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# ILLUMINER

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## Meditation for Biblical Spiritual Formation



**Rev. Dr. Idicheria Ninan Ph.D.**  
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Rev. Dr. Idicheria Ninan served many years as a professor of New Testament at SAIACS, Bangalore. He was formerly the General Secretary of ICPF and principal of IPC Theological Seminary at Kottayam. Currently he is the chairman of ESAF Foundation. His wife and himself live in Bangalore and are engaged in integral mission in India.

**'M**editation' is a spiritual discipline rooted in God's word. It is commanded by God (Josh 1:8), endorsed and explored by the devout over centuries (Ps 1:8) and emulated by Mary the mother of Jesus (Lk 2:19,51). In a sense, all human beings irrespective of religious orientation are prone to meditate.

What then is meditation? There are several Hebrew words that imply the idea of meditation. (śî (a)ḥ, śû (a)ḥ, hāgâ ). The major English versions of the Bible translate their verb forms as 'meditate, complain, muse, talk about, lay thinking, mutter, imagine, pray' etc. Such a range of meaning clearly shows that meditation does not require the suspension of rationality. Thinking (ponder, consider, enquire) demonstrates a searching spirit that compares, contrasts, or reflects upon the implications of an event, a sign, character, puzzle, problem, concept, utterance or text. In this sense meditation takes place as we 'ponder, muse, ruminate' etc.

"Meditation prepares the way for our restless souls to rest in the goodness of God's loving purposes. It is a discipline that can be developed and trained. A good way to start is to read or pray aloud the psalms or scriptures. Repeat the psalm/text several times as contemporary worship leaders repeat the song till the lyrics and music sink into the worshipper aligning herself with the spirituality of the song."

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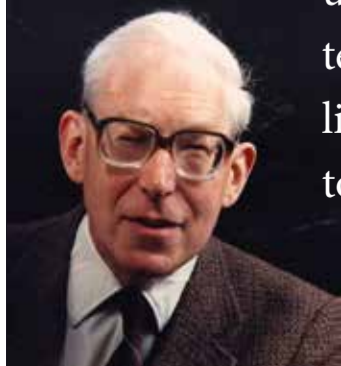
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The healthy Christian is not necessarily the extrovert, ebullient Christian, but the Christian who has a sense of God's presence stamped deep on his soul, who trembles at God's word, who lets it dwell in him richly by constant meditation upon it, and who tests and reform his life daily in response to it.



J.I. Packer



## REGAINING THE LOST IMAGE: THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

***Under the new covenant, contemplation of the Scripture is not just regular reading of the Bible from cover to cover but allowing the Spirit to transform us into the image of Christ.***

**M**editation is an ancient practice integral to several religious traditions. Christianity during the Mediaeval period produced not only scholastics but also profound meditative practices that contributed immensely to the Christian tradition in the form of prayers, liturgies and numerous other spiritual resources. However, the current post-Christian West is heavily drawn towards the meditative practice of Eastern religions, especially Buddhism. The principal reason for this attraction is its emphasis on well-being, specifically its impact on improving mental health. Today, yoga and mindfulness are familiar terms for any Westerner as the most effective means for stress relief and developing a healthy mind.

The goal of all meditations is empowerment that develops one's resilience, effectiveness, and innate strength. Eastern meditative practice achieves this through focusing on the self, beginning with paying attention to the surroundings and eventually focusing on feelings and thoughts of the self, often with the help of auditory or visual aids. Mindfulness is the modern version of meditative practice that helps one to get out of auto-pilot mode to be more intentional, living in the present moment and increasing self-awareness. All these benefits are attractive and appear to be harmless and easily adaptable. Therefore, it is widely accepted by all segments of society and endorsed by institutions and organizations as a therapeutic activity. However, in my view, one of the chief reasons for the fascination towards Eastern meditative practice is because it caters to the spiritual revolution that relinquishes belief and submission to the external, to the supernatural and focuses on the self.

The goal of Christian meditation is radically different from the popular Eastern meditative practice. While Eastern meditation employs self-emptying and

detachment, Christian meditation is self-enriching and attachment to the divine. Eastern meditation focuses on the self, one's feelings and thoughts. In contrast, Christian meditation involves contemplating God's dynamic and living Word that feeds one's mind with divine thoughts. Eastern meditation enables one to achieve temporal relaxation and relief from stress and anxieties; however, it rarely helps one to achieve any ethical or moral renewal that the meditation of God's Word offers. The distorted human nature remains the same despite regular meditation. On the contrary, meditating on God's Word leads to reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (1 Tim 3:16).

The law has always been an independent entity that people listened, read, referred to, and grappled with under the Old Covenant, but it never led to a transformation. In contrast, the New Testament writings testify to the fulfilment of the prophetic vision of Ezekiel and Jeremiah about an era where scripture is not merely read or listened to; rather, the Spirit ingrained it in their heart. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts... No longer will each man teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jer 31:33, 34). "And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezek 36:27). Paul highlights the practical implication of the Spirit's work under the new covenant, "Moses is read with the hearts veiled"... but whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away... we all with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory and transform into his image (2 Cor 3:15-18). Therefore, under the new covenant, contemplation of the Scripture is not just regular reading of the Bible from cover to cover but allowing the Spirit to transform us into the image of Christ.



## REVIVAL, BIBLE, AND THE PRACTICE OF *LECTIO DIVINA*



**"God can be met through a spirit-filled charismatic worship experience and a more contemplative way of scriptural meditation. Both have their role in orienting our desires towards God."**

**D**uring one of the latter days of the 2023 Asbury Outpouring, when the revival discussions were very hot within our Asbury Seminary community, I had a fascinating conversation with my son. Upon witnessing the unusual crowd on our streets for numerous days, my five-year-old son asked me, "Why are there a lot of people?" I replied, "They are here to experience God at the revival." After a few seconds of pondering, he quickly stated a significant statement. He said, "So they do not have Bible at their homes?"

In the recent history of hundred years, with the Pentecostalization of global Christianity, there has been a renewal and desire to experience God more imminently. Hence, the emphasis on experiencing the Holy Spirit through various manifestations has become commonplace. Such a widespread notion made the 2023 Asbury Outpouring global news. However, my son's question also signifies the heart of Christianity, i.e., the emphasis on Scripture for Christian formation.

Even amid the most stimulating revivalist spiritual experience, the Bible remains an indispensable gift from God for a Christian. The Bible represents the translatable Word of God in every tongue and tribe. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the development of the Bible in vernacular languages began to revolutionize how

Christian tradition understood the evangelization of the world and uplifted the dignity of numerous indigenous languages. While other religious traditions propose that divine language is non-translatable and so adherents are to read and recite in a particular dialect, the Christian tradition holds to the revelation that God, the Almighty, can communicate His story to humankind in our own respective language. Every language has been dimmed to be sacred for God to communicate His word to His people. Nonetheless, what makes the Scripture formative is the practice of meditation.

