

INTRODUCTION

*“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.”*

Psalms 1:2-3

You have a slim probability of meditating if the 2015 National Center for Health Statistics report is accurate. It claims that only eight percent of U.S. adults practice a form of meditation. While a variety of types of meditation exist, meditation, at its core, involves repetition of thought or speech along with reflection. Based on that concept, though, we all meditate.

Surprised? We all meditate on *something*. Self-talk dominates the conversation of our lives. Where does your inner conversation turn when you are alone, when your mind disengages, when you can't sleep at night? Probably your thoughts most naturally turn to challenges—relational demands, financial woes, or issues at work. But you *could* focus on God's Word, eternal truths, precious promises, or God's unchanging character.

Which choice will give you greater joy, peace, wisdom, strength, and comfort? In which direction would God point you? This book will help guide your thoughts to life, health, and peace.

If you yearn for something more in your life, if life has left you battered and pain-ridden, if you hunger after God, read on. Even—and especially—if you believe you can't squeeze another spiritual habit into your busy schedule, read on. Finally, if you thirst for life change, read on.

You already meditate. Let's turn your worries into delight.

Pursue with Perspective

“My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.”

Psalm 63:5-7

“I LOVE YOU,” Trent assured me as he cradled my hand in his long fingers.

“I love you, too,” I replied in a shaky voice.

Maneuvering around IV lines and an assortment of tubes, he gave me a quick, but fervent hug. Then he disappeared from my line of view.

It was about 11 p.m. on February 24, 1990. Trent and I found ourselves alone, in an unfamiliar city. One hundred fifty miles away, my parents cared for our two boys—two-week-old Nathan and three-year-old Jonathan. A sense of isolation threatened to overwhelm me as orderlies wheeled me down sterile halls, through double doors, and finally into surgery.

I knew I may never see Trent again.

Earlier that day, the doctors ruled out surgery, and then later determined they must operate despite a forty percent chance I would not survive.

“We need to remove that hematoma or she won’t make it,” the head doctor informed us.

This can’t be happening! I just came in to have a baby. As frantic as a caged animal, an urge to rip out IV lines and escape from intensive care nearly pushed me to action. *I have to get home. My boys need me.*

But I knew that, in my weakened condition, I didn’t have strength to take two steps. Besides, all that day spasms, induced by the pressure of the nearly two-liter sized, growing blood clot convinced me I desperately needed medical treatment. Our local hospital, unable to give me the care I needed, had me airlifted to University of Michigan Hospital.

The voice of reason soon quieted my heart.

During the hour wait before surgery, Trent and I had exchanged last words, and I dictated messages for my parents and children in the event I didn’t live.

Now in the operating room, a sense of aloneness *should* have engulfed me—except for one thing. In past years, I had committed large portions of scripture to memory. As my source for meditation, I clung to them, especially at night. Now treasured friends, these rock-solid truths assured me that God Himself drew near. Verses such as these two favorites:

Psalm 27:1 – *“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”*

Isaiah 40:29 – *“He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.”*

Those words permeated my mind and enveloped my heart in peace as I awaited my surgery. Calmly, I faced the uncertain future.

Why Meditate?

Have you considered meditating on scripture? Are you aware of the invaluable benefits meditation can bring to your life? No doubt you have heard Bible verses such as these Old Testament standards:

Joshua 1:8 – *“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.”*

Psalm 1:2 – *“But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”*

The New Testament also speaks of filling our minds with God’s Word:

Colossians 3:16 instructs us, *“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.”*

John 15:7 advises, *“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”*

A few months ago, I talked to my friend Joyce several times about meditation and this book as I worked on it. Joyce’s family was grappling with a difficult situation, and she faced an upcoming court appearance. The day after the Friday hearing, Joyce related what had happened.

A phone call on Thursday evening from the attorney revealed the exact purpose of the hearing. The ramifications of the hearing on those she loved and the potential effect of her testimony weighed heavily on Joyce. Her trepidation led her to commit her concerns to God, and she fervently prayed for wisdom.

The next day tested Joyce’s ability to wait. Once at the courthouse, she remained with others in the hall for over an hour and a half. Then a bailiff called the others in, but she was left alone until her turn to testify.

Anxious and desperate for a favorable outcome, she looked to divert her mind from imaginations of what may be transpiring in the courtroom. No purse, no phone, no magazines. What could she do?

This place of silence could be a perfect opportunity to meditate, she realized. One at a time, Joyce reflected on verses she could recall from memory. She contemplated the significance of each word and how it applied to her situation. Then she prayed with those thoughts in mind.

