



MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH

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Spring 2020 Lenten Studies

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Focus on Meditation

Remember: Lent is a period of preparation and fasting that has been observed since the first century. It is not mentioned or commanded in scripture. It was a time to prepare candidates for baptism and for believers to repent, readying themselves to celebrate the new holy day that we now call “Easter.” It was officially established in the fourth century (ca. 325 CE/AD) by the Council of Nicea. Jewish church founders felt that the church should have times of holy reflection in the same way that the Jewish and other religious communities did. Remember that Christianity is a fairly new religious faith, much younger than the other three of the world’s four largest religions: Hindu (the oldest), Judaism (tied to Abraham), Islam (tied to Abraham’s son, Ishmael). Special note: while Islam is ancient, the Nation of Islam wasn’t founded until 1930.

As Passover celebrates the crucial event in Israel’s history – God’s decision to pass over houses of Hebrews during the final ten plagues of Egypt (Exodus 12:1-23) – Easter celebrates THE crucial event in the church’s history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Observation of Lent is totally voluntary and is meant to help build discipline, devotion and closeness to God. It is a time for prayer, meditation and fasting.

We spend a lot of time and energy thinking about, talking about and developing strategies for fasting. We speak a lot about prayer. But what about meditation? People of all faiths, and even those who don’t believe in God meditate. Christian meditation is unique because of its motivations (why), focus (on what), and results (end goal).

- 1) The first biblical example of a person meditating is Isaac in Genesis 24:63.**
- 2) The first commandment about meditating is Joshua 1:6-8**
- 3) Meditation is an activity of the heart that can be pleasing to God.**
Psalm 19:14, Psalm 104:34
- 4) It is the mark of a person who wants to please God. See Psalm 1:1, 2**
- 5) Meditation is most mentioned in the Psalms.**
Psalm 1: 2; 4:4; 48:9; 77:12; 143: 5; 145:5
- 6) THE Psalm that speaks most about meditation is Psalm 119.**
Psalm 119: 15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97-99, 148
- 7) Peace is one of the results of meditating.** Isaiah 26:3, Philippians 4:7

Three Christian meditation techniques (contemplative practices) you might try are:

- **Contemplative prayer** — which usually involves the silent repetition of sacred words or sentences, with focus and devotion. It could be something as simple, “I come to you God because you are a” and develop a list of characteristics that you want to think about when you think about God. Remember, the goal is get closer to him, so thinking “You are Immanuel, God with us” might be better than “You are high and holy.” From a Biblical point of view, this may address that meditation/speaking connection.
- **Contemplative reading** — or simply “contemplation”, which involves thinking deeply about the teachings and events in the Bible. Last summer, we learned a practice called “Lectio Divino.” This is where you read a passage (I would suggest no more than ten verses, or one complete scene) at least three times, praying as and between readings. First, read the passage either silently or aloud. Then take two minutes to meditate on what you read. What words, thoughts or images come to you or stick with you. Read it again. This time it should be aloud. Think about every word. Notice any verbs, adjectives, powerful images. Take two minutes to reflect on, think about, meditate on what you read and anything that might pop up. Read a third time. Close in prayer, thanking God for whatever He showed you and determining to carry whatever you take away. It might be a good idea to journal the experience.
- **“Meditating with God”** — a silent meditation, this one is more “mystical,” focusing your mind, heart, soul and body on being in the presence of God. Think about, for instance, envisioning God in your hands and in your feet. Didn’t the old folks used to say, “God has no hands but our hands”? Envisioning God taking over your mind. Aren’t we supposed to have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2: 5)?

A meditative Bible website/app is *pray-as-you-go.org*. It follows the international lectionary (schedule of readings followed by most non-Protestant faiths). Most sessions are 10-15 minutes.