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**Core Seminar**

**Meeting with God**

**Class 3: Meeting with God in His Word, Part 2**

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**Introduction**

 Welcome to Week 3 of the Meeting with God Core Seminar. Again, my name is Jon Malone and the other teacher for this course is Josh Coover. We’re glad you’re here. Let’s start with a quick review of the past two weeks.

**Summary**

In Week 1, we considered two assumptions:

 *First* -- That it is possible to meet with God; and

 *Second* -- That meeting with God is something that we should do, even on a daily basis.

Last week, we began our discussion of *how* we can meet with God, and we focused on what Donald Whitney calls “Bible intake”; that is, how we meet with God through His Word, the Bible. Last week, we spent our time discussing *hearing* and *reading* God’s Word.

We’ve also considered the value of meeting with God in a quiet time over the last two weeks. And, as you can see on the front of your handout, we learned that the “quiet time is part of the day that we set aside for the worship of God, for the reading of the Word of God and for fellowship with God so that we would know Him more, know ourselves in light of Him, and know the world according to His perspective.”

It’s during our quiet time where we can take full advantage of all five components of Biblical intake, listed on your handout:

* 1. Hearing
	2. Reading
	3. Studying
	4. Memorizing
	5. Meditating

The illustration of the hand shows us why exercising these five components are important. If we only do one or two of these things, we can’t possibly hold onto God’s word. But when we utilize all five of these components, we have a firm grasp on the Word.

Last week, we considered the first two components – hearing God’s Word, and reading God’s Word. Today, let’s take some time to examine the other three: studying, memorizing, and meditating.

If we are to grow in godliness, we need to begin to understand and apply *all* of these tools. Let’s pray for our time together this morning.

**Pray**

**Let’s open God’s Word to our key text for this morning, Psalms 1: 1-3**

*“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers.”*

This is what we want to be. People who are like trees planted near streams of water that yield fruit. When the storm comes, we want to be rooted so firmly in God’s word that we are not shaken. We want to grow strong in order to be prepared to weather the storms of life. We want to provide good fruit for the hungry who may approach our branches, even if they don’t know what kind of nourishment they need.

And we should be sure that the Lord *will* make us strong through his word. Christians with little to gain on earth and much to lose have testified to this truth throughout the ages -- their stories fill the Bible, our church bookstall, and the library across the hallway. What’s more, if we are honest about our own life experiences, we have first-hand proof of this truth. My walk with God would be non-existent were it not for the constant reminders and refreshment that His Word brings. As Jesus says in Matthew 4:4, “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Psalm 1:3 also raises an important distinction. It speaks to the benefits of meditation, something we will consider in more depth in a few minutes. It says “in all that he does, he prospers”. When we think about prospering, we need to be careful. The Bible is speaking here not of health, wealth, or prosperity according to the world’s definition, but of *God’s* idea of prosperity. That’s really important to keep in mind as we think about meeting with God through His Word. We want to prosper according to His definition, not ours.

Let’s now take a closer look at our three components for today.

**I. Studying the Bible**

Donald Whitney describes it like this: *“If reading the Bible can be compared to cruising the width of a clear, sparkling lake in a motorboat, studying the Bible is like slowly crossing that same lake in a glass-bottomed boat.”* Crossing the lake in a motorboat gives us a sweeping overview of the lake, and we can get an idea of its depths from just being out on the boat. It’s important to get that overview. But the glass-bottom boat of studying the Bible takes you beneath the surface for the clarity and detail that would be otherwise impossible for those who just pass by quickly.

We looked at Nehemiah 8 last week as an example of *hearing* God’s Word, when Ezra read and taught publicly. Ezra himself provides us with an important example of *studying*, as well.

Ezra 7:10 -- *“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”*

Ezra had come to Jerusalem to teach the people the laws of God and to lead them in the worship of God. His heart was set on studying, living out, and teaching God’s law to His people. Ezra’s passion was for the Word of God. Ezra 7:9 tells us that *“the good hand of his God was on him.”* It pleases God when His people have hearts devoted to His word.

***But how do we study God’s word?***

Studying the Bible gets us into the depths of God’s word. But how do we plumb those depths? Commentaries, concordances, and seminary degrees certainly help. But they aren’t *necessary* for good study of God’s word.

There are two primary things that you need:

1. **A heart turned toward God in prayer and humility**.

