

Read *and* Meditate

Have you ever read a few chapters in your Bible, closed it, and then realized, “I don’t remember a thing I’ve read”? When this happens, don’t blame your age, IQ, or education, for they’re not the cause. Nearly all Bible readers frequently experience this forgetfulness. In most cases, however, the problem has more to do with the *method* of engaging God’s Word than anything else. For if you merely read the Bible, don’t be surprised if you forget most—if not all—of what you’ve read.

What’s the simple solution? (And I do believe that benefiting from the intake of God’s Word *must* be fundamentally simple since the Lord expects it of all His people, regardless of age, IQ, or education.) The solution is not only to read the Scriptures, but to *meditate* on them. Reading, of course, is the starting place. *Reading* is the *exposure* to Scripture, but *meditation* is the *absorption* of Scripture. And it’s the absorption of Scripture that leads to the transformation of our lives.

The Bible itself explicitly warns that if we do not look intently at (that is, meditate on) God’s perfect Word, we’ll forget it: “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25, NASB). Just as *hearing* the Word of God without meditating on it causes a person to be a “forgetful hearer,” so anyone who *reads* the Bible without meditating on it becomes a forgetful reader. And if you can’t remember what you read, you probably won’t experience or be changed by what you read.

On most days though, you probably feel as though you’re not able to give nearly enough time to the Word of God, much less introduce something else to the process. So, assuming that you’re already devoting time on a regular basis to reading the Bible (and if you’re not, *that’s* the place to start), let me suggest a way whereby you can begin to meditate on Scripture without necessarily increasing the overall time involved.

If, for example, you normally spend ten minutes in Bible reading, from now on, don’t spend your entire time reading. Starting tomorrow, read for five minutes and meditate for five minutes. It’s far better to *read less*, but *remember more*, than to read for the entire ten minutes and remember nothing. It’s far better to close your Bible knowing that you have something from God’s Word with you so that you can “meditate in it day and night” (Joshua 1:8), than to realize that you’ve already forgotten everything you’ve read.

I’ve written at length in other places about *how* to meditate on Scripture.¹ I have space here only to emphasize the *importance* of meditation. It’s not so much what we read in the Bible that changes us, but what we remember. Doubtless there are many believers who should increase their daily intake of Scripture, but many others are devoting all the time they can. If you cannot possibly add meditation to the time you already spend reading, then read less in order to meditate more. The goal is not just to “get through” a certain amount of pages, but to meet God and hear from Him.

¹ See the pertinent subsections of chapters two and three in Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1991) as well as the chapters in this book, “Ask the Joseph Hall Questions,” “Ask the Philippians 4:8 Questions,” and “Meditate and Apply.”