

## The W's And H's Of Meditation (Part Three)

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We will turn to several related scriptures upon which I intend to weave a theme for this message. All scriptures will be taken from the Lockman Foundation's *Amplified Bible* or *New American Standard Bible*.

**Isaiah 55:8-9** For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Let us turn to a familiar scripture described by John Ritenbaugh last week as the nuts and bolts passage, or perhaps we could say where the rubber meets the road in terms of overcoming sin, character building, and maturing spiritually as God's offspring.

**Romans 8:5-7** For those who are according to the flesh and are controlled by its unholy desires set their minds on and pursue those things which gratify the flesh, but those who are called according to the Spirit and are controlled by the desires of the Spirit set their minds on and seek those things which gratify the [Holy] Spirit. Now the mind of the flesh [which is sense and reason without the Holy Spirit] is death [death that comprises all the miseries arising from sin, both here and hereafter]. But the mind of the [Holy] Spirit is life and [soul] peace [both now and forever]. [That is] because the mind of the flesh [with its carnal thoughts and purposes] is hostile to God, for it does not submit itself to God's Law; indeed it cannot.

**Proverbs 13:11** Wealth [not earned but] won in haste or unjustly or from the production of things for vain or detrimental use [such riches] will dwindle away, but he who gathers little by little will increase [his riches].

Like Aesop's tale of "The Tortoise and the Hare," slow and steady wins the race. As one of my mentors, Bob Hoops used to say, "The plodders will be the ones to make it into the Kingdom."

**Proverbs 22:6** Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it.

We can plainly see that good habits formed in youth will carry one to success in old age while bad habits formed early will carry one to perdition.

In Zechariah 4, we learn how God's creative projects are launched.

**Zechariah 4:6** Then he said to me, "This [addition of the bowl to the candlestick, causing it to yield a ceaseless supply of oil from the olive trees] is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, saying, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit' [of Whom the oil is a symbol], says the Lord of hosts."

The diligent, habitual exercise of God's Holy Spirit dwarfs into insignificance all displays of human might or power. In verse 10, the emphasis on all great things starting small is underscored:

**Zechariah 4:10** Who [with reason] despises the day of small things? For these seven shall rejoice when they see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel. [These seven] are the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro throughout the whole earth.

God usually does not seem to begin His greatest works with phrenetic bursts of energy, but instead contemplatively, beginning with small, insignificant things such as He has demonstrated with our calling, recruiting the base and undistinguished on the earth to confound the wise and the pompous. Even the zealous prophet Elijah had to learn the lesson that the contemplative and meditative always trumps the dramatic and pyrotechnic.

**I Kings 19:11-12** And He said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire [a sound of gentle stillness and] a still, small voice.

We will now return to the New Testament to the Parable of the Talents.

**Matthew 25:23** "His master said to him, 'Well done, you upright (honorable, admirable) and faithful servant! You have been faithful and trustworthy over a little; I will put you in charge of much. Enter into and share the joy (the delight, the blessedness) which your master enjoys.'

The same principle is underscored in the enigmatic Parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16:10 in which Jesus assures His disciples when He says, "He who is faithful in a very little [thing] is faithful also in much, and he who is dishonest and unjust in a very little [thing] is dishonest and unjust also in much." Before we can ever assume our roles as kings and priests in God's Kingdom, we must prove ourselves faithful in smaller, less glamorous developmental tasks during our sanctification process.

Finally, before I move on to the purpose statement of this message, let us go back to Matthew 17 to Jesus Christ's comparison of productive faith to the diminutive mustard seed, one of the smallest of all seeds, but having the capability in its genotype to produce in its phenotype one of the largest herbs on earth, in some cases having a tree-like appearance.

**Matthew 17:20** He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith [that is, your lack of firmly relying trust]. For truly I say to you, if you have faith [that is living] like a grain of mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to yonder place, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.' "

Paul has instructed us in Ephesians 1:14 and II Corinthians 5:5 that God has given to His called-out ones a tiny, diminutive earnest payment of His Holy Spirit which we are to diligently and habitually cultivate until our ultimate resurrection as His offspring.

What I propose to do in this third installment of “The W’s and H’s of Meditation” is to demonstrate how to cultivate the habit of meditation as a major tool to tackle the nuts and bolts problems of character building and overcoming, displacing our deadly carnal nature, which, if unchecked, would annihilate us. We are to replace it with godly character (the very mind of God) using a systematic program of scriptural meditation allowing us, with the aid of God’s Holy Spirit, to absorb His thoughts and precepts day and night, being incrementally transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

Our part of the sanctification process consists of daily mortifying the old man, exchanging lethal and self-destructive carnal behavior patterns for life-sustaining spiritual habit patterns by absorbing the mind of God through scriptural meditation.

