

The Contemplation of the Disciple

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Date: 24 February 2019

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[0 : 00] Wonderful. Well, we need to leave, we need to end a little bit early, apparently, because of what all is happening, all the exciting things that are happening today, so maybe we should go ahead and get a start.

Well, a few days ago, in the sauna of my gym, I was speaking of the change that following Christ, trusting him with forgiveness, makes in our lives.

The sauna was reasonably full and all seemed to be listening with interest when suddenly a verbal salvo shot across the bow of our conversation by one who had been sitting in the corner quietly listening.

It isn't true. Christianity does not make a difference. I've watched Christians up close for years, and they're no different.

Certainly no better than the rest of us. It's all a lie. Initially stunned, I was subsequently sobered. Was he right?

[1 : 17] Well, no, the gospel does make a difference. It does change lives. But was he largely right? How is it that his disturbing assertion is seemingly true for so many, and indeed of so many, who go by the name Christian?

It does seem, under sober analysis, that we Christians are often a little short on change. Why is this so?

Well, I imagine the answer is complex, but I have no doubt that a large part of it is the common neglect of the fundamental means of change and growth for a Christian.

The Word. As Peter writes, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect to your salvation.

1 Peter 2, 2. Why aren't we growing and changing? A likely reason is that we are not engaging fruitfully with God's Word.

[2 : 30] Well, rather than focusing on the negative, okay, all the ways we fail and go wrong here, instead, I want to set forth positively how we can indeed fruitfully engage the Word of God.

How do we engage God's Word so that it actually changes us? How can our engagement with the Word be to our spiritual profit and progress?

So that is our topic for this morning, and I want to take as our guiding text a passage of Scripture that my father opened up to me when I was a young man.

Actually, a very little boy. And when he did, I knew that from his life, he wasn't giving me something that was kind of incidental, but the heart of his own life and walk with God.

My father lived in the Word. My earliest memories are of running through the woods together and memorizing Scripture. If I memorized, we had a little game going, if I memorized one verse, he would memorize the chapter.

[3 : 43] And if I memorized a whole chapter, he would memorize that whole book of the Bible. If I were really ornery, I could have really set him up there, but I wasn't.

And his engagement with the Word was no episode, just very consistent, very consistent. In fact, the day he died, he was rooting the Word of God in his heart.

He was found on his bike. He had a bicycle accident. And his verse pack, he was probably even reading it while he was riding. His little verse pack of Scripture that he was learning was there.

Well, so the model came to me with the credit of a godly life, a life that bore much fruit. And I want to pass it on. So this is what he taught me, and he took it from the book of James, this little passage of Scripture.

James chapter 1, verses 21 to 25. Let me read it. James chapter 1, verses 21 to 25.

[4 : 54] James writes, Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.

But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 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. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts.

He will be blessed in all he is doing. Well, the context is the role of the Word in bringing spiritual life. Verse 18, we have been brought forth by the Word of truth. And then he goes on to explain how the Word sustains the life that it has inaugurated.

[6 : 05] Okay? And Dad identified four steps from this passage. And the first is preparation. Preparation.

How do we receive the Word of God fruitfully? First step, preparation. I apologize, would you repeat the scripture? Yes, it's James chapter 1, verses 21, the next four or five verses.

Yep. So, preparation, first step. Verse 21, you notice there, putting aside all filthiness. I love the old King James. Superfluity of naughtiness.

What a phrase. Wow. Watch out for that superfluity of naughtiness. See, often we dive right in. But it's fitting and needful to actually prepare our hearts as we come to the Word.

As Thomas Watson, the Puritan writes, many come rashly to the reading of the Word, and no wonder if they come without preparation, that they go away without profit.

[7 : 05] They that look for the bridegroom had need trim up their lamps. Thomas Manton. I love the Puritans, so I'm going to quote a lot of Puritans here.

All right? In agricultural metaphor, weed before you seed. Jeremiah 4, 3, plow up the fallow ground, so not among thorns.

Okay? How do we put aside all filthiness? Well, we check to see if we're cherishing any sin. David's prayer is a good model there. Psalm 139, 23, search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and see if there be any hurtful or wicked way in me. And if the Holy Spirit reveals anything, then we confess our sin, and He will cleanse it.