Pray and ask God to give you understanding by the Holy Spirit. This is the role that the Holy Spirit plays in our lives. He illuminates our understanding of the Bible. As we discussed last week, Jesus promised in John 14:26 that the Holy Spirit would come, remind us of His words, and teach us from the scriptures. Without God giving us His Spirit to understand, remember, and apply His Word, we will read the Bible no differently than we would a history book. In your study of the Bible, rely on the Holy Spirit to help you understand what you read.

We should also be humble enough to ask questions. This is especially important if you’re pretty familiar with the Bible, because often we can get trapped in the thought that “I’ve read this before” and assume we can’t learn anything else. Let’s turn to Romans 11:33-36 to see how Paul approached meeting with God. This passage will help us to think about our own knowledge of God’s Word.

Read Romans 11:33-36 together

 Paul, the author of this passage, probably knew Christ better than any other man living at that time and had even encountered Christ personally on the road to Damascus. He knew God intimately, and yet it is clear from this passage that He was consistently amazed and astounded at the person and works of God. If Paul, who knew God so well, could speak this way of God, may we never think that we can grow tired of God’s Word.

When we come to study God’s Word, we should come humbly and prayerfully.

1. **A Bible**.

Everything you need is in the text. Using the Bible to study the Bible is called inductive study. This kind of study brings you directly to the word of God apart from someone else’s understanding or interpretation. It involves three skills:

1. Observation
2. Interpretation
3. Application

Let’s spend a few minutes considering each of these three skills.

**Skill 1: Observation**

As you read through a passage of scripture with the intention of studying it, train yourself to ask yourself several questions. **Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?** These questions are the foundation of observation and will help us to interpret the text better.

This is essentially the method that is used here at CHBC for our Wednesday night Bible studies. Let’s try it with Romans 12:1.

**Romans 12:1**

*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”*

Let’s use those questions quickly to study this verse.

***Who is saying this? Who is speaking?***

(Answer: Paul)

***Who is he speaking to?***

(Answer: Paul’s brethren, the Christians in Rome – we can also see this from Romans 1:7)

***What is he saying? Just the words here, not the meaning yet. Is he asking a question? Giving a command? An encouragement? A rebuke?***

(Answer: He is encouraging them by way of a command to live holy lives – pointing them back to what we read in Romans 11)

(side note: I’m leaving out the when and where because they aren’t essential to understanding this verse and we would have covered them at the beginning of the letter if we had been studying the whole book)

***Why is he telling them this - to live holy lives?***

Because this is what the Christians were called to do. This was their spiritual service of worship to God; living holy and sacrificial lives.

***How does he make this appeal?***

He makes this appeal *“by the mercies of God.”* Paul knew that *he* could not command spiritual things of people. He relied on God’s authority and grace. Paul wanted to make it exceedingly clear to his audience -- as he so often did -- that he was relying on God’s power, not his own.

OK – if you’re thinking that you don’t know how to study or you’ve never done it before, notice that for that one verse it only took us a few minutes to go through and answer some questions to help us understand the text better. You don’t have to be a rocket scientist to study the Bible. God gave us His word and the Holy Spirit so that we could know Him. He is not trying to confuse us by His word. He has made it accessible.

These questions form the first step of studying the Bible – *observation.* Observing allows us to understand what the verse says.

The second skill of ***interpretation*** helps us understand what the verse *means*.

Here are three basic guidelines that help us in interpreting God’s word under point 2 on p. 2 of your handout. These are taken from a Precept Ministries publication on inductive Bible study.

***First guideline of interpretation: remember that context rules***

Think about the verse in light of the surrounding verses. As you study, ask yourself: “Is my interpretation of a passage of scripture consistent with the theme, purpose and structure of the book where it is found?” Even though it’s very easy to do, we should never take a scripture out of context to make it say what we want it to say. A good way to keep from doing this is to read the entire chapter or book before you focus on a studying a particular passage or verse.

***Second rule of interpretation: always seek the full counsel of God***

Interpret God’s word against other scripture. When you know God’s word thoroughly, you will not accept a teaching simply because someone has used a couple of isolated verses to support their idea. Knowing the whole of scripture is your safeguard against false teaching and false doctrine. This is why we read and study. There are times in our lives when we may not need to sit down and study every verse as much as taking time to simply read so that we can have a good foundation of the broader scope of scripture.