### 'Lectio Divina':

Nowadays, 'meditation' refers to various practices, from techniques designed to promote relaxation to daily exercise. Etymologically, the word 'meditation' comes from the Latin *meditar*, which means 'to meditate, to think over, consider, ponder, have in mind.' Meditation in the early 13th century meant 'discourse on a subject.' Later, during the 14th century, the meaning of the term 'meditation' evolved as the 'act of meditating, continuous calm thought upon some subject.'

In the Western Christian tradition, meditation was linked to scriptural devotion, shaped by the monastic practice of 'Lectio Divina.' Simply put, 'Lectio Divina' was coined to explain the act of reading Scripture that leads to contemplation. The 'Lectio Divina' exercise was primarily addressed to the monks;

however, today, many Christians use this rich Christian tradition. The practice has four stages,

1. The first stage of *Lectio* means reading. At this stage, the reader follows the literal sense of the text. Reading attentively as an act of receiving the Word from God is the critical aspect of *Lectio*.
2. *Meditatio* is the second stage, where the focus is laid on the studious activity of the mind. In this stage, we are finding the meaning of the specific Scripture, 'mulling over' the passage, and trying to think of ways to apply the meaning in our life. At this stage, we receive and accept God's Word for our life.
3. On the third level, called *Oratio*, we respond to God through our words. Using our own words, we pray to God for change in our life, holding on to what we have heard from God through Scripture in the previous stage.
4. *Contemplatio* is the final stage. This is the most profound level where we rest in God due to the power of the word of God. At this stage, we allow ourselves to be in the presence of God with the realization we received from our meditation on the word of God.

Such an approach toward scriptural reading enables us to slow down from our busy life and intentionally train ourselves to hear

God's word holistically. In the *Lectio Divina*, we are called to be present in an embodied sense where our scriptural devotion goes beyond a mere reciting exercise or an intellectual rationale endeavor but is present without bodies. In the final stage, we surrender ourselves to God in stillness, especially considering what we read and think over.

Such a practice of biblical reading only amplifies our desire for God, often refreshed in worship instances of revivals. God can be met through a spirit-filled charismatic worship experience and a more contemplative way of scriptural meditation. Both have their role in orienting our desires towards God.



**Rev. Allan Varghese**  
Kentucky, USA

Rev. Allan Varghese Meloottu is a Doctoral student (Intercultural Studies) at Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, USA. His current research is at the intersection of Pentecostalism, social engagements, and public witness.





# PLUG INTO GOD'S WORD

THE SCRIPTURES WERE MEANT TO BE READ AND HEARD. SHUT THE WORLD OUT FOR A WHILE. PLUG INTO GOD'S WORD.



**T**wo hours and ten minutes. That is how long it took me to get through the seemingly impassable territory of Leviticus. The 'dreaded' book has a reputation for taking down many a determined Christian who faithfully follows their annual Bible reading plan. The secret of my apparent success? I did not read Leviticus. I listened to it.

I plugged in my headphones to listen intently to streaming audio from the YouVersion app. I concentrated on the text. My mind kept recreating various scenes I read about—sacrifices and Jewish cultic rituals. I sketched a mental map of the book. It was good that I was not following the words on a printed page. There was no distraction or an urge to linger about any exceptional passage. However, I find it helpful to have a pen and paper ready to make a quick note or to create an outline as I continue to listen to the Word.

I noticed that not all of Leviticus was about sacrifices. Even in the descriptions of sacrifices and rituals, there was a certain rhythm and order. From there, the book transitions to rules concerning

the priesthood. There are more rules on food, hygiene, and health. At the heart of Leviticus is God's requirement that His people be holy. Detailed instructions regarding sexual morality, atonement, and holidays were, in fact, about God's people partaking in His holiness.

In the early Church, few had access to personal copies of the Septuagint, or the Gospels or epistles. In their meetings, they read the scriptures aloud. The scriptures were meant to be read and heard. Today, the ubiquitous smartphone, and the fancy contraption that delivers audio straight into our ear canals, can revolutionize our interaction with the Bible.

Listening to the audio Bible – or reading the Bible aloud in a small group – will help us take in a whole book in one go. That itself can bring a sea of change in our understanding of biblical books. What if you do not grasp the essence of a book the first time you listen to it? That doesn't matter at all. You only need two or three hours to repeat the exercise! By the time your Christian friends read

one book, in instalments, over a month, you would have actively engaged multiple times with the book of your choice.

Besides, the Word will not be confined to the pages of a book or a device. Its message will simmer in our hearts while we go about our daily activities. The sacred text will keep churning in our minds. At certain times of the day, you may wish to chew the cud, meditate, worship, pray, and obey.

There are other key advantages to listening to God's Word. While we listen, we are forced to retain what we hear to make sense of what we continue to hear. Our minds strive to identify connections between various passages. As a result, we get to "see" the book's primary flow of thought.

If the author deviates from the main course, we will notice it. We continue to track the narrative till he returns to the main story. These mental exercises come naturally to most people. Some might need a little training and patience.

How many times should we listen to a book? We must listen until we can state its outline and summarize

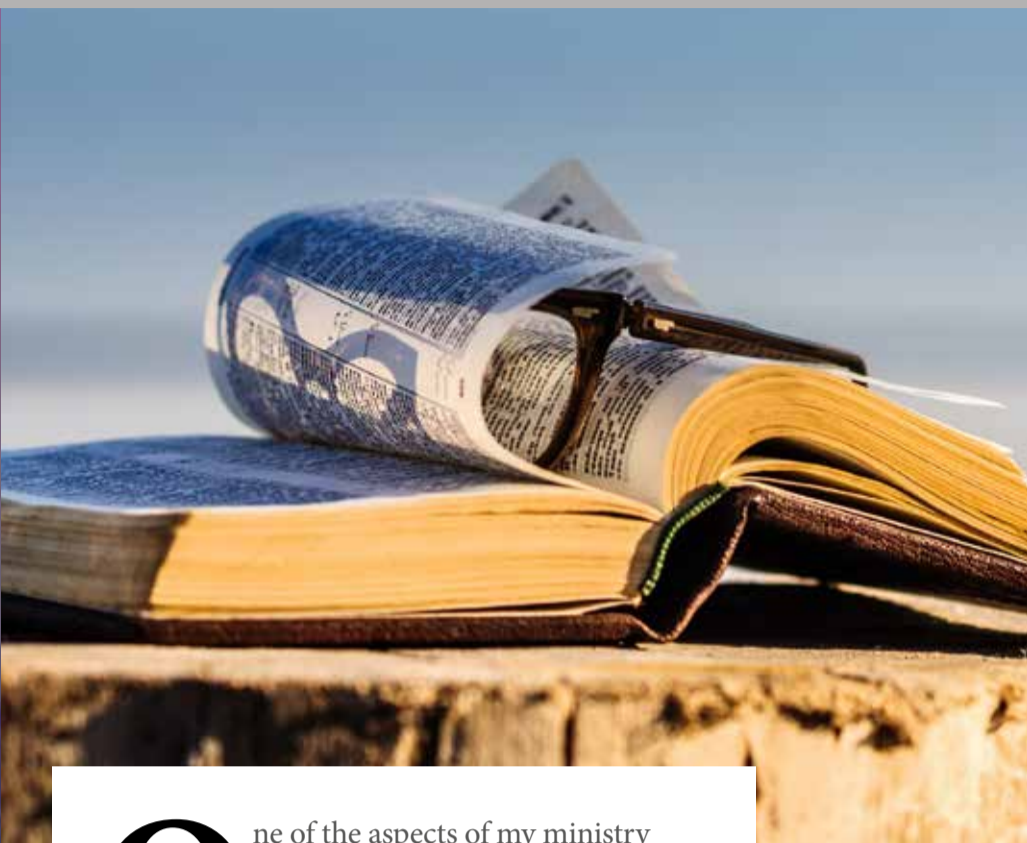
its message and purpose. Once we are familiar with the overall content of a book, we may subject it to a detailed study. Christians tend to boast about how often they have read the Bible. Our focus must be on saturating our minds with the Word of God, understanding the message of each book in its context, and living it out in our context. Shut the world out for a while. Plug into God's Word.



