... she will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty.... When you walk, your steps will not be impeded; and if you run, you will not stumble."* (Prov. 4: 4-12)

If you're like me, reading these great promises from God Himself causes something to rise up in you... an excitement, an expectancy! But maybe when you consider the actual condition of your spiritual life that promise deflates like a tired old balloon.

Have you ever tried to read God's Word, or tried to pray, only to hear a doubtful little voice in the back of your mind saying: "If I'm a Christian, why is my spiritual life in such a

'dormant' condition? Why do everyday pressures leave me so drained and empty? Why don't I seem to be growing – becoming more fruitful in my service to the Lord?"

I believe the secret to the spiritual growth we all desire is contained in the exercise of godly meditation. It is a simple but incredibly important exercise, and *so powerful* that Satan has tried to destroy the very concept of "meditation" by flooding society with a bunch of spiritual counterfeits!

## Danger: Counterfeits

Today, most Christians get nervous at the mention of the word "meditation." And with good reason! Ever since the 1960s when the Western world was introduced to Eastern "transcendental" meditation, counterfeit forms of meditation have continued to spring up everywhere.

Chain bookstores sell audio tapes designed to manipulate your subconscious mind and fill it with subliminal messages. "New Agers" and false prophets proclaim the wonders of meditating so you can find "the god within." I recently came across a book written by a medical doctor recommending that you meditate on a certain number in order to reduce stress, high blood pressure, and heart problems.

It's true that this type of meditation dethrones the God of

the Bible. Man is not a "god," and meditating will not turn him into one. Meditating *can* lower your stress level and improve your health, but that is just a by-product! We need to seek inner peace from the Maker of heaven and earth – not just seek to alleviate physical stress by practicing a prescribed formula!

But all this fuss about meditation does tell me one thing: *These people are on to something* – even though they seem to want only the benefits and not the God who gave us meditation!

The truth is – meditation is a simple but powerful God-given practice. Meditating on the Word of God is the way we go about getting His life-giving truth into the core of our souls – down into the place where the vital decisions of our lives are made every day.

Meditation is the way we can "mine" the treasure in God's Word. It's the way we hide God's Word in the storerooms of our heart so we can draw steadily from those stored-up riches. As Psalm 119:11 says, *"Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee."*

If meditation is that important, it's no wonder there are so many counterfeits being offered! As Loren Cunningham, founder of *Youth With A Mission*, says, "You never counterfeit something that's worthless – that's why you don't see counterfeit paper bags!" On the other hand, if there are meditation "techniques" that can carry us *away* from God, it's absolutely crucial that we understand how to draw *closer* to God by meditating *His* way.

## Not By Bread Alone

When Jesus was fasting in the wilderness, getting physically weaker, Satan tried to get Him to step into the role of the Father – to replace God's plan with one of His own making. But when Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread, Jesus





replied: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4) This silenced the tempter, and it gave us our first lessons in true godly meditation.

Just as food nourishes your body, God's Word is real spiritual nourishment. It's like vitamins, minerals, proteins, and carbohydrates! Without food, you become malnourished and sickly. Eventually you die. And if you don't have a healthy, regular practice of taking God's Word into your inner man – you'll experience similar results in your spiritual life.

Meditation is the process by which God's Word passes from your head down into your spirit where its power can be released. As Campbell McAlpine stated in his book *Alone With God*: "Meditation is the digestive faculty of the soul." Even though Jesus was physically depleted from 40 days of fasting, He was so strong in spirit from seeking God and meditating on the Word that He wielded a few words and they were a powerful weapon to defeat His adversary.

The prophet Jeremiah knew about the power of meditation. He cried out: "Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart..." (Jer. 15:16) Is your spirit joyful because it's nourished by real life-giving "food" – or is it malnourished? Is your quiet time with

invalid. She was too ill to attend public school, so her mother educated her at home and taught her by reading Scriptures out loud. By the time Catherine was ten years old, she and her mother had read aloud through the Bible eight times! No wonder this child had totally different values than most other children of her generation!

As a young teenager, Catherine's illness kept her from having a social life – so she instead devoted herself to the study of Scripture. She was extremely determined in this pursuit and, as a result, Catherine became a young woman with incredible depth of conviction. She was absolutely unwilling to compromise what she knew to be true! That kind of conviction can only come from *immersing* yourself in the Word of God.

