



Fancy

MEDITATING

“On the Run”

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 check-out line and focus on how you long to restore my soul...

Meditating 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 changes us. Praying the Twenty-third Psalm, for example, helps us become people who 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 nonreligious, 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 intend 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. Working with Scripture 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 a prayer in Ephesians. I liked praying

for these people that they would be strengthened in their inner being (instead of feeling so incapable and ineffective), that they would be rooted and grounded in love (in every difficult conversation), and that they would comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ (and pass that love to others; 3:16-21). In fact, I began praying this for me, too!

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 also 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:

"Though an army (questioner/grouchy person) encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war (intimidating people/a headache) rise up against me, yet I will 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.

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