

## George Muller Document

Excerpt from *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney  
(NavPress, 1991) pp. 73-76.

Puritan pastor and Bible commentator Matthew Henry remarked about Psalm 19:14, David's prayers were not his words only, but his meditations; as meditation is the best preparation for prayer, so prayer is the best issue of meditation. Meditation and prayer go together."<sup>8</sup>

One of the most prolific Puritan preacher-writers was Thomas Manton. In a message on Isaac's meditation in the field (refer to Genesis 24:63), he points directly to meditation as the link between Bible intake and prayer. He wrote,

Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the word and prayer, and hath respect to both. The word feedeth meditation, and meditation feedeth prayer. These duties must always go hand in hand; meditation must follow hearing and precede prayer. To hear and not to meditate is unfruitful. We may hear and hear, but it is like putting a thing into a bag with holes.... It is rashness to pray and not to meditate. What we take in by the word we digest by meditation and let out by prayer. These three duties must be ordered that one may not jostle out the other. Men are barren, dry, and sapless in their prayers for want of exercising themselves in holy thoughts.<sup>9</sup>

William Bates, called "that most classic and cultured of the later Puritan preachers," said, "What is the reason that our desires like an arrow shot by a weak bow do not reach the mark? but only this, we do not meditate before prayer. . . . The great reason why our prayers are ineffectual, is because we do not meditate before them."<sup>10</sup>

Among the best of the practical Puritan writings came from the pen of William Bridge. On meditation he asserted the following:

As it is the sister of reading, so it is the mother of prayer. Though a man's heart be much indisposed to prayer, yet, if he can but fall into a meditation of God, and the things of God, his heart will soon come off to prayer. . . . Begin with reading or hearing. Go on with meditation; end in prayer. . . . Reading without meditation is unfruitful; meditation without reading is hurtful; to meditate and to read without prayer upon both, is without blessing.<sup>11</sup>

A modern British writer, Peter Toon, in his book *From Mind to Heart*, summarizes the teaching of the Puritans on these things:

To read the Bible and not to meditate was seen as an unfruitful exercise: better to read one chapter and meditate afterward than to read several chapters and not to meditate. Likewise to meditate and not to pray was like preparing to run a race and never leaving the starting line. The three duties of reading Scripture, meditation, and prayer belonged together, and though each could be done occasionally on its own, as formal duties to God they were best done together.<sup>12</sup>

About two hundred years after the Puritans came the man recognized as one of the most God-anointed men of prayer ever seen by the world, George Muller. For two-thirds of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century he operated an orphanage in Bristol, England. Solely on prayer and faith, without advertising his need or entering into debt, he cared for as many as two thousand orphans at a

single time and supported mission work throughout the world. Millions of dollars came through his hands unsolicited, and his tens of thousands of recorded answers to prayer are legendary.

Anyone who has heard the story of George Muller ponders the secret of his effectiveness in prayer. Although some argue for one thing as Muller's "secret" and others argue for another, I believe we must ultimately attribute his unusually successful prayer life to the sovereignty of God. But if we look for something transferable from his life to ours, my vote goes for something I've never heard credited as his "secret."

In the spring of 1841, George Muller made a discovery regarding the relationship between meditation and prayer that transformed his spiritual life. He described his new insight this way:

Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer after having dressed in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing was to give myself to the reading of God's Word, *and to meditation on it*, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, *whilst meditating on it*, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.

I began therefore to *meditate* on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning. *The first thing I did*, after having asked in a few words of the Lord's blessing upon His precious Word, *was to begin to meditate on the Word of God*, searching as it were into every verse to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.

The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, *but to meditation*, yet it turned almost immediately more or less to prayer. When thus I have been for a while making confession or intercession or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my *meditation*. *The result of this is that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation*, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart.

The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer.... But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour on my knees before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then really began to pray.

I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word. It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point.... And yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is to obtain food for his inner man.

Now what is food for the inner man? *Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water passes through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it and applying it to our hearts.*

When we pray we speak to God. Now prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season therefore when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by *meditation on the Word of God*, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us. We may therefore profitably *meditate* with God's blessing though we are ever so weak spiritually; nay, the weaker we are, the more we need *meditation* for the strengthening of our inner man. Thus there is far less to be feared from wandering of mind than if we give ourselves to prayer without having had time previously for *meditation*.

I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow believers to ponder this matter. By the blessing of God, I ascribe to this mode the help and strength which I have had from God to pass in peace through deeper trials, in various ways, than I have ever had before; and having now above fourteen years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it.<sup>13</sup>

How do we learn to pray? How do we learn to pray like David, the Puritans, and George Muller? We learn to pray by meditating on Scripture, for meditation is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer.

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8. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, n.d.), vol. 3, page 255.
9. Thomas Manton, *The Works of Thomas Manton* (reprint, Worthington, PA: Maranatha Publications, n.d.), pages 272-273.
10. William Bates, *The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates*, arr. and rev. W. Farmer (reprint, Harrisburg, PA: Sprinkle, 1990), vol. 3, page 130.
11. William Bridge, *The Works of the Reverend William Bridge* (reprint, 1845; reprint, Beaver Falls, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), vol. 3, pages 132, 154.
12. Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), page 93.
13. Taken from *Spiritual Secrets of George Muller*, © 1985 by Roger Steer. American rights granted by Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60189. Pages 60-62, emphasis mine.