**Pr. Philip P Eapen**  
Cochin, India

Pr. Philip Eapen, an Environmental Scientist by training, devoted his life to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Philip also teaches Christians to equip them for service.





# Beauty

## of Biblical Meditation

(Joshua 1:8)

One of the aspects of my ministry that I enjoy the most is teaching techniques of studying the Bible systematically daily. It has been a blessing to many from whom I have heard back personally or through mail or short text messages. The most enriching aspect of the exercise is meditating upon God's word from multiple angles to listen to the voice of the Spirit who inspired the original authors. In other words, if meditating upon the inspired word is not the ultimate goal of studying the Bible, the exercise of Bible study is fruitless, and God's word loses its creative power in our lives.

What is biblical meditation? After Moses' death, when the Lord appointed Joshua as the leader of the Israelites, the LORD required Joshua to tread the path Moses commanded to be successful. The only way to accomplish it was to "meditate on it day and night." The word "meditate" would mean "diligently study," which is not mere "contemplation." In modern "yoga" classes, every student is taught to concentrate thoughts on something outside of oneself to off-load daily concerns and experience inner peace. It helps calm oneself by learning to divert one's mind from everyday troubles.

The biblical understanding of meditation is to delve deeper into facets of the meanings of every word in the Bible. It has two vital aspects: (1) It requires careful observation of what the word or phrase means, and (ii) understanding how it speaks into one's life. In meditation, we need to recognize that the words were spoken at first to someone in biblical times. So, studying the Bible as part of meditation is understanding the Holy Word in its original context. It raises relevant questions to the living word, like "What and why is God saying or mentioning this here?" Such a series of interrogative questions will yield answers (insights) from the Bible. They need to be understood in light of the overall message of the Scripture. It then requires us to ask, "What does it say to me today about God and my life?" In other words, it is to understand God's revelation in the word in its original context and examine one's life in the light of the Scripture. In this process, the distance between the text and the reader slowly reduces, and the word begins to speak directly to the person.

Interestingly, for a child of God, meditating upon the word is not an event of a day or a routine act performed mechanically daily but a necessary process that permeates every aspect of one's life day and night. The LORD's command, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth," refers to the ancient practice of memorizing the divine instructions because literacy generally was very low. The only way to preserve the Holy Word and the Faith was to repeat them regularly and to teach the young ones to learn the same and do so constantly. The expression "depart from your mouth" would mean risking forgetting the word by not practicing. It would be dangerous for the individual's faith and has lasting consequences on the family and national life. Hence, it is a negative command to Joshua ("shall not depart").

So, the only way to safeguard oneself from such a dangerous consequence is to soak oneself with the word. The goal of meditation is to be absorbed by God's word as one reads it carefully. The LORD'S directive to Joshua was to let the commandments of Moses saturate his heart, mind, and action so much that no aspect of his daily life would be untouched by the Holy Word. Joshua had to allow his heart and mind (in fact, his being itself!) to be soaked in the commandments of Moses so much that they began determining his daily steps and decisions.

The purpose of meditation is to "do according to all that is written in it." Here, the difference between "contemplation" in yoga and the biblical understanding of "meditation" becomes clear. While the former helps temporarily deflect worries that disturb one's inner peace, the biblical meditation aims at guiding and transforming our daily actions based on the Word of God. A child of God has no other yardstick to measure and determine one's course of action in life than the Bible. It is the revealed will of God for us. Hence, it must soak us thoroughly, leaving its seal in our every word, thought, and action.

Thus, the intended divine will in commanding meditation upon His commandments is that we will prosper and succeed. The route to success in a believer's life is never apart from the directed

