

Meditating On the Run

Scripture Meditation for Busy Amateurs

by Jan Johnson

I used to feel impatient when I stood in line at the grocery store or waited to get off a plane. On good days, I zoned out. On bad days, I wondered why the people in the front of the line were so slow.

Things began to change when I took my energy to the interesting place of prayer. In the supermarket line, for example, I often pray Psalm 23: *Thank You, O God, that You are my shepherd. Thank You that I really do have everything I need even when I crave more. Thank You that being in this store is one way You provide those things. I long for still waters and green pastures with You—help me experience that this minute, even while standing in line. I can ignore these magazine covers and gadgets by the checkout line and focus on how You long to restore my soul. . . .*

Immersing ourselves in truth by meditating on Scripture in this informal way results in prayer conversations that can occur anywhere. These back-and-forth prayers are caught up in the language and pattern of Scripture and they become a way God transforms us into Christlikeness. Praying the 23rd Psalm, for example, helps us become people who really do believe that God is providing everything we need (well, almost). Such praying makes us active participants in how God increases our faith.

Meditating on the run is not irreverent, but a way of surrendering more of the moments of life to God and recognizing God as our companion throughout the day. This is important because we pick up things from those we spend time with – perhaps their accent or odd laugh. In the same way, as we hear God speak to us in Scripture (even in non-religious, everyday moments), God's words and ideas invade our mind until we begin thinking more the way God thinks. God's ways rub off on us. We may set out only to fill our time positively, but we find to our surprise that we have interacted with God and sensed more joy within.

When Scripture shapes our thoughts, we are more likely to act on it. Because this meditation occurs in a relaxed everyday setting, the truth is more likely to become embedded in everyday thoughts and actions. Trusting God begins to sound normal, not just something a spiritually elite person would do. Having God speak to us through Scripture outside a church or Bible study setting makes it more likely that whatever we do in word or deed, we'll do to the glory of God. Working with it in odd moments such as waiting in line is a concrete way of affirming that I really want God to permeate my life.

On a certain leg of my morning bike ride, for example, I started praying for several friends. Then I decided I wanted to pray more substantively so I memorized phrases from *Paul's* prayer in Ephesians 3:16-21. I liked praying for these people that they would be strengthened with power through the Spirit in their inner being (instead of feeling so incapable and ineffective), that they would be rooted and grounded in love (in every difficult conversation), that they would grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is (and pass that love to others). In fact, I began praying it for me!

GETTING STARTED

How do we start such praying-meditating on the run? Take a passage that impresses you or meets a deep need. Maybe you've heard it taught in a class or preached in a sermon. You can start by copying it or printing it from your computer in 20 point type. The large print works well not only because it's easier to read but because there's something about letting the eyes feast on the individual words and drink them in slowly.

While hiking, I often carry a printed out passage with me to ponder as I move along. I may add to it or rephrase it by substituting words that fit me:

If an ~~army~~ (questioner/grouchy person) besieges me, my heart shall not fear.

If ~~war~~ (intimidating people/a headache) breaks out against me, even then will I be confident.

Working through Psalm 27:3 this way helps me not to be defensive or take things personally. It frees me to love the person in front of me without fear of what he or she is up to. Then I pause on my bike and pick up the next line.

Such conversation with God all day long brings a new quality to life. One feels that God really is a constant companion, the Shepherd of one's soul.

MEDITATING WHEN CRABBY

Meditating on the run allows us to let God change our attitudes when we're grumpy or lacking energy. It lets Scripture take us back to what Jesus asks of his disciples. This happened to me once when riding with two friends on a long trip. They explained how I had to sit in the back the entire time since the passenger easily got carsick but then they began to converse about situations that didn't involve me. I felt excluded. I tried asking a question or two, but I was clearly not part of the conversation.

I felt myself falling into an abyss of judgment. I knew if I spoke up, I'd be unbearably resentful. So I tried to pray for them, but I ended up whining to God. So I dug out my dog-eared, coffee-stained sheet of paper on which was printed the Sermon on the Mount. In a flash, I read these words: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Mt 7:1-2).

Though I knew these words by heart, I needed to see them in print. It was such a relief to read the truth I knew in the midst of my crabbiness. Yes! I breathed. It was as if I could hear God's voice – gentle but firm – reminding me of who I am committed to be. Clutching my paper, I began to pray silently: "I will not judge, O God. I don't want to be condemned the same way I'm condemning others. I want to be generous and overflowing in how I measure events."

Then I read, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (vs. 3). The word *look* stood out to me. I prayed: "Yes, O God, I am *looking* long and hard at the behavior of the folks in the front seat so I can judge them. I confess to you that I *look* for error! I even do it to people I am committed to serve."

Then the words *sawdust* and *plank* leapt out at me. "Oh God, I confess to you that I am so obsessed with finding sawdust. I am the Sawdust Queen, yet so weighed down with planks in my eyes." I sat riveted for several miles, gazing out the window at the beautiful hills. I'm not a I'd been a country-western music fan, but I almost broke out into a prayer song about being the Sawdust Queen.

My prayers of repentance and confession melted into surrender and peace. Still clutching Jesus' words, I prayed, "I, the recovering Sawdust Queen, am greatly loved by you, O God, who skillfully eases planks out of my eyes." As the miles passed, I began to feel peaceful. I knew

then that I could ask my friends to include me in the conversation without resentment. I felt generous and kind so I knew my words would come out that way.

God's words call out to us to come home in prayer to find freedom from fear and resentment. When we're finished, we find that Christ dwells in our hearts another layer more deeply.

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(Quotations taken from New International Version.)

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