Because bad habits are extremely hard to break, progress is not going to be easy or dramatic, but the new habit will enable us to draw closer to our Creator as we incrementally take on His nature. As with the cultivation of any habit, by the yard it is hard, but by the inch, it is a cinch. We could say that habit is to character, or character building, what manners are to morality, as John pointed out in his October 21, 2017 commentary on American manners.

Educator Horace Mann once wrote, “Habit is a cable; we weave a thread of it each day, and at last we cannot break it.” Ralph Waldo Emerson similarly states, “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”

Whether learning to play a musical instrument, learning a new language, writing a book, initiating a new diet, arranging an exercise program, drafting a new household budget, or planting a garden, no new habit will ever magically fall into place or develop unless we are willing to resist our carnal pulls to procrastinate, waiting until conditions are ideal to make the initial move. We must solidly determine in our minds that the helpful changes or spiritual dividends we will eventually experience are worth a commitment of time, place, and regular practice.

Because many of us in our high-tech Western culture are impatient for instantaneous, micro-second or nano-second results (that is one thousand-millionth of a second-and I am hardly exaggerating), many of us are not willing to deliberately slow down our phrenetic pace-which is exactly what meditation requires.

Most of us have had success with establishing more than one positive habit in our lives. When we were born, we could not walk, talk, write, text, or exercise control of our elimination processes. I trust that most in the range of the sound of my voice have developed some proficiency in all those areas. Habit is the common denominator of all human accomplishments in the arts and sciences.

To those called of God to become His crowning workmanship, the task is not impossible, but it requires a commitment of continuous overcoming with the glorious goal of becoming His offspring, a marriage companion to His only Son. Our own meager attempt at Godly habit formation, coupled with the shaping power of God’s Holy Spirit, will bring the sanctification process successfully through to its conclusion. Philippians 1:6 punctuates this assurance.

**Philippians 1:6** For I feel confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Like all the other spiritual tools, prayer, Bible study, and fasting, meditation requires a specific commitment to take the baby steps as we would for any other human endeavor such as beginning a diet or a household budget. We must have the patience of an angler waiting for a trout or a farmer waiting for seeds to sprout. We must be content initially with meager, unimpressive results.

Back in 1960, plastic surgeon Maxwell Maltz wrote a self-help book called *Psycho-Cybernetics*, in which he stated that it took 18 to 21 days to start a new habit. Since that time, new research suggested that 66 days was a more realistic time frame and that some recalcitrant bad habits took up to 245 days to turn around.

Gretchen Rubin, in her October 21, 2009 *Psychology Today* article, “Stop Expecting to Change Your Habit in 21 Days—How long does it really take to change a habit?” laments that while it takes only two repetitions to firmly entrench a bad habit, it takes much longer to establish positive ones, adding emphatically “That’s why developing a good habit is really worth the struggle; once you’re used to making your bed each morning, or going for an evening walk, or flossing, you don’t have to exert much self-control to keep it up.” It took me about two solid months to learn how to use bookmarks and hyperlinks on the computer to create indexes and tables of contents, and then continuous reinforcing practice over several years to make it a reflex response.

Back in April of 2010, Mike Ford gave a sermonette on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread entitled “Outliers” that was based upon a book written by Maxwell Gladwell who insisted that success in any endeavor depends on practice and that practice is not something we do when we are good, but it is something that we do diligently and habitually to make us good. Professionals never stop practicing.

In his message, which later appeared in print, entitled “Diligence in Practice,” Mike cited Gladwell’s concept of the 10,000-Hour Rule, developed from a study in the early 1990’s conducted by Berlin’s elite Academy of Music, concluding that diligent and habitual practice plays a far greater role than innate talent in producing professional musicians. The students who would end up the best in their classes had begun to practice more until they got up to 10,000 hours. Mike made the case that God’s called ones are obligated to harness the work ethic, practicing diligently and habitually our spiritual endeavors including Bible study, prayer, fasting, and meditation.

As a saw is different from a hammer, and a screwdriver is different from a pliers, prayer is different from Bible study, and meditation is different from fasting; they are intended to work together to construct an edifice of godliness. Meditation could be considered a needed warm-up exercise for prayer and a cool-down exercise for Bible study.

Meditation requires quiet, solitude, and a far slower and more relaxed pace—something alien to modern Western culture. When we study or pray, we are in the sprint mode; when we fast and meditate, we are in the walking or plodding mode. Meditation may be compared to the decompression intervals to combat the bends. Ascent from a pressurized environment such as we experience every day must be done carefully and at crucial intervals.

Scripture provide some clues as to when these spiritual warm up and cool-down exercises should occur.

**Psalm 1:2** But his delight and desire are in the law of the Lord, and on His law (the precepts, the instructions, the teachings of God) he habitually meditates (ponders and studies) by day and by night.

**Proverbs 6:22** When you go, they [the words of your parents' God] shall lead you; when you sleep, they shall keep you; and when you waken, they shall talk with you.