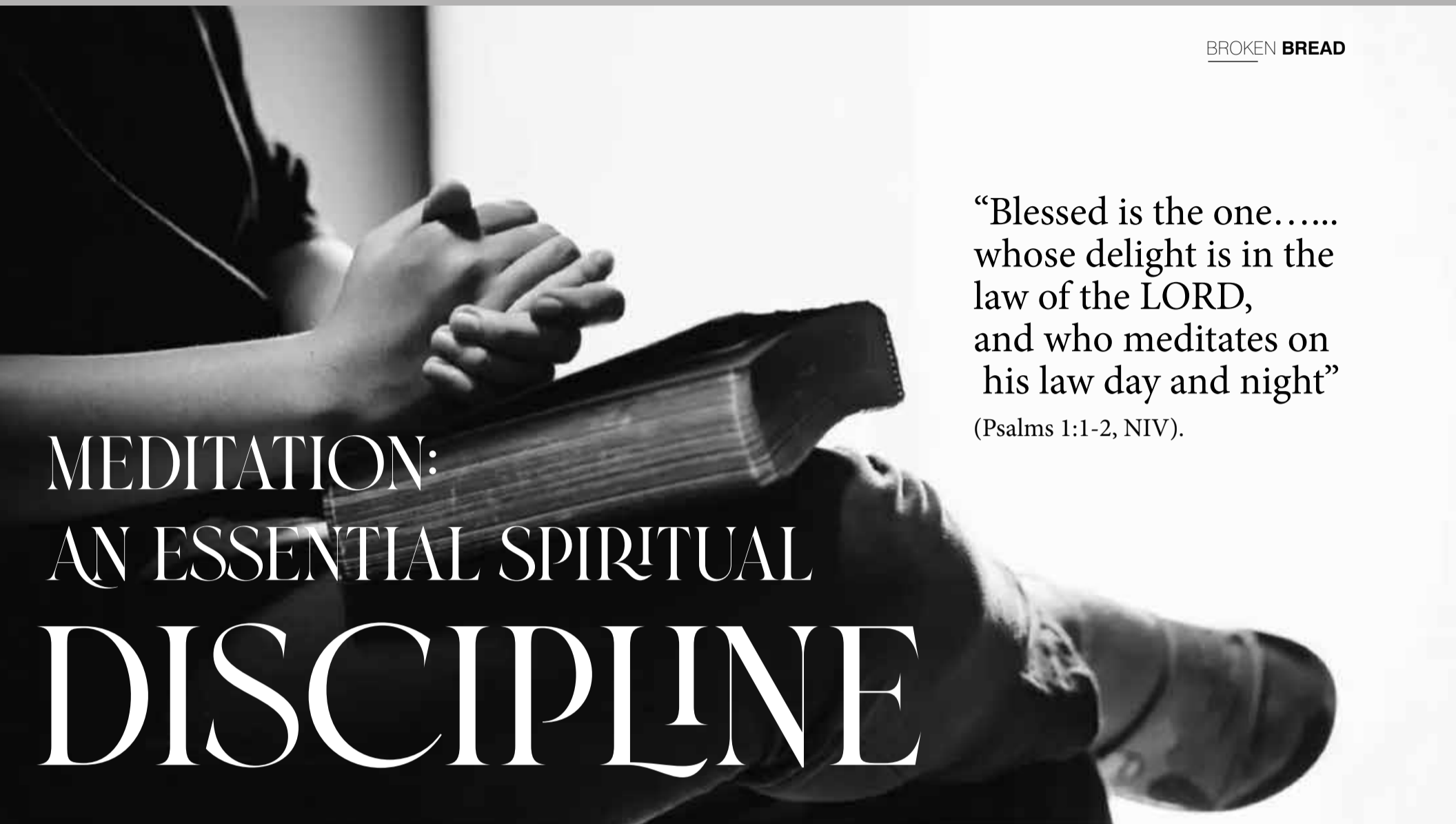
**"A child of God has no other yardstick to measure and determine one's course of action in life than the Bible. It is the revealed will of God for us. Hence, it must soak us thoroughly, leaving its seal in our every word, thought, and action."**

path in the Bible. In other words, obedience to God's word is capable of scripting our success story in God's way. Such is the power of meditation in our lives when we allow the word of God to soak us thoroughly and our life colored by it reflects our God's word visibly in action before others. May the Triune God help you and me to live a life meditating day and night always!



**Dr. Roji T George**  
Bangalore, India

Dr. Roji Thomas George, MA, MTh, DTh, is Professor of New Testament at SAIACS, Bangalore. He has authored numerous academic articles in national and international journals, books, and encyclopedia.



## MEDITATION: AN ESSENTIAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

“Blessed is the one.....  
whose delight is in the  
law of the LORD,  
and who meditates on  
his law day and night”

(Psalms 1:1-2, NIV).

**M**editating the Word of God is one of the essential disciplines for the spiritual growth of a Christian. Unlike other forms of meditation that focus on emptying one's mind of all thoughts and emotions, Biblical meditation focuses on filling one's mind with the Word of God and pondering on God and all He has done for humanity.

The Scripture reveals who God is: His mighty deeds, unfailing love, promises, and His will for us. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 conveys that all Scripture is given by divine inspiration to transform the children of God to be complete and proficient, outfitted and thoroughly equipped for every good work. It is beneficial for teaching, convicting sin, rectifying the error, restoring obedience, and training to conform to God's will. Therefore, a careful study and meditation of the Word of God are mandatory for every child of God.

Meditating on the Word of God allows us to comprehend the depth of the Scripture. It is more than just reading. When we meditate, the Holy Spirit reveals the mystery of God through Christ and enables us to grow in intimacy and conformity to Him.

One of the instructions that the Lord gave to Joshua after Moses' death was to meditate on the Book of the Law, day and night, so that he would be careful to do all that was written in it (Josh. 1:8). Meditating on the Scripture helps us to walk in God's ways. Psalms 1:1-2 echoes the same command. It says that the man favored by God is the one who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night. He does

not walk in the counsel of the wicked, following their advice and examples, stand in the path of sinners, or sit down to rest in the seat of ridiculers. God's Word directs us to guard our ways. It illuminates our path so we can walk in the right way and not in the wrong way (Psa. 119:104-105).

As our body needs food to grow, God's Word is the food required for our spiritual growth. 1 Pet. 2:2 says, "As newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby." It has the power to transform our lives. It is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword that penetrates through the deepest of ourselves, exposing and judging our heart's very thoughts and intentions (Heb. 4:12). Thereby, pruning and correcting us to bear much fruit and grow in the likeness of Christ.

Another important aspect is that the Word of God is the only offensive weapon among the armor of God to fight against spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:17). When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan, He used this weapon to defeat temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). Just as Jesus used the Scripture to ward off the enemy, we can also defend and attack the enemy with God's words. Furthermore, the promises in the Scripture give us hope and assurance that we have a glorious inheritance awaiting us.

Therefore, our greatest priority as children of God is to guard and nurture our souls. Studying and meditating on God's Word helps us achieve that goal. An enormous spiritual resource is readily available to us. But tapping and using it for our benefit is purely our choice. Let us keep aside everything else and prioritize spending

time with God and meditating upon His words so that we will bless many and bring glory to our Father in heaven.