She repeated this process for the next seventy-five minutes until the court broke for lunch. Within the sterile environment of the courthouse hall and her inner anguish, scripture had brought a slice of heaven into the depths of her being. God’s Word blanketed her heart and mind, creating an unexpected calmness and a confidence that God would help her remember what she wanted to say.

After lunch and another wait, a bailiff finally called Joyce into the courtroom. He led her to the witness stand in full view of loved ones, witnesses, attorneys, and the judge. She could have felt intimidated and paralyzed at the import of her testimony, but instead calmness reigned. She spoke the truth with boldness and tempered with love, though uncomplimentary at times. The defense cross-examined her and tried two times to make her look or feel unreasonable. She countered with clarity of thought and full composure.

Finally, the hearing ended and with it came relief—relief the hearing was over and how well her testimony had gone. Meditation on God’s Word had made a key difference in the state of her heart and mind, which in turn had a positive impact on her responses and words. Her spirit overflowed with thanksgiving.

A Story of Beginnings

Let me tell you why I choose to meditate.

God uses meditation, a spiritually dynamic practice, in my life as He makes me more like Jesus. It still amazes me how reflecting on the Bible transforms me—my thoughts, emotions, words, and motivations.

Twenty-three years after my risky surgery, fears often plagued me. I feared that tragedy would fall on my husband or our older son, Jonathan, an Air Force pilot.

Jonathan lived in England, but we usually communicated with him once a week via FaceTime. In between times, we could email. Sometimes, if he was on a mission, we didn’t FaceTime and responses to our emails could be delayed.

Something must have happened. Why else didn’t he email? How could I take it if something happens to him? These thoughts and more would hijack my mind, flooding my heart with fear and tightening my stomach into knots.

I responded the same when Trent would be late coming home from a job or from bike riding. Especially if calls to his cell phone resulted in, “This is Trent Watford of Tech Help. Please leave a message.” Dread and anxiety held me captive.

My fears were not totally unfounded.

Three years earlier, in 2010, we lived through one of the worst nightmares a parent can experience. At age twenty, our younger son, Nathan, tragically died while stationed in Guam with the Navy. He died by suicide. After that experience, I knew that horrific tragedies didn’t just happen to other people. They could—and would—happen to me as well.

Fear blighted my journal entries. I knew I needed to trust God more. I read the Bible. I prayed. I memorized. I even meditated ... some. But apprehension still had the upper hand. Slowly I began to sense a need for significant change in my life.

My habits of memorization and meditation had become sketchy at best. When Nathan died, grief impaired my memory and I never totally regained it. At night I would turn to meditation, but could only recollect a few verses.

My journal entry from January 8, 2015, summarizes it well: *Is it any wonder that fear haunts me? I know deep down I am not immune from the most painful losses that life can throw at a person. What if it happens again? And again? And again?*

Just the day before, I had listened to a podcast by mistake. If I had known the topic was memorization, I would have made another selection. I knew all about memorization (so I thought). I just didn’t discipline my mind to actually do it. *Life is hard enough as it is. My mind just needs a break.*

Through the *Revive Our Hearts* broadcast (January 7, 2015), I realized that my problem wasn’t lack of discipline, but lack of hunger. On that broadcast, Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth interviewed Janet Pope about Janet’s book, *His Word in My Heart*, on the topic of memorizing scripture.

Janet: What if I said to you, “You’re so disciplined in eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner every single day. You rarely miss a day.”

Nancy: Most of us could say that.

Janet: But you would say, “No, it’s not discipline. I’m hungry.” And so I would say to you, “It’s not that you are lacking discipline [to memorize]. It’s that you are not hungry.”ⁱ

As I listened to this interchange about discipline, I thought, *But I am hungry. I’m desperate for God. I cannot face life without Him.* That day I got back to memorizing.

I chose to start with Psalm 1, a familiar chapter yet I could not quote it. One night, snuggled in a warm bed while snow and ice ruled the outdoor landscape, my thoughts centered on verse three: *“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”* (KJV)

This comparison fascinated me: *“And he shall be like a tree planted.”* I visualized God using His own hands to lovingly plant me in a place He carefully selected and which offered the best resources for wellness, growth, and fruitfulness. I pondered the implications of such actions, of His unfathomable love expressed in deliberate forethought and careful planning.