In contrast, our current generation is plagued by an incredible lack of conviction. Instead of being influenced by God's Word, we are influenced by television, movies, radio, and contemporary music. I'd like you to take a really close look at the long-range effects these forms of secular "entertainment" are having on our society. First of all, it's clear that most of the things we see and hear today from the media definitely do not reflect God's viewpoint or His standards. In fact, the media takes great delight in encouraging rebellion and putting down godliness – and that's just one of its more obvious influences!

Our desire to be continually "entertained" is also causing us to become a lazy generation. In order to get the message of a T.V. show, movie,

influences. We apply His words to our lives. It's an active process of thinking and dwelling on God's Word so that our thoughts and actions are naturally transformed – from the inner man to the outward actions. This is exactly the opposite of legalistic conformity or "striving" to do right for God. It's the vital connection that gives us *freedom* through the Holy Spirit!

Meditation makes clear another promise that Jesus made: "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me." (John 15:3,4) Likewise, in Ephesians 5:26, Paul talks about being cleansed by the "washing of water with the Word."

Now I'd like to share six simple but important principles I use to deepen and enrich my meditation in God's Word:

(1) **Ask God to give you revelation as you study His Word and thank Him that He will.** Many times we approach our time in the Word with a defeated attitude, thinking, "Oh, I don't feel very spiritual today. I feel really far from God. It's going to be hard to pray, and I don't think I'm going to get anything out of this scripture when I read it." And, sure enough, we don't!

But this attitude is inconsistent with the truth! God is the same yesterday, today, and forever – and He *always* wants to instruct us in His ways. He *always*

to think about it in a deeper way. You analyze it more carefully, and your thoughts are more penetrating.

(4) **Write down what you understand from that particular scripture.** At this point you might think, "This thought is nothing new – nothing unusual. Why bother writing it down? I'll wait until I think of something really unusual." But if you do that, your mind is going to start floating away on another subject. So *write down* your thoughts, even though they might not seem very profound to you at the time.

You'll find that one thought will follow another until pretty soon you're shocked at the things God has shown you concerning one verse! For instance, I've meditated on very familiar passages that I've quoted all my life – like John 3:16 or Psalm 23. Although I wondered what more I could possibly learn from these well-known verses, I was faithful to write down all that came to mind – and the Lord gave me much greater insight than I'd ever had before!

Remember, don't critique and edit your thoughts – just write them down! You might be amazed at how the Lord can weave a beautiful pattern from some of those random thoughts!

(5) **Apply the understanding to your life.** As you continue to meditate, the Lord will probably begin to fill you with incredible insight concerning His character and His love. When you receive these "nuggets of gold" in your heart, don't just relax and be content to store them away for safekeeping –

You don't have to climb the tallest mountain or search the depth of the sea to find it - this treasure can be found without journeying farther than your own back yard.

the Lord a joy – or a duty? God's Word is not something you read to fulfill a daily "obligation" or to show Him what a dutiful Christian you are. In a very real sense, it's meant to bring the kind of inner happiness that gives "healing to your body and refreshment to your bones." (Prov. 3:8)

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we find men and women who knew how to take the Word of God *within* – and there it touched off a fire of wisdom, understanding, power, and prophetic insight. People like David, the prophets, and the Apostles knew that godly power and joy came from feasting their souls on God's Word.

Let me ask you a question: What are you feeding your spirit?

## Be Set Apart

It's easy to think that God picked certain "special" people at random, tapped them on the head with his finger and zapped them with His "anointing." They just opened their mouths and started declaring the word of the Lord in an incredibly powerful way. Right?

Wrong! People like Jeremiah *took time* to get away from the world. They set their hearts to seek God. As Jeremiah said: "I did not sit in the circle of merrymakers, nor did I exult. Because of Thy hand upon me I sat alone, for Thou didst fill me with indignation." (Jer. 15:17)

Jeremiah was not a killjoy – he just knew that he should keep himself apart so he wouldn't be influenced by worldly people who feasted their souls on partying and not on God's Word.

The result? He says, "Because of Thy hand upon me I sat alone...." Jeremiah had chosen a different source of joy – the influence of God's Word. And the result was that he had a viewpoint totally different from most of his generation.

Catherine Booth, co-founder of the *Salvation Army*, was another person whose viewpoint was radically different from the rest of her generation. Throughout her childhood years, Catherine was an

or song – what do we have to do? Absolutely nothing. We just sit (or lie) there and the message goes in – or it goes by. And we do nothing at all.