1 John 1, 9. We repair to that fountain open for sin and impurity. Zechariah 13. As we used to tell our girls as they were growing up, you wash your hands before the meal.

[8 : 06] And it's the same way when we come to the Scriptures. The second part of preparation concerns our attitude or our disposition. Notice how it says there in the text, in humility.

In humility. We need to place ourselves under the Word. Recognize its authority. It judges us, not we it. So we need to drop our defensive, guarded posture.

Rather, read the Word with a willingness and a readiness to submit to it. Where does God disclose Himself? Well, in highest heaven, but also to the humblest heart.

Isaiah 66, 2. But to this one I will look. To Him who is humble and contrite of spirit. Who trembles at my word. Luke 1, 52.

He giveth grace to the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things. So we want to come to the word hungry and humble. The final phrase there.

[9 : 10] Receive the word. Able to save. Able to save. This indicates our dependence. We welcome the Word's work. For the Bible's work in our hearts is a saving work.

Recall that receiving the word is a condition of salvation. Not for salvation. Of salvation. If we are being saved, it will be characteristic of us that we are receiving His word.

So there's the first step. Then with our hearts prepared, we turn to step two. Step two is meditation. First, preparation. Second, meditation. And that's suggested by verse 25 there. Notice, looks intently. Looks intently. Looks intently.

Slow and closer. Okay. Oh, thanks. Okay. I'll lean in. Looks intently. The Greek word suggests kind of bending over and peering into, just like the disciples did the sepulcher.

[10 : 20] Remember? They're just leaning in and looking intently. Or also, in 1 Peter 1, same term, where the angels desiring to search out God's saving action in Christ.

Angels long to look into it. That's the word here. So what is it that we intently look into? What is the object of our meditation?

Well, we certainly can meditate on nature or providence. The Bible tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God. And that God is the shaper of history and has purposes in history.

So we can look at those things. That's true. A gracious heart, writes Thomas Manton, is like an alembic. An alembic. A distillation apparatus. Something that distills.

A gracious heart is like an alembic. It can distill useful meditations out of all things it meeteth with. As it seeth all things in God, it seeth God in all things.

[11:22] Wonderful. It's interesting that John Owen, in his spiritual mindedness, talks about seeing God in the providence, the way history is shaped. Also, in nature.

So this was very common for an earlier generations of Christians to look at nature and see God in nature. But nature cannot be an adequate supply of new content to revelation.

What it chiefly does is not inform us, but impress us with things that we already know. It reminds us of truths that we find from scripture.

And the chief object of our meditation is the scriptures, which is the object that James here indicates. Notice the perfect law, parallel to the law of the Lord throughout the Old Testament, Psalm 1 or Psalm 19.

Well, does this just refer to the laws in the Bible? The law of the Lord? The Ten Commandments? No, James here is not speaking of a particular portion.

[12:29] Rather, all of God's word considered authoritatively. All of God's word considered authoritatively. And the term is a helpful one, for it reminds us that we must accept its authority completely.

You see, if you get rid of the bits that you don't like, you can't really wrestle with God. God can't challenge or correct you.

And then it will cease to be a life-changing encounter. As we consider meditation, let me first enforce how vital it is for the disciple, but how commonly neglected.

As Richard Baxter writes, Why so much preaching is lost among us. And professors, those who profess Christianity, can run from sermon to sermon, and are never weary of hearing or reading, and yet have such languishing, starved souls, I know of no truer or greater cause than their ignorance and unconscionable neglect of meditation.

It's from his saint's rest. True in his day, but certainly true in ours also. Well, it's helpful to consider meditation in relation to, first, its dynamic, how it works.

[13:59] It's dynamic, how it works. Then the discipline, how we work at it. How we work at it. So first, the dynamic of meditation. How does it work?

Well, Psalm 1 tells us that the one who meditates is like a tree. See, in a tree, water goes in one end at the bottom, and then you have fruit come out the other end.

