

MEDITATION METHODS

Three methods of meditation will be discussed in detail in this chapter. Some people will find one method more helpful than another. It is recommended that you try all three methods several times to determine which method is suitable for yourself. Experiment using several types of passages with different methods as you may find one method more adaptable than another. For example, if you are meditating on passages of the Gospels the visualize method may be best, but if you are doing Psalms or Proverbs you may prefer the questionnaire method. Feel free to experiment. Remember prayer, communion with the living God is key.

VISUALIZE

If we are going to effect change on our spirit we must utilize the components of our soul (see page 9). One of the best ways to do this is to visualize the passage you are meditating on.

To visualize means to use your eyes, but not your physical eyes. Psalm 119:18 says, "Open my eyes, that I may see wonderful things from Your law". David is speaking of spiritual eyes here. If you remember, the Greek word for meditate in the New Testament is *meletao*. This gives the idea of revolving something around in the mind. It also extends the notion of imagining, but without the air of fantasizing or make believe. That is what visualizing in meditation is. It is imagining yourself right in the middle of the scene you are reading in the Bible. This is especially true for the non-didactic, or non-teaching, portions of the Word. This would include much of the Gospels and Acts, and a great deal of the Old Testament. The parables are real-life situations. Through meditation we should experience God's Word in our lives.

This idea of visualization is not new. It was practiced a great deal by early believers who could not read, or had no access to the written Word. They had to rely on what was read to them occasionally, or on what they could remember. The first person to record this method at any length was Ignatius Loyola during the first half of the sixteenth century. His testimony takes us from an army officer in the service of the Spanish Duke of Najera, and ends as the founder of one of the Jesuits; one of greatest missionary movements of the church. Ignatius would give much of the credit for his power and ability to minister, to meditation.

In the following pages three other methods of meditation will be discussed. Before entering into any one of these three methods, there are two phases of preparation in which the meditator should do first. The phases of meditation should be done each time you meditate so as to help you in visualizing the passage and for prompting our souls to become actively involved in the meditation process. The first phase may be done along with the "Steps" already discussed.

PHASE I

1. Preparatory Prayer. briefly ask the Lord to guide your thoughts in order to teach you something specific concerning a particular problem or area (eg. meekness, love, faith, etc..).
2. Read a passage (a sequence in the life of Christ). Do not rush, but make no attempt to meditate either. For example, you could read John 4 (Jesus at the well) or you could start with the promised birth of Christ in Luke.
3. Orient yourself geographically. This is not an attempt to meditate, but it is an effort to observe the context of the passage. Get the scene in your mind. Close your eyes. Read the passage as many times as necessary to do this.

PHASE II

During this phase, you will employ all five of your senses from the picture related in the passage. Imagine the situation:

1. Close your eyes and picture yourself in the situation. Mentally note all that would capture your attention visually: the people, the animals, the well, etc. Notice color and positions.
2. Incorporate your sense of hearing. Listen to the conversation. Ad lib a little without destroying the truth of the passage. Imagine what people who are not talking are thinking - think out loud for them.
3. Use your sense of smell. What odors are there? People, animals, food, dust, water, etc. This will take some practice.
4. Try the sense of taste. If there is food in the passage, what does it taste like? If water, is it warm or cool? Do the corners of your mouth taste salty due to the heat?
5. Employ the sense of touch. How does your face feel? Sweaty, unshaven, tense? How about your clothes? The animals? The people? How does it feel to touch a withered arm? Pick up a child. Touch whatever you can in the scene without disturbing the movement.

With all five of the senses in operation, you will be following the motion and the emotion of the story as if you were actually there when it took place. Do not be disappointed if your first attempts are not very dramatic. Keep at it. Remember that prayer is the key to effective meditation, whatever the method. You may want to employ only two or three of the senses the first few times, as five may be hard to handle.

Also remember that both Phases I and II should be done before doing any of the following methods.

I. PERSONALIZE

Remember you may employ any of the "STEPS" with this or the following methods. The personalize method includes four parts: the colloquy, review, personify, and prayer.

- 1. Colloquy:** Initiate an imaginary conversation with anyone in the scene. You may talk with several persons during this time. Start with a dialogue. Ask them questions that have come to your mind as you envisioned the story with your five senses. You may talk with God, Jesus Christ, or the Spirit. This is not a prayer, but a discussion of the events in the story. Pretend you are actually on the scene and put yourself in the shoes of one or several of the characters involved. You could be a relative, or one of the disciples; be Jesus Himself; a Pharisee or one of the crowd. Try to think and react as they do. Live the moment for and with them. Don't limit yourself time-wise. Allow plenty of time to relive the scene. Record your thoughts.
- 2. Review:** Terminate your "on-the-scene" position and review as much as possible from what you asked God to do in your heart through this meditation, from the reading, the imaginative exercises of the five senses, and your colloquy.
- 3. Personify:** Now repeat the colloquy part again only this time be yourself. If you were actually a disciple or a Pharisee knowing all you presently know, how would you react? The same as you did in the colloquy part or different? Review and record your thoughts.
- 4. Prayer:** Write down some applications and pray at length.

Phase I may be done the night before, if you intend to meditate in the morning. Otherwise, it is best done just prior to the exercise. Phase II should be done in a QUIET place. You should be alone in a comfortable position. When using this method, it is best not to write during your meditation, or even immediately after. Let your soul do the work. What your conscience recalls hours later may well be what will really be important in your life, many years later.