**Jossy Binz**  
Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia

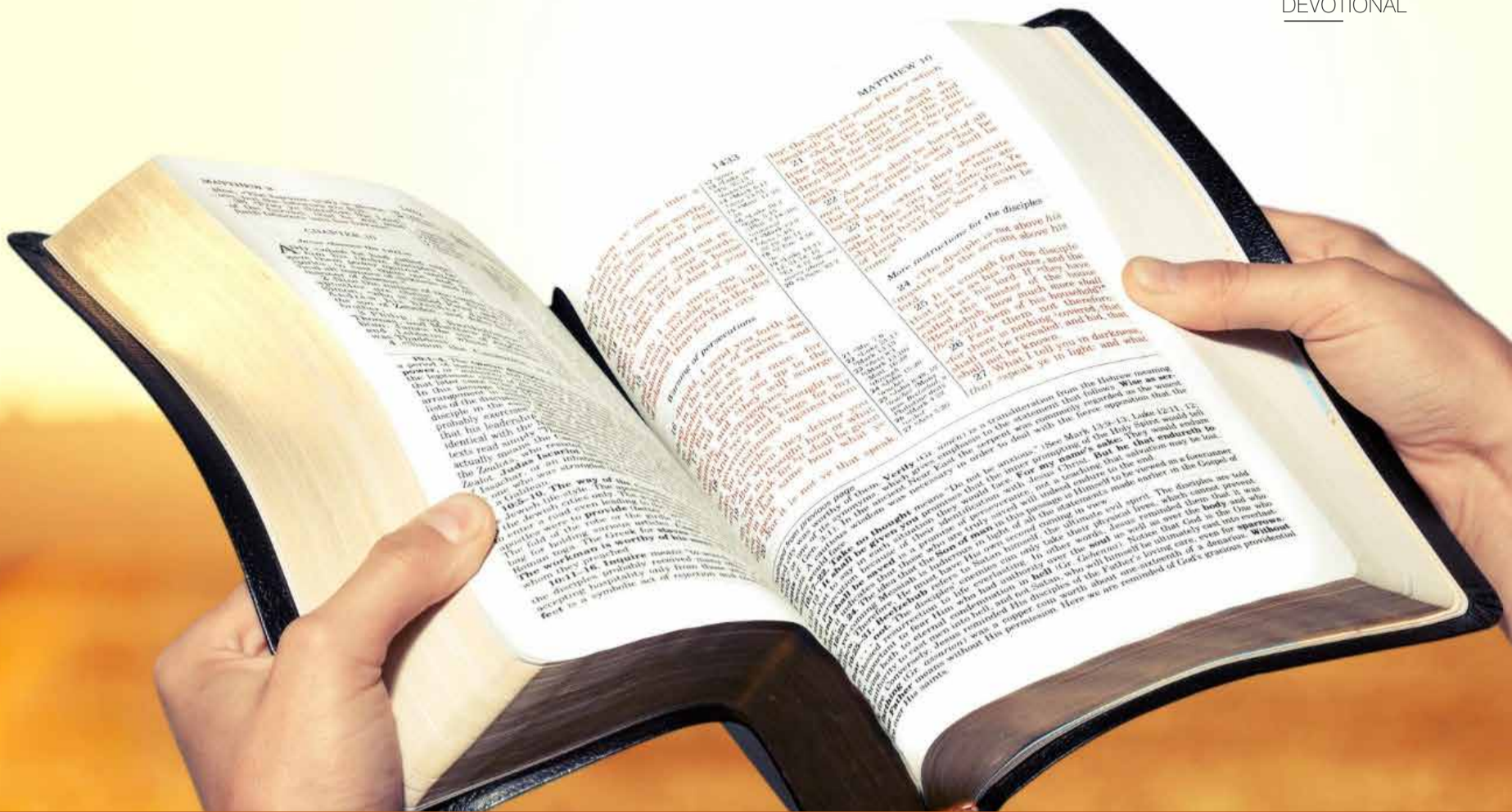
Jossy Binz is currently pursuing M.Div. from IPCTSK. She is a teacher and holds a Master's in English Literature.

**"OUR GREATEST PRIORITY AS CHILDREN OF GOD IS TO GUARD AND NURTURE OUR SOULS. STUDYING AND MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD HELPS US ACHIEVE THAT GOAL. AN ENORMOUS SPIRITUAL RESOURCE IS READILY AVAILABLE TO US. BUT TAPPING AND USING IT FOR OUR BENEFIT IS PURELY OUR CHOICE."**





DEVOTIONAL



## ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH SCRIPTURE

"EVERY TIME WE READ THE BIBLE, WE SHOULD MEDITATE ON EACH WORD RATHER THAN MERELY READING TO GET BLESSED. JUST READING FOR THE SAKE OF READING IS ONLY A RITUAL. WE SHOULD NOT FORGET THE TRUTH THAT THE HOLY SCRIPTURES CAN MAKE A MAN CHANGE AND TRANSFORM; IF THAT DOES NOT HAPPEN IN US WHEN WE READ THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, WE ARE NOT WORTHY OF BEING CALLED TRUE CHRISTIANS BUT HYPOCRITES."

**O**ur life in this world has a purpose and meaning. Those who believe in God and His acts believe life is not an accident. The truth is that God knows each person individually. God is love, and He loves each person individually. Therefore, God wants us to love Him back. Jesus Christ was once asked what the most important things a person should do were. He replied "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength...(and) love your neighbor as yourself".

True Christians have a spiritual culture. They read the Holy Scriptures daily. Should that be a requirement to be a true Christian? There are many ways to read the Bible daily. The verse in the book of Revelation 1:3 gives an insight into the need to read the Bible. "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it because the time is near." This may be the reason that precipitates believers to read the Bible as a ritual and to become blessed. In this regard, a mere reading of the Bible is not enough. Whenever we read the Holy Scriptures, we should do it with the utmost respect, and each

verse of It should be meditated on to get spiritual enrichment.

Reading and meditating on the scriptures can mold the inner man and character. It is inevitable for a man to read it and follow them. There are still so-called pious people who spend a lot of time reading the scriptures and trying to understand the meaning of the word of God, but not in its real sense. They are rather engrossed in finding out how many praise words, Hallelujahs, etc., are in the Bible.

While reading the Bible, we should allow the scripture to fill us with the desire and faith to encounter God. While reading the Bible verses, we are not required to learn them but try to meditate on the verses, compare the meaning of the verse, and try to apply them in our life. Therefore, reading and meditating on the verses are two different things. Read the Bible respectfully and try to understand that each verse is meant for me. Sometimes, when we read the Psalms, we try to think about our enemies and their fate as the verses were written by King David, who had encountered his enemies. Some may think that all good verses are for me, and those verses are not acceptable

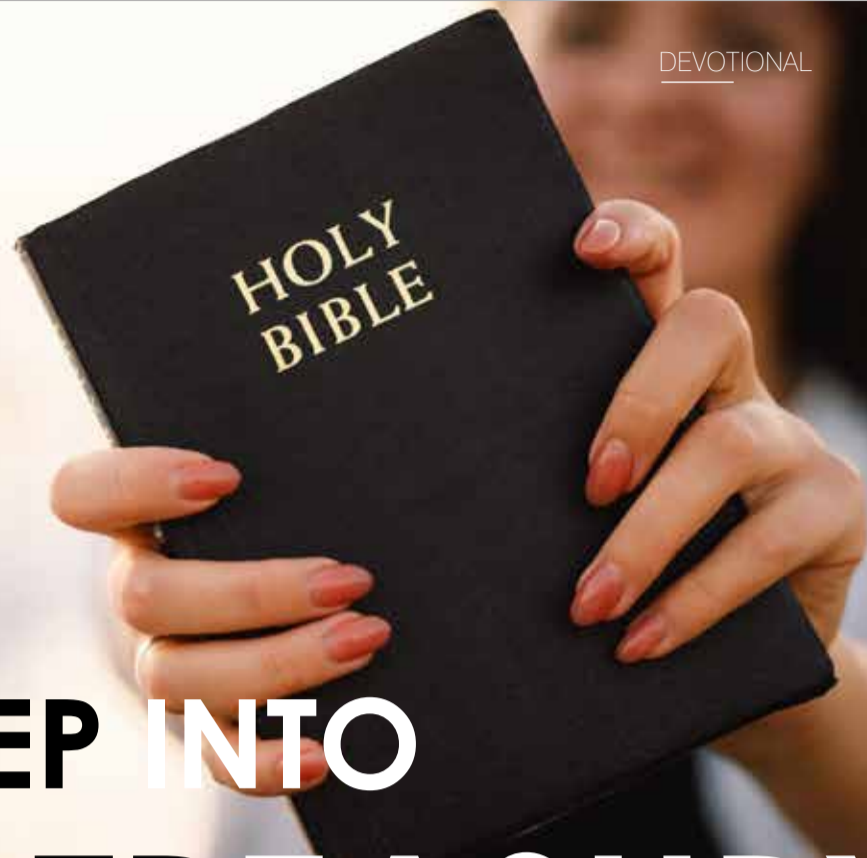
for others. As far as a child of God is concerned, this understanding is not right. Every time we read the Bible, we should meditate on each word rather than merely reading to get blessed. Just reading for the sake of reading is only a ritual. We should not forget the truth that the Holy Scriptures can make a man change and transform; if that does not happen in us when we read the Holy Scriptures, we are not worthy of being called true Christians but hypocrites.