But seeking God through His Word is not like watching television. It takes effort! God's method of meditation requires you to get away from the world's influences. It requires you to get alone and become quiet before God. And as you read His Word, turning it over and over in your mind, it begins to expose the dark and shadowy places in your heart. God's Word can reveal how you might be relying on the world for acceptance and approval. And, most importantly, God's voice of righteousness can sustain us as we are daily challenged to live in a harsh world that does not always reflect the truth of His Word.

## Bread Of Life

Now some Christians might read David's statements in Psalm 119 and mistakenly think that meditation was only for Old Testament people – "Oh, how I love Your law! I meditate on it all day long." You might say, "We're not under law, we're under grace. Isn't meditation just another 'religious practice' that puts you under a legalistic bondage?"

No way! Not when you consider some important instructions that Jesus gave us. John 1:1 introduces Jesus as "the Word" who was with God and who was God. It was as *the Word* that Jesus taught His disciples: "The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I am the living bread who came down out of heaven... Just as the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me." (John 6:33,51,57 NIV)

What did Jesus mean when He spoke about "feeding on Me"? He was talking about *absorbing* the truth of His words and the meaning of His life. Letting it so renovate our minds that it becomes part of us – and we become part of Him.

And as our minds become renewed (Rom. 12:1-2), we listen to Him and value what He says more than we value any other

wants to speak to us. Proverbs 2:6,7 says, "For the Lord gives wisdom.... He stores up sound wisdom for the upright...." He wants to give us insight through our meditation! It's very important that we understand that fact so we don't keep letting our feelings and emotions stand in the way of our time with the Lord. You may have to fight through a case of the "blahs" – but God *never* does!

Meditation isn't just sitting down, reading a scripture, and then thinking about it. No! The God of all creation is *participating* in your meditation, so just ask Him to fill you with His revelation – and thank Him beforehand. Don't forget to do this! Sometimes people complain about not receiving anything in meditation. Most of the time it's because they've failed to begin with this important principle of *thanksgiving*.

(2) **Slowly read and "picture" the scripture.** Our modern world is hectic and many of us mistakenly think that getting things done quickly is more valuable than taking our time. But there's no such thing as rushing a revelation from God. You have to slow down when you are meditating in God's Word. There's *no other way* to experience the richness of Scripture.

Here's one technique I use to help me slow down and really savor the passage I'm reading: Read the scripture over and over until you can "picture it" in your mind. You don't need to be an "artistic" type of person to do this – just linger on that passage until the Lord begins to fill your mind with an image. The Bible is full of beautiful descriptions, amazing stories, and parables of great wisdom. There is no other book on earth that can set your spirit and heart ablaze with such wonder! So just take time to really *visually focus* on what you are reading.

(3) **Write the scripture down in your notebook or journal.** I usually just meditate on one or two verses of Scripture at a time, never a whole chapter. Sometimes God will prompt me to meditate on some specific subject, and then I look up several different verses on that subject and meditate on all of them.

Writing down the scripture takes a disciplined effort, and the more disciplined you are, the more opportunity you give the Holy Spirit to speak to you. When you write something down you tend

start to apply them to your life! Ask yourself: *How should I handle this certain situation in light of what God has shown me?* Then base your actions on the revelation you received about the character of God. As you are renewed and transformed by God's truth, you might see some of your actions and relationships beginning to change.

(6) **Respond to God.** Nine times out of ten, meditation will bring you to a point where you're bursting with a *new response* to God. For instance, you might see something about the Lord you've never seen before, and that new revelation makes you want to rise up in worship and praise. Don't lose that moment by hesitating! Seize the opportunity to respond with all your heart to the living God!

Maybe the Lord will give you greater discernment about a certain situation that's been troubling you. Again, don't put off your response. Pray about it right then! Or maybe God will give you a new song to sing about the verse you're meditating on. Well, sing it! *Respond to the Lord out of that meditation.* Your response will make your meditation more alive, and it will make your relationship with God much more than just an intellectual exercise.

## Seek Wisdom

Meditating and receiving understanding from the Lord is not just a quiet and passive activity. We don't just sit there with an open Bible while the Lord fills us to the brim! Instead, the Lord requires us to take an *active* stance in meditation. He continually exhorts us in Proverbs to "cry out for discernment"... "seek for wisdom as silver and search for her as hidden treasure"... "incline your heart for understanding"... "treasure His commandments"... "bind them around your neck and write them on the tablet of your heart." Do these sound like passive directives to you? No! They are urgent reminders for us to *actively seek* godly wisdom.