II. QUESTIONIZE

Questionize is a home spun word for asking questions. What is the point of questioning scripture? That is not the goal. The goal is to ask questions about the Word that will help us understand it as it is. David said, "make me to understand the way of Your precepts, so I will meditate on Your wonders" (Psalm 119:27). The people of Berea in Acts 17:11 "... search the scriptures daily, to see if those things were so." We know that the "...unfolding of Your Word gives light, it gives understanding to the simple." (Psalm 119:130).

It is important to ask God questions about His Word. We are to ask questions about portions we do not understand as well as we are to ask questions about verses we do think we understand. The following are three ways of asking questions. Obviously you may create your own questions too.

First, you may use a list of questions to cover and comprehend a verse or a passage thoroughly. For example, you could ask the following questions:

1. Is there a command to obey?
2. Is there an example to follow?
3. Is there a warning to heed?
4. Is there a promise to claim?
5. Is there something to give thanks for?
6. Is there a solution to a current problem?

Second, look for verbs or words that are repeated, or names. Then ask the question "What are the verbs in this passage?" For example, look at Psalm 103:3-5:

"Who pardons all your iniquities;
Who heals all your diseases;
Who redeems your life from the pit;
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;
Who satisfies your years with good things;
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle."

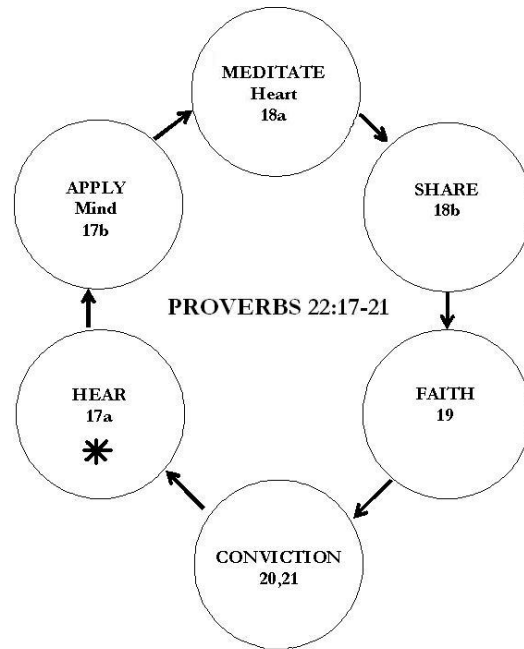
Notice those verbs? Can you visualize the God who does each of these for us? Can you see some promises here? Can you see something to give thanks for? Is there an application you can find that deals with your own life?

Third, look for sequences or flowing ideas. The question is, "Is there a sequence here?" for example, look at Proverbs 22:17-21. The sequence goes like this:" Hearing the Word leads to application which leads to meditation which leads to sharing which leads to faith which leads to conviction which leads me back to hearing the Word for more."

In writing down thoughts, questions and answers; don't be afraid to draw pictures or patterns of ideas. For example, a flow chart on the following page illustrates Proverbs 22:17-21 graphically.

Ask questions about what you are reading. "Inquire" of the Lord. Do not be afraid to tell Him if there is something you do not understand. He has no problem handling your honesty. It will be thrilling for you to experience His "flooding the eyes of your heart with light"! (Ephesians 1:18).

QUESTIONISE: "Is there a sequence?"



III. ACTUALIZE

The third method of meditation is actualizing. To actualize a passage means to personalize it; to take the Word and make it intimately applicable to your own life. David said in Psalm 119:59, 60, "I considered my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies. I hastened and did not delay to keep Your commandments". James 1:22 tells us, "be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.". Unless we make a practice of actualizing the scriptures we fall into self-deception. There are various ways to actualize the scriptures.

1. One way to actualize the scripture meditatively is to ask personal questions like: "How can this verse be applied to my attitudes," or "How can I apply this verse in my life today?" Put your name in the verse. For example, Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear." To actualize this, you could put your name in the verse like this: "John, let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth today. Be sure everything you have to say today, John, is good for the edification of others according to the needs of the moment, that what John says may give grace to those who hear." Try this with one of your favorite verses, or with the verse you do not particularly wish to apply!

B. Another way to actualize verses is to ask several questions that relate the passage to your own life. Some people prefer to this method as the "Reporter's Style" for it may use the reporter's style of asking questions. For example:

WHO could I share this with who will help me follow through?

WHAT does the bible teach on this subject?

WHERE does my life demonstrate that this scripture is/is not in my life?

HOW could I apply this truth to my situation today?

WHEN do I plan to have this application completed?

Writing down special insights as they come is an important part of this method; so make generous use of a pen and paper. Both the Questionize and Actualize methods can be done adequately in a shorter period of time (10 to 20 minutes) than the visualize method.

Sharing your time in meditation with others is another way to help you actualize and personalize the Word to your life on a regular basis. True meditation is evidenced by a change of heart and a change of character.

SUMMARY

These visualization methods totally immerse us in the object of our meditation – Jesus. Our emotions are stirred, and our wills respond to obedience. Our motivations are purified and intensified. You can see why Jesus used parables – picture stories. Those with whom He shared these stories would involve themselves totally in the story, not just intellectually or philosophically. This kind of meditation will transform your life, as with Loyola's, and the thousands of Jesuits who were pioneers in reaching people for Christ throughout the world.

In review then, visualization is the activity of imagining a non-didactic portion of Scripture in a personal way. There are three phases to this method. Each phase should be carefully followed. The five senses could be acquired progressively if necessary. Practice increases your comfort with these types of meditation.

Methods of meditation may be done alone or in a small group. The group should split up for Phase I and when using the method(s) of meditation, but should meet back again to share discoveries about Christ and about themselves after the meditation of thirty to sixty minutes. In meditating, expect to meet intimately with God, yet don't be disappointed if you don't have a dynamic meditation at each attempt.