**Dr. Binu Daniel**  
Dusseldorf, Germany

Dr. Binu Daniel is a management consultant, teacher, author, and educationist.





# DIVE DEEP INTO THE GREAT TREASURY OF ABSOLUTE TRUTH

**M**ost often than not, we see that truth is mixed up with some error. And we are often unconsciously contaminated by what we see, hear, and read. Every single day we need to be cleansed afresh and set right. Our mere conscience is not enough to guide us. Like a compass needle which needs to be corrected repeatedly by constant reference to a mariner's chart, so our conscience needs to be constantly corrected by reference to the one and only absolute truth that we possess, the word of God.

In the biographies of men God greatly used, we find, without exception, had two points in common; they all had a well-developed prayer life, and secondly, they disciplined themselves to take a good amount of their time to dive deep into the Word of God. It became an unutterable joy to such souls as God revealed himself in a way no words could describe, making them live in the radiance of a heavenly dawn dazzled by the revelation of His love.

Meditating on the Word of God leads us to discover a new world, the kingdom of God itself. It enables us to see things from God's point of view, exploring His kingdom's fantastic revelation and being infinitely rewarded. One of the beautiful mysteries is that the more we grasp what God wants to reveal, the more our prayer becomes inspired and permeated with faith. His spirit turns our hearts towards all truth, surpassing our intellectual mind loaded with facts towards the things of God, consequently making our prayer powered with faith and more effective. Thus the man who neglects to read and

**"THE BIBLE IS A REMARKABLE BOOK THAT A MAN CAN READ DAILY THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE WITHOUT EVER GETTING TIRED OF IT. THE OVERALL VIEW OBTAINED BY SUCH READING WILL MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO DIVE DEEPLY INTO THIS PERFECT TREASURY OF ABSOLUTE TRUTH WITH INFINITE RICHES, BOTH EXHILARATING AND LASTING VALUE."**

meditate on the word of God finds that his prayer life becomes feeble and disintegrates over time.

Jesus, when faced with all the power of Satan in the wilderness, puts him to route with these words: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the word of God" (Mathew 4:4). We have only one life to live and our time is infinitely precious, dwell on the word of God to make the most of it. The book of Ecclesiastes says: "Remember now your Creator while you are still young before the evil days come". However, it's never too late for anyone to come into a deep knowledge of God through His Word. Fortunately, the Bible is a remarkable book that a man can read daily throughout his life without ever getting tired of it. The overall view obtained by such reading will make it possible to dive deeply into this perfect treasury of absolute truth with infinite riches, both exhilarating and lasting value.



**Elizabeth Mathew**  
UAE

Elizabeth Mathew is a born-again, Spirit-filled Christian. As a former Vice Principal, she had a close association with educators, parents, and children.





# CHRONIC COUGH

**C**oughing is the body's natural defense mechanism to clear particles, secretions, or foreign bodies from the lung. A cough that accompanies an acute illness or infection resolves in a matter of few days, but when a cough persists for over eight weeks in adults, it is called a chronic cough. Chronic coughing can sometimes be debilitating and affect the quality of life.

### Common Causes:

**Post-Nasal Drip:** when secretions drip or fall at the back of the throat due to allergies or a sinus infection.

**Asthma:** is a frequent cause of chronic cough and gets worse with environmental triggers like cold, dry air, and fragrances.

**Gastroesophageal Reflux:** when stomach acids back up to the throat, creating irritation and inflammation.

**ACE Inhibitors** (which usually end in "pril"): are the commonly used medications for hypertension, and can cause a dry hacking cough in up to 20% of people. Cough begins as soon as three weeks or as late as one year after starting the medication. Switching to another medication often improves the cough over the course of one to two weeks.

### Chronic Bronchitis and Bronchiectasis:

Bronchitis occurs when the airways are inflamed due to irritation from tobacco or long-term exposure to industrial air pollutants. Bronchiectasis occurs when there is damage to the airway walls, which can be from chronic infection or inflammation.

### Other Causes:

Lung infections (bacterial, fungal, viral)  
Pertussis  
Heart failure  
Environmental irritation  
Aspiration  
Lung cancer, especially in smokers.  
Psychological

### Action Steps

Don't ignore a chronic cough. If the cause is post-nasal drip or GERD, you may be able to treat it yourself with over-the-counter medications, avoiding allergens, lifestyle, and dietary changes.

Contact your doctor if you are coughing up blood, or running a fever (Temp above 100 F), or if you are having weight loss, drenching night sweats, trouble breathing, difficulty swallowing, or voice hoarseness.

