

Christian Meditation

“I meditation on your precepts and consider your ways.” Ps. 119:15

You have read and studied the passage to discover its meaning to the original readers. Now do you suppose God has anything to say to you based on this text or on daily life as you are living it?

Meditation is thinking about how to put into practice what you have read in Scripture (Josh. 1:8). It is thinking about and appreciating God’s works in creation and salvation (Ps. 143:5; 119:148). Christian meditation is a conversation with God. It includes listening to God and responding to Him in prayer, confession, praise and gratitude. This will begin the most satisfying experience of personally knowing God through Jesus Christ.

A Conversation with God

1. Find a quiet time and place and be aware that you are in the presence of God who loves you very much. Have an unhurried period of quiet; try to avoid any tenseness. (Psalm 37:7)
2. Confess any known sin and seek forgiveness through Christ. Be absolutely honest with yourself in God’s presence. Ask Him to show you things in your life that are contrary to His will. (1 John 1:5-9)
3. Write down on paper everything that comes to mind. (If concerns about things you need to do come to mind, jot them down and continue in your meditation.) You may use the study tips in “Apply Personally”. Listen to your heart — listen to the Holy Spirit. Listen! (1 Samuel 3:10)
4. Surrender every situation, burden, or problem to God: Submit all your disappointments, bitterness, fears, guilt — everything that absorbs your attention. Accept what you cannot change and forgive others as God has forgiven you. (Romans 12:1-2)
5. Believe God’s promises to you: accept them with gratitude. Thank God that He has given you what he has promised, and then remain silent until you have peace. Focus more on God’s love and power, than on your failure and problems. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

“Everyone needs to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. **We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart.** When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Ps. 46:10. Here alone can true rest be found.”

Desire of Ages, p. 363

A Short Guide to Listening to God in Scripture

Overview

One of the most satisfying and transforming experiences a Christian can have is to take a passage of scripture, and through a process of listening to the text, begin to understand the intent of the author, and then hear God speak to him through that passage.

This requires a method, a system, to interact with the passage to extract its rich treasures. Many Bible students suggest three steps in the process of personal Bible study (others combine steps 1 and 2):

1. **Observe.** This first step is a matter of observing the passage, seeing the words and their relationships, asking questions of the text, and seeking answers. We want to discover as clearly as possible what the writer said to his first readers. Rudyard Kipling will help us here:
“I keep six honest serving-men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are What and Why and When; And How and Were and Who.”
2. **Summarize.** Here we are dealing with the big idea – what the author’s major point was. Discover the key ideas the author was trying to make and then summarize them into one main idea.
3. **Apply Personally.** This step involves listening to God – personal application through meditation. We can expect God to reveal changes we need to make in our behavior and attitudes, in our relationships to people, to God and the world. Over time this will result in a life-changing, transforming experience!

Some specific tips for studying the Bible and listening to God are found in the center fold. **PLEASE to not follow these suggestions as rules.** Instead, **read them occasionally** (or when you’re searching for a method for a particular passage you are studying), **then set them aside.** Spend time with just you, God and His Word.

You will not use all the suggestions with any one passage. Your approach will depend on the type of literature, the time you have to study and the size of the scripture portion. The ideal size of a good study passage is a story or a section with one subject (one to a few paragraphs); not usually a verse and not necessarily a whole chapter.

Always study with paper and pencil (or keyboard) – it will help you think! As the Spirit who guided the writers, guides you in your study, your love for God will increase and your life will be changed. Enjoy God's Word!

A Personal Bible Study Method

1. OBSERVE: Understand what the writer said to the first readers. (Select activities that are appropriate for your passage.)

Prayerfully read the passage several times (perhaps in different translations). At first observe the obvious, later each reading may be for a different purpose. Identify the **type of literature**: poetry, prophecy, history, parable, psalm, proverb, letter, etc. Each type will be approached differently.

Scan the book or surrounding chapters to get the bigger picture.

What does the passage tell about **the writer, the first recipients**?

What does the author say is his purpose in writing?

Who are the principal characters?

As you **read the passage several times**:

Look for **key words or ideas**. These may be repeated. You may want to underline or circle key words and phrases with a colored pen or pencil.

Do you **understand the actual words used** – including the names of people and places? (Names often have meaning. You can check them in a Bible dictionary or footnote/margin in your Bible.)

Pick out the **action words** (verbs). What is the subject of each verb?

What **connectives** are used?

contrasts and comparison (*but, however, nevertheless, like, as*).

cause and effect (*therefore, because*).

conclusion or results (*therefore, for, so that, for this reason*).

expressions of time (*then, after this, until, when*).

Ask questions of the passage for understanding.

Ask who, what, when, where, why, how.

Are **figures of speech** used? Simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, irony, etc. How should they be understood?

How is the **material organized**? Sometimes doing an outline or even a structural diagram can help a person see how the sentences or paragraphs are organized. Look for progression of ideas and logical relationships.

What is **the context**: historical, political, geographical, cultural and situational?

What were the local conditions that influenced the writing?

How does this passage fit in the context of what is before or after it? How does it fit in the development of the larger theme of the whole book? – The theme of the whole Bible?

Note the historical, political and cultural setting of the text.

What did it mean to the first readers?

Note the **quotations** or possible allusions to past writings, historical events, locations or people?

Are there promises to claim?

commands to obey?

examples to follow or avoid?

attitudes to change?

praise or gratitude to express

warnings to heed?

sins to confess?

truths to believe?

actions to take or avoid?

a situation or problem to surrender?

Are these backed up with reasons, proofs or results?

For narratives imagine you are there.

Role-play the story in your mind. What do you see, hear, feel, smell? What emotions or attitudes do you sense among those present?

Is there one verse that summarizes the main idea of the larger passage or is the “punch line” of the story?

Three most important questions are:

- What do I learn **about God**, His character and His ways? **Jesus**?
- What do I learn **about myself**?
- What **in my life needs to be adjusted**?

2. SUMMARIZE: Discover the main idea. (What was the author concerned about in the local situation. Summarize and evaluate.)

Why did the writer include this story/passage in the book?

- What is **the theme**? Try to sum it up in a couple of words or a short phrase.
- What do you think the author wanted his **readers to understand**? (List these key points; or paraphrase the passage.)
- Try to describe **the main idea**, the timeless truth, in one sentence.
- Why is this **important**?

3. APPLY PERSONALLY: What is my response? (Listen to God in meditation, reflecting on the meaning of the passage to you personally, and respond in prayer. See suggestions on the next page.)

How does this apply to me? Why is it important for me?

Does this passage remind me of something in my own life?

If you really took the words in this passage seriously, **what difference would it make** in your choices? your beliefs? your actions? your family? your work? your church? How should you live out this principle in daily life?

- Write a decision based on how God is speaking to you. What are you going to do about it?
- Write a life-application paraphrase of the passage including your name.
- Write a prayer to God as your response to His Word to you.
- Is God bringing to mind situations or issues even unrelated to the text.