Okay? Unlike a pipe, where you just water in, water out. No, no, this is different. A change takes place in the substance of the tree. And that's what meditation does.

See, meditation makes the word, in our Bibles, flesh. Makes the word flesh in us. It takes the principles of truth and it works them into our being, cognitively, emotionally, affectively, actively. And the word becomes us through meditation. Meditation is the way to make the Bible the burning bush before which Moses stands.

[15:12] Out of which God speaks to you directly and arrestingly. Meditation is the descent of the mind into the heart.

As in the Mount of Transfiguration, where the truth begins to shine. And it is as truth is transfigured before us, that's what actually transforms us.

As truth is transfigured, begins to shine, that's what transforms us. Truth kind of works into and explodes in our heart like an internal combustion engine and imparts the soul speed and strength to get on its way actively in the godly life.

Or you can think of it like photographic film. I know this is kind of an archaic thing. Now it's all digital. But I remember these cameras.

Remember the photographic film was chemically treated to make it sensitive to light? And think of that as the Holy Spirit working on our heart to sensitize it to the word of God that comes in.

[16:23] And meditation brings these truths like light to impress themselves upon a heart that the spirit has prepared. And then it creates these images.

It shapes our heart. These images that it creates are new affections. The new affections we use.

And so that's how meditation actually changes these affectional currents in our heart.

That's how we're changed. To kind of redirect the flow of the things that we love. And simple Bible reading or even Bible study does not achieve this.

This inner work really does require meditation. Here's what Thomas Watson writes. The old Puritan. These are all. I'm quoting all Puritans.

Study is the finding out of a truth. Meditation is the spiritual improvement of a truth. In other words, it changing us.

[17 : 27] The one searcheth for the vein of gold. The other digs out the gold. Study. Here's a great metaphor. Study is like a winter sun that hath but little warmth and influence.

Meditation melts the heart when it is frozen and makes it drop into tears of love. Or again with similar metaphor.

This is Thomas Watson. There is as much difference between a knowledge of a truth and the meditation of a truth as there is between the light of a torch and the light of the sun.

Set up a lamp or a torch in the garden and it hath no influence. Ah, but the sun hath a sweet influence. It makes the plants to grow and the herbs to flourish.

So knowledge is but like a torch lighted in the understanding which hath little or no influence. It makes not a man the better.

[18 : 35] But meditation is like the shining of the sun. It operates upon the affections. It warms the heart and makes it holy.

Meditation fetcheth life into a truth. So if we would experience real change, we must give ourselves to meditation.

As Thomas Brooks writes, A man shall as soon live without his heart as he shall be able to get good by what he reads without meditation.

Okay? So how may we practice this vital discipline? That's the dynamic. Now the discipline that we must practice. How we work at it.

Okay? And meditation is the essential discipline of all the spiritual disciplines. And really a compound discipline.

[19 : 39] Involving both study and prayer. As Thomas Manton explains, Meditation is a middle sort of duty.

Between the word and prayer. And hath respect to both. The word feedeth meditation. And meditation feedeth prayer.

And the prayer that arises from our meditation is answering prayer. Answering prayer. This is distinct from, say, calling prayer. You know what calling prayer is? We initiate.

That's Peter when he's starting to sink and he says, Help me, Jesus, I'm drowning. That's calling out prayer. But in answering prayer, God chooses the subject.

He sets the tone. He commences the conversation. And we respond to him. And so meditation begins in Bible study.

[20 : 36] But then out of that, God begins to address us. And then we answer in our prayer. It proceeds to prayer. Begins in Bible study. Proceeds in prayer.

In the wonderful phrase of Richard Baxter, Meditation is taking the truth and praying it down into your soul until it catches fire.

Oh, isn't that wonderful? Praying the truth down into your soul until it catches fire. Helpful on the meditation process is Augustine, the African theologian, 354 to 430, I think.

He speaks of meditation as the ascent of the soul into God. And he breaks it down, helpfully, I find, into three steps.

Three steps. The first he calls *retentio* or retention. And this is the distillation of the truths of scripture and holding them centrally before our mind.

[21 : 44] So basically, Bible study. Okay? And here, observational skills are key. Okay? We're trying to hold these truths of scripture centrally in front of our mind.