God’s sovereignty (something I already knew but now examined in a fresh perspective) brought comfort and peace. Unexpectedly, a tidal wave of assurance enveloped my soul, washing away “What if’s” and “I can’t’s.” I felt confident that if something “bad” did happen to a loved one or me, God would have kindly and thoughtfully chosen that place for me. His Presence and His Word—the River of Life—would flourish right there beside me, providing all I need.

After many months of rampant fears, this insight, gleaned from immersing my heart and mind in Psalm 1:3, refreshed my soul like a spring of cool water in desert heat. And it continues to steady my emotions in the winds of change.

Biblical meditation pleases God. It also supplies our soul with rich nourishment—with felt emotional, mental, and spiritual personal benefits such as contentment, peace, and joy. Want to dig deeper? See Appendix 3 for a list of blessings from reflecting on scripture.

Soul Cravings

Psalm 63:5-7 describes a satisfied soul—that is, a soul totally filled up, even to excess: *“My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.”*

Did you notice that the satisfied soul results *“when I remember you ... and meditate on you ...”*? But what is a soul satisfied as with fat and rich food? The phrase refers to the Lord meeting our deepest needs and longings (which only He can) just as a rich dessert satiates our physical appetite.

In his article, “The God Who Delights to Satisfy,” Jonathan Berry of London, England, expresses his thoughts this way in his blog: “I confess that I have a weakness for fat and rich foods. Whether it’s a full English breakfast or a chocolate indulgence cake, I find such things hard to resist. But by far my favourite of all rich foods is the delicious range of Gü puds (and no, Gü are not sponsoring this Thought for the Week). They’re not cheap and are, therefore, only an occasional treat. But oh my, they are certainly very satisfying.”ⁱⁱ

After reading Berry’s thoughts, I couldn’t resist going to gupud.com. Even their website is absolutely tantalizing. I have never been treated to a Gü pud, but I agree that a slice of decadent cheesecake is more satisfying to my taste buds than, say, apple slices.

So, what does this mean for our souls—for our inner being? We go through life foraging for scraps of love, affirmation, and attention from people. But it’s never tasty or plentiful enough to quiet our gnawing

appetite. When we approach God's table, it's different. God offers a banquet of love and acceptance laid out on an endless, crammed-full spread, and He encourages us to eat to the full!

We may think we crave chocolate, new clothes, a day off, or a word of appreciation. But we really crave communion with God; a communion with God fostered with purposeful directing of our thoughts to scripture throughout the day and night.

Commenting on Psalm 1:2, *The Treasury of David* by Charles H. Spurgeon puts it this way: "He [the Christian] takes a text and carries it with him all day long; and in the night-watches, when sleep forsakes his eyelids, he museth upon the Word of God. In the day of his prosperity he sings psalms out of the Word of God, and in the night of his affliction he comforts himself with promises out of the same book. 'The law of the Lord' is the daily bread of the true believer."ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, scripture is our intimate companion, meeting our needs as they arise. God's truth realigns our pursuits, our desires, our thoughts to the eternal and away from the temporal.

In my desperate battle for life that continued even after my risky surgery, one of Trent's journal entries clearly pinpoints the importance of maintaining a memory bank of scriptures.

On March 1, 1990, he wrote, "Realized today [the] importance [of] memorizing scripture so you can use it when you are sick and can't look at your Bible."

Yes, I left the surgery room alive on February 24 after the four-hour procedure, but afterwards the doctor's voice held reserve.

"Will she survive?" Trent wanted to know.

"There's a good chance ... if we can get the bleeding to stop."

The surgery removed a large hematoma, grown in my abdomen in the previous two weeks that followed a C-section. Sometime during my pregnancy, my body developed a blood clotting disorder, violently revealed after an uneventful Cesarean section. Now the mass of blood had been removed, but nothing had corrected the underlying problem. And that was the challenge in the next few days.

I received hourly boluses (intravenous injection of a single dose of a drug over a short period) of Factor 8, one of the necessary thirteen blood clotting proteins. The resumption of dreaded plasmapheresis treatments addressed declining Factor 8 levels in my blood. (Plasmapheresis is a process for removing blood plasma without depleting the donor or patient of other blood constituents like red blood cells.)

The quagmire after the surgery appeared as hopeless as before undergoing the operation. But God's Word brought us comfort. Trent would read to me since I was too weak to read on my own, or I would recall portions from memory. Two weary, perplexed souls caught in the reality of the frailty of life, we grasped the Word of God and the God of the Word. We both realized again the importance of maintaining a treasure chest of encouraging verses in our heart and mind.

We've talked a bit about benefits of meditation. Now let's stop a moment to examine what scriptural meditation is . . . and what it isn't.