As we discussed last week, a good practice is to read the Bible in its entirety every year so that you’re constantly confronted with the Bible’s full scope. This takes time! If that’s too ambitious for you at this point, a good way to start would be to expand your horizon to include less popular books like Lamentations, Nahum, Revelation or Obadiah. Last fall, Mark preached through Lamentations. It was a sobering and painful reminder of the consequences of disobedience, and yet holds such sweet passages expressing hope in God, as well. Remember 2 Tim. 3:16 – that “*all* scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.” Let’s seek to know all of it.

***Third rule of interpretation: look for the single meaning of the passage***

Always try to understand what the author had in mind when you interpret a portion of the Bible. Don’t twist its message to support a meaning that isn’t clearly taught. While this may be easy to do, and selfishly makes us feel good, it is dangerous to our souls. We need to interpret the Bible as it was intended to be interpreted.

The final piece of studying is ***application***. Knowing what a verse says and what it means should help us to shape our lives around its teaching. We should not be people who gain an understanding of God and then do nothing. Instead, we should strive to resemble those people described in James 1:22. *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”*  If we hear the word or read it or study it and don’t do anything about it, we are deceiving ourselves. *“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.”* Can you imagine looking at yourself in the mirror every day and then forgetting who you are once you leave the mirror? Let’s not be people who study God’s word and then forget what we’ve just learned, or forget to think about how it affects us. God’s Word should and does change us.

*Question*: which of the three steps (observation/interpretation/application) of Bible study do you find easiest or most difficult?

As the years pass in my walk with God, the temptation for me right now is to observe and interpret, without really applying the text to my life. I know how to read the Word in context and find the main point(s), but I’m often hesitant to do the deeper reflective work to apply it carefully.

Along with studying, an important and necessary means for receiving the word of God in our minds and lives is *memorization*. That’s our second area of Bible intake for today.

**II. Memorization**

Committing the Word of God to memory helps us in many ways. Knowing God’s Word by heart means that we can think on it anywhere we go. All the benefits of the Bible, and ultimately knowing God Himself, are at the forefront of our minds.

Scripture itself tells us of many of the benefits of memorizing God’s word. Let’s look at a few.

***Benefit 1: Victory over sin***

***Psalm 119:11-13 (read together)***

*“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”*

This is *not* a formula. It does not mean that if we memorize 10 verses this month, then when we’re tempted, we’re guaranteed victory over sin. It *does* mean that by filling our minds and hearts with God’s word we may be less deceived by sinful temptation, and that certainly when we’re tempted we’ll have the word of the Lord there as a reminder of what is really good and right. Consider what Jesus taught: *“Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks* (Matt. 12:34)” and *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Matt. 6:21).” As we read during the service last week from Mark 7:20-23, Jesus taught that what defiles a person is what comes from within us. We fight those desires by filling our hearts and minds with God’s Word.

***Benefit 2: Victory over Satan***

Satan is real. As 1 Peter 5:8 says, he prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking those whom he may devour. We are called to be like Jesus, so what did he use to defeat the devil? Lightning? Cosmic firearms? No, Jesus defeated Satan with scripture. We spoke of Matthew 4:4 last week, when Jesus told the devil, *“It is written, man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* Satan cannot stand against the truths of scripture.

***Benefit 3: Preparation for witnessing and counseling***

Scripture memory can prepare us for unexpected gospel conversations.

Proverbs 25:11 says, *“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”* It is good and right when we’re ready with the word of God when it needs to be spoken.

I’ve experienced all three of these benefits of scripture memory. When I was growing up, my siblings and I were in a scripture memory program at our church. Even though my motivation for memorizing scripture has changed – it isn’t for the candy anymore – I’ve seen fruit in my own life and in ministry to others in the foundation of scriptural knowledge that that investment by my parents has borne in my life. Just this week, I had a conversation with a brother who was struggling with sin and wanting to repent. I was able to recall a passage about godly repentance, and in fact it’s the sermon text for this morning from 2 Corinthians. Memorizing the scripture bears good fruit.

So, we’ve seen some of the benefits of scripture memory. Let’s talk about some of the challenges of trying to do it.

What if you don’t have a good memory?

 Memorizing scripture is not about having a good memory. It’s about fighting for our souls. We remember what’s important to us. Our phone numbers. Our passwords. Mom’s or spouse’s birthday. Our way back home. Movie quotes. My wife has a photographic memory for text, but I don’t. It’s easier for her to memorize, but it’s equally fruitful in both of our lives.