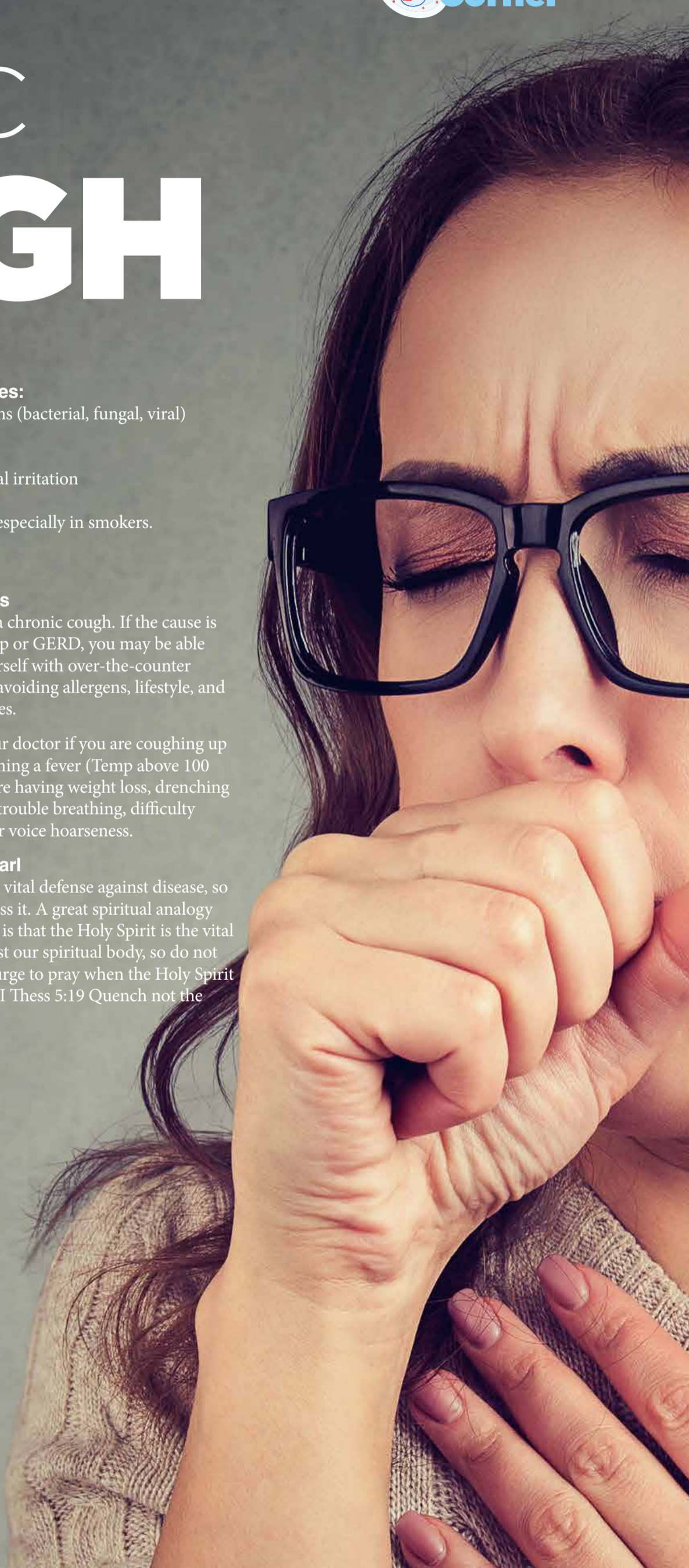
### Spiritual Pearl

Coughing is a vital defense against disease, so do not suppress it. A great spiritual analogy related to this is that the Holy Spirit is the vital defense against our spiritual body, so do not suppress the urge to pray when the Holy Spirit prompts you. I Thess 5:19 Quench not the Spirit.



**Jebi Sam**  
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FROM HISTORY

## St. Anthony's Prayer

**S**aint Anthony was one of the earliest Christian monks, a man determined to find God in silence and isolation. Born to a wealthy Alexandrian merchant family, one day he passed by a church and heard the minister reciting the words of Jesus, "Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and come and follow me." He took those words to heart and at the age of 34, gave away his entire inheritance and retreated into the desert. He found an abandoned tomb and lived alone there for many years. In the desert he not only found a way to abandon his material desires, he learned to live with very little water or food, seeking only prayer as sustenance. Saint Antony, considered by some to be the

father of all monks, recited the Jesus Prayer over and over, seeking only the mercy of his lord Jesus Christ.

This ancient prayer has been passed down through generations. Initially recited verbally, it was ultimately written in obscure instruction manuals intended only for monks. It was kept in secret, only to be revealed as part of a dedicated life of isolation. Some spiritual counselors advise using it only with the help of a disciplined guide, in the context of a life devoted to monasticism. Others say that anyone can use it. Still in use some 2,000 years later in monasteries and churches

that grew out of the Egyptian desert and spread to Greece, the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, Slavic lands, and Russia, the Jesus Prayer is now being revealed to those of us in the western world.

There is no longer a need to become a monk or nun to know and use this prayer. It isn't necessary to leave your family, work or home behind and renounce everything. Jesus Prayer, has great power.



*Continued from Page 01*

# MEDITATION FOR BIBLICAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Human beings meditate not just with their reason but also as emotional beings. Rationality gets enmeshed with deep emotions (cry, trouble, anguish, sleeplessness, refusal to be comforted, moan). The Hebrew word Hāghâ means "growl," "utter," or "moan" as well as "meditate" or "muse." Therefore, meditation is not just inarticulate or speechless contemplation. Christian monastic orders therefore developed the public or audible recital/reading of scriptures in repetitive cycles as a necessary component of meditation.

Biblical practices of meditation differ from oriental non-Christian exercises of meditation. Eastern spirituality requires the practitioner to empty her mind to experience bliss, renewal or enlightenment. Another key to eastern understanding of meditation is the sufficiency of the individual to rejuvenate and revive itself. These practices are built on the concept of the unity of the Supreme soul and the individual soul. On the contrary, the meditative spirituality of the Psalms engages human experiences of both the individual and the community with a God who communicates (relates, provides, hears, loves, comforts, helps, heals, protects etc.). Biblical spirituality constructs the God-human

relation on God who reveals himself as gracious, compassionate, comforting, promise keeping etc. His power and wisdom have no limits as he engages in the world and in the ordinary lives of his covenant people.

Some may think that meditation is for the specialists with rigorous training. Though meditation is a discipline such fear is far from truth. Any human being who is prone to worry or brood over a negative feeling like anger, hurt, shame, fear etc. is exercising the meditative capacity of being human. As a meditative being we have the potential to transform the debilitating power of negative emotional engagements into a tool for spiritual growth. The questions of 'why me/us/now' addressed to God, even with pointing fingers 'where are/were you, when will you, how could you' etc., set meditation in process. The seeking mind, whether set in a tranquil or turbulent heart, irrespective of bodily postures of rest or restlessness, is engaged in meditation. In such a mood, conscious engagement of memory, experience, puzzle, personal or collective circumstances etc. are drawn prayerfully to debate or discuss with the word of God, his gracious and redemptive

acts, his character/promises etc. These may be speechless groans, or articulate, individual or corporate prayers or reflections. In both pensive silence as well as agonizing whispers or loud cries, the soul searches for comfort and resolution, in the framework of God's parental care and promises.

Meditation thus prepares the way for our restless souls to rest in the goodness of God's loving purposes. It is a discipline that can be developed and trained. A good way to start is to read or pray aloud the psalms or scriptures. Repeat the psalm/text several times as contemporary worship leaders repeat the song till the lyrics and music sink into the worshipper aligning herself with the spirituality of the song. Begin to pray the psalms or scriptures, reflecting on the character, promises, or memories of God's historic dealings with his people in dialogue with our current situation. Our souls learn the security of a journey of cleaving to God. There may neither be smart nor immediate solutions. But the pilgrimage of trust, even in tribulations, is worth the trial for 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'. So, on your marks, get set and go.