In the March 13, 2006 article by Jim Downing, entitled "How to Meditate on Scripture Day and Night," he explains that there is a far more practical way to accomplish this objective than staying awake 24 hours a day, reminding us that generally the last thing we are conscious about before drifting off to sleep is the first thing to roll into our conscious the next day, indicating that our subconscious has been faithfully working throughout the night, processing what we had purposely thought about before falling asleep. Downing concludes that rather than allowing the subconscious to work on our problems and worries, we can—we should—meditate on the Word of God while we sleep.

A logical placement of our decompression intervals, a time we cool down from focused study in the Scriptures and warm up stretching exercises for prayer, is right before we drift off to sleep and the very first thing in the morning before we begin our other daily routines. If we habitually make God's Word our last thought every day, with the help of our subconscious mind and God's Holy Spirit, we will be able to meditate on the Word of God "day and night."

We have ample precedents from Scripture endorsing that end of the day/beginning of the day principle. I will give you a sampling of such practices. Nighttime meditation before bedtime or falling asleep is found in:

**Genesis 24:63** And Isaac went out to meditate and bow down [in prayer] in the open country in the evening; and he looked up and saw that, behold, the camels were coming.

**Psalms 4:4** Be angry [or stand in awe] and sin not; commune with your own hearts upon your beds and be silent. *Selah* [pause, and calmly think of that]!

**Psalms 16:7** I will bless the Lord, who has given me counsel; yes, my heart instructs me in the night seasons.

**Psalms 42:8** Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

**Psalms 63:6** When I remember You upon my bed and meditate on You in the night watches

**Psalms 119:148** My eyes anticipate the night watches and I am awake before the cry of the watchman, that I may meditate on Your word.

Our Elder Brother Jesus Christ established the habit of rising early in the morning to establish contact with the Father.

**Mark 1:35** And in the morning, long before daylight, He got up and went out to a deserted place, and there He prayed.

Over the past five months, I have tried to establish the time interval before retiring and the time interval right after I get up as a solid beachhead for the habit of meditating on a portion of God's Word. For how long should we meditate? At least four articles on meditation concurred that one must

invest a minimum of 10-20 minutes or 15-20 minutes daily to generate positive results. And just like the 10,000-hour rule in “Outliers,” the more one practices meditation, the stronger and unbreakable the habit will become.

One article entitled, “Learn with the Heart” recommended that no less than half of our Bible study should be meditation, when we slowly turn over some of the key phrases, repeating them, playing with them as a mother cat plays with a weakened mouse before going in for the kill.

Over the past nine years, I have been systematically studying various languages, using the Pimsleur method, studying each language a half hour per day, moving through three incremental levels with 30 units in each level. We are required to interact with the program repeating the phrases we hear and taking part in recorded conversations with native speakers. As the lesson comes to a close, I spend another 15 minutes rehearsing new words and phrases from the lesson, following the three laws of memory: impression, repetition, and association. Today, after nine years of practice, what once seemed impossible now has become a reflex response.

Now, if each of us would consider the amount of time we devote to our hobbies and interests, imagine if we could devote just a tithe of that time to assimilating Scripture, the investment would pay enormous spiritual dividends.

If each of us would consider the amount of time we spend worrying or fearing (another form of counterfeit satanic meditation), imagine if we could just devote a tithe of that precious time to godly meditation of God’s Word, the investment in time would pay enormous spiritual dividends. If each of us would consider the amount of time that the satanically-inspired mainstream media prevarications and slanderous lies robs us our peace and serenity, this modest investment of time meditating on God’s Word would pay enormous spiritual dividends, restoring our once damaged, destabilized nervous systems.

**John 6:63** It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

How many of us pray on a regular basis for more of the Holy Spirit, and then ignore the spigot of the fountain where God’s Spirit flows freely—namely His Holy Scriptures? How many of us have envied Abraham’s or Moses’ ability to communicate with God person-to-person? Perhaps we have desired to pick up our cell phone and dial His throne room direct. Thankfully, Almighty God is offering us such opportunity right now by giving us His Holy Spirit, and offering the communicative spiritual tools of prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation.

The first baby step in this process is to commit ourselves to a daily habit of meditation, time intervals during the day (logically at the end of the day when we prepare to retire and when we wake up before we begin the work routine) when we can totally shut out all the world’s poisonous influences, replacing them with the very mind and character of God. Even a meager, minimal investment of 10-20 minutes would suffice to bring about measurable results. But just as we plan our 401K or retirement account, the more we invest, the more we will have when we need it. Also, the power of God’s Holy Spirit will exponentially compound our meager investment in the habit of godly meditation.

Back in 1966, a local elder in Minneapolis delivered a sermonette entitled, “The Key to the Next Day is the Time you Hit the Hay.” I would like to add a corollary to that message, “The key to the next day is what you habitually think about before you hit the hay.”