What if you’ve never memorized scripture before?

John Piper provides us with a few practical tips:

 *1. Pray* – that the Lord would help you to desire the Word, understand it, and remember it.

 *2. Set aside time* – just like reading and studying, you won’t do it if you haven’t made time. Use your commute!

 *3. Repeat the text* – Ten times read, ten times said.

 *4. Review* *the text*– Do it again the next day, and the next day, etc., etc.

Let’s add two more:

1. Have a plan – just like with reading, if you don’t have a plan to memorize something specific, it can be hard to be consistent
2. Memorize word for word – each individual word is important to get right. Again, we’re talking about God’s word.

Ultimately, by God’s grace, memorizing God’s word will help us meditate on it. Meditation on scripture is a lost discipline in this age. But the Puritans warned that, “If you continue to neglect meditation, it will dampen or destroy your love for God.” What then does meditation mean?

**III. Meditation**

If you look up the word “meditate” in the dictionary, you may find the following definition *“to engage in thought or contemplation; to reflect.”* That’s a helpful definition, especially in light of the common idea of meditation today. If you Google the word “meditate,” most of the sites will be focused on one of four things: (i) trying to relax yourself; (ii) meditating for good health; (iii) Buddhist meditation techniques; or (iv) the healing power of meditation. The Wikipedia entry defines meditation as *“a mental discipline by which one attempts to get beyond the conditioned, ‘thinking’ mind into a deeper state of relaxation or awareness.”* This is *not* our goal when we talk about biblical meditation.

Our goal in meditation is not to *empty* our minds, but to *fill* them with the truth of God. Biblical meditation focuses on the objective truth of who God is as revealed through his Word. In Joshua 1:8, God commanded Joshua, *“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”* Psalm 1, which we saw earlier today, speaks of meditating day and night on the law of the Lord.

The Puritan Thomas Watson defined meditation as *“a holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truths of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder upon them and apply them to ourselves.”*

Edmund Calamy wrote, *“A true meditation is when a man doth so meditate of Christ as to get his heart inflamed with the love of Christ; so meditate of the Truths of God, as to be transformed into them; and so meditate of sin as to get his heart to hate sin.”* May the Lord grant us to be changed in this way as we meditate on His word.

We live in a time that is so distracting and full of information that carving out time to meditate with careful focus on the truths of God is difficult. To grow in godliness, we have to discipline ourselves. Sometimes we just need to turn off the computer or the TV or the mobile device, get alone with God, and turn our minds and our hearts toward his truth. When we live distracted lives, it’s much easier to be tempted to believe the lies of Satan about God and about ourselves. Remember Jesus’ prayer from last week in John 17:17 – *“Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth”*. God’s word is our only reliable source of truth. We should meditate on it!

The best way to meditate may be to choose a passage or verse or idea from your quiet time that impacts you the most as you read or study. Once you’ve selected a passage, there are several ways to engage yourself on a deeper level. It might help to rewrite the verse or passage in your own words. Some find that writing is their most helpful form of meditation. Or, you might prefer to just read and re-read the passage over and over, that you might remember it and think on it.

**QUESTION**

What are some other ways that you have found helpful to engage in meditation?

 (possible answers)

1. Pray through the text – both for yourself and others – meditation fuels prayer
2. Don’t rush – be patient and take your time
3. Sometimes reading less is more

The goal of meditation is to meet with God, so that we might know him, know ourselves, and know God’s world according to His perspective. It’s spending effort and energy to know God’s word in our mind and heart. It’s repeating these thoughts and verses in our minds that we might, as God so often instructs us, remember Him and the truth. With that in mind, let’s be like the psalmist in Psalm 77:11-12 when he says, *“I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.”*

Ultimately, we can think no greater thoughts of God than what He already really is. So, let’s allow scripture to drive us into a deep pondering of God. As the hymn on your handout says, “Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee / Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attending / Ponder anew what the Almighty can do / If with His love He befriend thee”. Ponder who He is. What kind of a God would create the world from nothing? What kind of a God would part the sea to save His people from sure death? What kind of a God would send and sacrifice His own son so that His people could be restored to Him, to glorify and enjoy Him forever? Hannah was right when she said in 1 Samuel 2:2, *“There is none holy like the Lord; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.”*

Questions?

Let’s pray.