## NATO chief warns Bakhmut may fall 'in coming days'



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned on 8th March the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut might fall to Russia in the coming days following months of intense fighting. His remarks came as Russia's Wagner mercenary group, which has spearheaded the attack on Bakhmut, claimed to have captured the eastern bank of the industrial town, devastated in the longest battle since Moscow invaded.

Wagner chief and Kremlin ally Yevgeny Prigozhin said on social media

Wednesday that his forces "have taken all of the eastern parts of Bakhmut", a salt-mining town with a pre-war population of 80,000. The intense fighting around Bakhmut has been the longest and bloodiest in Russia's more than year-long invasion, which has devastated swathes of Ukraine and displaced millions of people.

"What we see is that Russia is throwing more troops, more forces and what Russia lacks in quality, they try to make up in quantity," Stoltenberg told reporters in Stockholm on the sidelines of EU defence ministers meeting. "We cannot rule out that Bakhmut may eventually fall in the coming days," the head of the US-led military alliance said, adding that "this does not necessarily reflect any turning point of the war".

## World News

### Pakistan 'very close to signing IMF staff-level agreement -finance minister

Pakistan Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said on Thursday, 9th March, his country was "very close" to signing a staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund, a critical lifeline for taming a balance of payment crisis. "We seem to be very close to signing the staff level agreement, hopefully, God willing, in the next few days," Dar said at a seminar in Islamabad.

"My team and I are committed to completing this program to the best of our ability," he said, adding: "We have been in the review, and I think it has taken longer than it should have, in my opinion." An agreement would release \$1.1 billion to the cash-strapped South Asian economy.

Islamabad has been hosting an IMF mission since early February to negotiate the terms of a deal, including adopting policy measures to manage its fiscal deficit ahead of the annual budget due around June. The funds are part of a \$6.5 billion bailout package the IMF approved in 2019, which analysts say is critical if Pakistan is to avoid defaulting on external debt obligations.

The deal would unlock other bilateral and multilateral financing avenues for Pakistan to shore up its foreign exchange reserves, which have fallen to a lowly four weeks' worth of import cover.



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## NASA'S CURIOSITY ROVER SHARES A STUNNING SUNSET ON MARS



The Curiosity rover just sent back a stunning postcard capturing its view of a shimmering sunset on Mars. The NASA rover has been roaming across Mars for more than ten years, searching for why the red planet went from warm and wet to a frozen desert. It has discovered intriguing rock formations, searched for signs of life and scaled Mount Sharp at the centre of Gale Crater.

But rather than continuing to focus on the near-endless red stretch of rocks and dirt below its wheels, the rover has recently been looking up. On February 2, Curiosity observed rays of sunlight stretching across the horizon and illuminating a bank of clouds as the sun set on Mars. It's the



## Brahmapuram is just one of some 3,000 Indian landfills overflowing with decaying waste and emitting toxic gases

Commissioned in 2008, the landfill is spread across 16 acres, according to a 2020 report from the International Urban Cooperation, a European Union program. The study added that the landfill receives about 100 metric tons of plastic waste each day, of which only about 1% is suitable for recycling. The study said the remaining 99% is dumped as a heap at the site, calling it a "menace for the municipal corporation."

"The plastic dump at Brahmapuram is increasing in size daily," it said. "It has seen several fires over the past few years, thus polluting the air and the environment."

Despite its growing size and threats, the landfill is not India's largest. The Deonar dumping ground in the western coastal city of Mumbai, which stands at some 18 stories high, claims the top spot.

first time the rays, known as crepuscular rays, have been seen so clearly on the red planet.

The rover is surveying twilight clouds on Mars to follow up on its previous observations of night-shining clouds. In 2021, Curiosity used its black and white navigation cameras to watch the structure of those clouds as they moved on Mars.

Clouds provide deeper insight into weather patterns and conditions. Scientists can use information about when and where clouds form on Mars to learn more about the planet's atmospheric composition, temperatures, and wind. On Mars, most clouds are made of frozen ice and float about 37 miles (60 kilometres) above the ground. But Curiosity spotted clouds that reach a higher altitude, as seen in the new photo, leading researchers to believe they are made of frozen carbon dioxide ice — or dry ice. Scientists are still studying them to figure out why this happens.

## One of India's trash mountains is on fire again, and residents are choking on its toxic fumes.

Firefighters in the southern Indian city of Kochi were toiling Tuesday to control toxic fumes from spreading after a landfill burst into flames five days ago, cloaking the area in a thick haze and choking residents. The towering Brahmapuram landfill in Kerala state is the country's latest trash mountain to catch fire, causing dangerous heat and methane emissions and adding to India's growing climate challenges.

Authorities advised residents in the city of more than 600,000 to remain indoors or wear N95 face masks if they head outside. Officials said schools were forced to close on Monday due to the pollution. The blaze broke out last Thursday, according to Kerala's fire department. The cause has not been established, but combustible gases from disintegrating garbage can trigger landfill fires. Images and video released by officials showed workers racing to extinguish the billowing flames that sent thick plumes of toxic smoke rising high into the sky. While the fire has been largely put out, a thick cloud of smoke and methane gas continues to cover the area, reducing visibility and the city's air quality while emitting a lingering, pungent odour. Some firefighters had fainted from the fumes, the fire department said.

## World News



## Iran installs cameras in public places to identify unveiled women

Iranian authorities have said there will be no retreat on the issue of the hijab despite huge protests following the death of Mahsa Amini. Iranian authorities are installing cameras in public places to identify and penalise unveiled women in an attempt to rein in the increasing numbers who are defying the country's strict dress rules. Those deemed to be violating Iran's hijab rules will receive "warning text messages as to the consequences", police in Iran say. The move is aimed at "preventing resistance against the hijab law", the police statement, carried by the judiciary's Mizan news agency and other state media, said. It added that such resistance tarnishes Iran's spiritual image and spreads insecurity. A growing number of Iranian women have been ditching their veils since the death of a 22-year-old Kurdish woman in the custody of the morality police last September. Mahsa Amini had been detained for allegedly violating the hijab rule. Her death has sparked nationwide protests, and security forces responded violently.

An Interior Ministry statement last month described the veil as "one of the civilisational foundations of the Iranian nation" and "one of the practical principles of the Islamic Republic" and said there would be no retreat on the issue. Under Iran's Islamic sharia law, imposed after the 1979 revolution, women must cover their hair and wear long, loose-fitting clothes to disguise their figures. Violators have faced public rebuke, fines or arrest. The news about cameras comes after two women in Iran who went into a store while not fully covering their hair had yoghurt thrown over them by a man. CCTV footage showing the "yoghurt attack", believed to have taken place in Shandiz in northeast Iran, went viral on social media.