

**Theme Study: Being Transformed through the Word**  
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In the conversion story of Augustine, he gives the account of hearing some voices (perhaps children playing) saying, “Tolle Lege, Tolle Lege” – “Take and Read, Take and Read.” He picked up a Bible at random and read Romans 13:12-14. It was exactly what he needed to hear. What we need in this case, not for our conversion, but for our spiritual growth, is to “Take and Read.”

The battle in personal and public life is a battle for your heart and mind. Proverbs 23:6 says of the selfish man, “as he thinks within himself, so he is.” What you ponder shapes your whole being for good or ill. Your destiny could be at stake in this matter. An old saying indicates this: Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; and sow a character, reap a destiny. Your destiny starts in the thoughts you think, the acts you do, and so on. You could even say with plenty of illustrations from people’s lives: For want of a thought, an act is lost; for want of an act a habit is lost; for want of a habit a character is lost; for want of a character a destiny is lost.

God’s Word is the source of revelation that is decisive for your thoughts and life. Your mind and heart can be shaped so that you become wise and adequately equipped for life. II Timothy 3:16 starts with the well-known phrase, “All Scripture is inspired (God breathed) by God.” But it is not as often noted that without pondering Scripture we are inadequately equipped for life or ministry. Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be

adequate, equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:16-17). We are also called to destroy “speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to Christ” (II Cor. 3:5). How can this “renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2) be accomplished? By meditating on God’s Word day and night.

The classic Old Testament passage that frames this priority of meditation is Psalm 1. It starts by contrasting the way of the wicked with the way of the righteous. “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers” (Psalm 1:1). Ungodly thoughts, attitudes, and actions are not only wrong but, as we see later in the Psalm, self-destructive. But the accent here is not just what the godly reject but the way that the godly affirm. “But his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in his Law he meditates day and night.” The godly first delight in God’s Law. This certainly can be extended to include all of God’s revelation, but here the Psalmist probably intends the Mosaic Law (as in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). These sections of Scripture that are often neglected and skipped (in reading through the Bible) were the object of his delight. Why? Because they were so right, good, true, solid and appropriate for life.

It goes on to say that in that law he meditates day and night. The Hebrew here for meditate is somewhat difficult to define because it involves a network of ideas. It is the same word used for “plot” in Psalm 2:1. It means to give focused attention to, to reflect upon, to ponder, to contemplate, study, talk or utter. It can mean to mutter or murmur about something. You can imagine the Psalmist repeating over and over again the laws, perhaps memorizing them as well as pondering their truth, goodness, beauty, and meaning. J.I. Packer defines meditation in his book, *Knowing God*:

Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, thinking over, dwelling on, and applying to oneself the various things one knows about the works and ways and purpose, and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communication with God. Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let his truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart. It is a matter of talking to oneself about God and oneself. It is, indeed, often a matter of arguing with oneself, reasoning with oneself out of moods of doubt and unbelief into a clear apprehension of God's power and grace.

This meditation is to continue regularly both during the day and at night. For instance, Psalm 63:6 says, "When I remember Thee on my bed, I meditate on Thee in the night watches." Joshua also writes of meditating "day and night" (Joshua 1:8). Psalm 77:12 says, "I will meditate also of all Thy work, and talk of Thy doings." David prays, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). Meditation is not only regular but directed towards God and deeply aware of His watchful presence.

Those who reject wicked ways and meditate often in God's law will be (like a tree) firmly planted, yielding fruit at the right time, without withering, and experience

true prosperity. By contrast, the wicked (and their philosophical thought) will be driven away like chaff because it is light and lacking in true substance. The Lord knows (cares for, approves) the way of the righteous. The Lord also certainly knows about the way of the wicked but doesn't "know" them in the same intimate approving fashion. Note Jesus' response to some who say, "Lord, Lord" and do miracles in his name is, "I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness." It's not that they don't know about Jesus, but they don't "know" Him, nor He them.

The effect of meditating in God's Word is that it produces a kind of character and destiny in those who practice it. There is a substance and staying power in godly thought that is not present in its opposite. Note Psalm 37:35-36: "(35) I have seen a violent, wicked man spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil. (36) Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found."

Another classic passage (although not so well known) is Isaiah 50:4-9. It accents how the Servant of the Lord is taught by the Lord "morning by morning." The Servant of the Lord in this passage (prefiguring Christ) has been given the "tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word" (Is. 50:4). What a gift! To be able to say the right word at the right time to help one who is struggling. How does the Servant and how do we gain such wisdom? It says, "He awakens me morning by morning, he awakens my ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord God has opened my ear; and I was not disobedient, nor did I turn back" (Is. 50:4-5). Note that the Lord not only teaches the Servant but awakens literally and spiritually so that the Servant can hear. "He awakens me," "He awakens my ear," "God has opened my ear." If we are to learn spiritually it must not be a mere rote exercise, but God by His Spirit must be our teacher.

Out of this time, “morning by morning,” comes wisdom to speak the right word (vs. 4), willingness to obey (vs. 5), the ability to face suffering (vs. 6), and confidence (vs. 7-9). All this flows from time being taught by God “morning by morning.” It is certainly appropriate to be taught “afternoon by afternoon” or “evening by evening” but there is something important in the priority to orient ourselves towards the Lord and interact with Him at the start of our day.

Jesus says in response to one of the temptations in the wilderness, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). It is the Word of God that sustains us day by day. We need to daily feed on His words. The thoughts that we think and the meditations of our hearts are the root of the words we say and acts we do. Jesus says, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree rotten, and its fruit rotten; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:33-37). Note how Jesus connects the fruit of words (and actions) with the heart (or mind). What you say (and what you do) proceeds directly from the heart and mindset that is at the root of your life. The way to form the “tree” or character is by meditation.

Although Jesus does not use the word “meditate,” He does use related words and concepts. First, He says to “consider” the birds, the lilies (Matt. 26:-28). Second, He calls his listeners to “hear.” At the end of the Sermon on the Mount He says, “everyone who

hears these words of mine and puts them into practice” (Matt. 7:24). This hearing involves hearing with the ears but also receiving into the heart. The Greek word for “to hear” is *akuo*. The Greek word for “to obey” is *hupakuo* – hyper-hear. In other words, you can hear or really hear. To really hear is to go through the ears, down into the heart, and out into the hands and feet. Third, Jesus calls for a deeper reading of the Bible. Time and again He says to the religious leaders, “Have you not read?” (Mark 11:7, 12:10), 26, 35-37). Evidently, they had read but not understood the significance of what they were reading. Fourth, Jesus calls us over and over to remember His example, i.e. “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). All these attitudes and actions involve pondering deeply and responding appropriately to the world and the Word. We can take times of meditation; take time to remember God’s character action, words and mercies to us; learn from His Word the Bible, worship Him by meditation on His attributes.

In a passage in Philippians, the apostle Paul calls us to orient our mind and heart to focus on what is good: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything is worthy of praise, let your mind dwell (ponder, meditate) on these things” (Phil. 4:8). I have heard this verse used in a legalistic way to prohibit any interaction (reading, watching, seeing, hearing) with the culture. However, it is all too easy to go to the other side of immersion in culture at the cost of corrupting our minds and hearts.

Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light unto my path.” Without God’s Word we walk in spiritual darkness and are unable to see the world

clearly. The Scriptures function as light in darkness and as glasses letting us see the world with clarity.