



# Shaping the Heart

## Spiritual Formation & the Christian Life

One of the three legs from our proverbial stool will be the focus here. When **knowing** is rightfully calibrated, then the other two legs of **doing** and **being** is shored up and the stool is balanced and stable.

Most, though not all, sinful behavior can be traced to our thought life. That's why Paul says the renewing of our "minds" is so important (**Rom 12:2**). It is the content in our minds that drives the direction of our hearts. We live from the inside out. What we think matters because what goes into our minds comes out in our lives. Sure we all have moments when we act *before* we think, but predominantly our thought life dictates the course of action that we take. There is no better way to rid ourselves of unwholesome thoughts than a steady diet of truth from God.

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### Memorization

Everyone can memorize. It takes no special skill. It's often the case that we don't memorize Scripture, not because we can't, but because we haven't experienced the value of it in our lives. And we don't experience the value of it because we haven't done it. So the cycle goes. However, the difference between memorizing Scripture and knowing Scripture is like the difference between consuming a good meal and merely tasting it. When we consume food, we receive all the benefits of the nutrients and gain strength. **Jer 15:16** says, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart."

#### *The Value of Memorization*

- *Memorization supplies spiritual power over sin.* The Psalmist tells us that he "stored up" God's Word in his heart "that I might not sin against you" (**Ps 119:11**). When tempted, Jesus immediately applied God's Word as the primary weapon against the Devil (**Mt 4:7, 10**; see also, **Eph 6:17**). Moreover, God's Word gives us an authoritative basis to deny false teachings, just as Jesus did when Satan misapplied Scripture (**Mt 4:5-7**).
- *Memorization helps us distinguish right from wrong.* God's Word sheds moral light on life, giving us wisdom and discernment (**Ps 119:24, 104-105; Rom 7:7; 2 Tim 3:16; Heb 4:12**).
- *Memorization provides an objective basis for truth.* Before his crucifixion, Jesus prays "sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (**Jn 17:17**). Paul exhorts Timothy to rightly handle the "word of truth" (**2 Tim 2:15**) and the Psalmist exclaims "the sum of your word is truth" (**Ps 119:160**). Scripture is not just subjectively inspiring; it is objectively true because it is breathed out by the God of truth.
- *Memorization demonstrates we value God's thoughts.* God told Moses and us to take his word seriously. **Deut 6:6-9** reads, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Though this passage is intended to be applied metaphorically and not literally, the notion is clear that God's Word must permeate our thoughts, our attitudes, and our behavior.
- *Memorization emboldens our witness for Christ.* Peter quoted from Scripture when testifying to God's grace at Pentecost (**Acts 2:14-40**). In Pisidian Antioch Paul quoted Scripture repeatedly showing the truth of Christ as Lord and Messiah (**Acts 13:13-41**). When attacked by the Jews one week later, Paul again quoted from Scripture to substantiate God's truth (**Acts 13:44-47**; see also **Acts 4:31; 16:32; 2 Cor. 10:4-5**).
- *Memorization sustains us against a world that resists God.* Although **Ps 1:1-3** speaks to meditation, the implantation of God's Word via memorization is presupposed, and is a beautiful picture of the stability and prosperity that the Word of God brings. "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers."



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### **Meditation**

Meditation is the prayerful, willful, and persistent focus upon the word of God or the works of God resulting in a sense of wonder and amazement at the movement of God.

Consider:

MEDITATION IS <b>NOT</b> ...	MEDITATION <b>IS</b> ...
emptying your mind of all thought	filling your mind with God's thoughts
visualizing your own reality	focusing upon God's reality found in Scripture
fantasizing about your hopes & dreams	resting in God's faithful promises from his Word
involving only one person: you	involving two persons: you and God
passively waiting on a thought or feeling to be revealed to you	actively pursuing God's thoughts and feelings already revealed to you in Scripture

### *The Value of Meditation*

- *Meditation first and foremost moves the soul to gain spiritual insight into the wonders of God's character.* Meditation gives us spiritual insight that moves the mind from admiration to adoration of God's excellencies, perfections, and beauty. This Spirit-ed illumination does not stop at the corridor of the mind but moves deep into the caverns of the soul where authentic spiritual worship takes place. "My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night" (Ps 63:5-6).
- *Meditation helps re-center our focus and recall God's activity in creation and redemption.* "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands" (Ps 143:5). Or again, Ps 77:12, "I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds."
- *Meditation seeks to align our hearts with God's heart.* "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight" (Ps 19:14; also 104:34).
- *Meditation keeps us focused on God rather than our defense during times of trouble.* Jesus instructed his disciples not to spend undue time on their response to persecution (Lk 21:14-15; see also, Ps 119:23).
- *Meditation on God's Word, more than any other discipline, facilitates obedient living.* True success (not always materially, but certainly spiritually and morally) is promised to those whose thoughts are governed by God's thoughts. Joshua 1:7-8 explicitly affirms a direct connection between meditation and prosperity. "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." The goal of meditation is obedience and the result of obedience is blessing (Jn 13:17). If you're not experiencing spiritual blessings, then look at the obedient factor in your life. If you're failing in obedience, then take a serious look at your thought life!



# *Shaping the Heart*

## *What AAA Teaches Us about Spiritual Formation*

I once heard an interview on NPR with an executive from AAA regarding the dangers of cell phone use while driving. AAA reported that texting while driving is the “mother of distractions” because the activity involves eyes off, mind off, and hands off the driving task. When these three faculties are disengaged from driving for 2 seconds or more, the likelihood of an accident is greatest. I feel a spiritual lesson coming.



### **Eyes Off**

The writer of Hebrews admonishes we must “run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb 12:2-3). What comes into our view matters. Just a 2-second glance away from Jesus and the likelihood of an encounter with sin is significantly increased. Want to stay strong in faith and not lose heart? Eyes on Jesus!

### **Mind Off**

When our minds wander, we can quickly follow pathways that lead to sinful thoughts. Scripture says our minds matter. “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—**think about such things**” (Philip 4:8). Just a 2-second thought away from excellence and the likelihood of a fatal engagement with sin is greatest. Want to purify your thoughts? Mind on excellence!

### **Hands Off**

If our faith is not practical but merely intellectual, then Scripture says it is lifeless and useless. We must maintain a hands-on faith and put into practice the reality of our beliefs. “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (Jam 2:14-17). Just two seconds of hands-off biblically endorsed behavior and the likelihood of us having a head-on collision with sin is equal to 100%! Want to have fewer regrets? Put your faith to work!