And look at them. So, a great prayer here is David's for observational skills. Psalm 119, 18. Lord, open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things out of your law.

Okay? Out of your word. So, and this is tough. This is tough. And you'll grow in this by forcing yourself to do it and stay at it.

Louis Agassiz, the 19th century Harvard naturalist, he would have his students. He'd come in and have new graduate students. He'd bring them up and he'd set them in front of a fish tank.

And he would say, I want you to stare at this fish and just give me your observations from this fish. And he would have them do it for two days.

[22 : 52] And these poor graduate students, no, no, keep looking, keep looking. And he would force them to just keep looking at this fish and write down their observations.

Once he was asked, what was your greatest contribution scientifically? And this guy was the doyen of natural sciences in America, in early America.

He said, I have taught men and women to observe. To observe. And lingering is required for this. It's not some sort of cursory encounter.

It has to be protracted. Thomas Manton. The Christian is like some heavy birds. Like the buzzard and others.

That cannot get up upon the wing without a run of about a furlong or two. So you know the image. You know what, they're trying to get up in the air and they're running across the lake.

[23 : 48] We need a long runway to get off the ground on this. It takes some time. Manton again. Content not thyself with the surface of truth.

Like a swallow skimming the water's surface. But rather get into the bowels of it like a fish. The Puritans are great models here.

They would see a text of scripture like a diamond. And they'd kind of slowly turn it and look at its face. And then slowly rotate it and look at its other face of scripture.

And so they would catch all the different gleams of light that were coming out of it. And they would often write entire books on a single verse of scripture.

Entire books. A common phrase that you'll see as they begin to write scripture is spoken with thrill and delight is, Ah, this verse is full of matter.

[24 : 48] Full of sap. They would often say. One of my favorite Richard Baxter quotes, I think it's probably my favorite Richard Baxter quote, is, 57thly. I'm sure.

But no, he was making observations. Oh, and don't miss this. Here's a 57th thing about this truth. About this scripture. Oh, oh. So, to do this, you need to kind of break down what I call observational barriers.

Kind of like the sound barrier. Where it's just really hard to break through. But if you just keep at it, just keep your foot on the throttle, you'll break through and then things will open up more. I used to, as I would teach, you know, be discipling guys.

I'd bring them in. It was when I first got a start about 35 years ago at Yale. Bring in and say, okay, we're going to look at this now. Here we are. Let's take John 3.16. You know John 3.16? Okay.

I want you to make 100 observations from John 3.16. And, you know, they'd be staring at it for a while. And like, literally, three or four minutes later, they're squirming. No.

[25 : 54] And I'd literally have to hold their head down to the text. No, keep it. This will be worth it. This will be worth it. Keep it. Trust me. Trust me. Trust me. And they'd keep staring at it. And then suddenly, oh, my goodness.

And they'd kind of burst through this little barrier. And then they'd see about eight or nine more things would open up. And then they were sure that was it. There is nothing. No, all of Christendom will not find one more thing in this verse.

No, no, no, no. Keep at it. Keep at it. Keep at it. You're only 13 minutes in. Ah! But it changed their lives. This changed their lives. I got a picture recently from some other disciples that are out at West right now.

And they're living in a house together. And they've got this huge whiteboard. And they've got a little verse in the middle. And they're scribbling and writing all over. It's like a team event where they're all coming in.

They'll make an observation. They just keep it up in their kitchen for, like, weeks and weeks and weeks. They're just meditating on this one little verse of Scripture that they have. It's wonderful. I'm so proud of those guys. Some practical aids for the process of your observation.

[27 : 01] Paraphrase. You think you understand this? Oh, yeah, I know this. Put it into your own words. You'll discover, hmm, oh, wow, huh, not quite sure I do. Maybe outline it. Forces you to discern the connections.

Isolate one word at a time. What meaning does this one word add? What's missing if I take it away? What does this add? One word at a time. Working your way through the whole thing.

Bombard it with questions. Bombard the text with questions. The journalistic questions. Who, what, when, why, where, how, all of those. And each question will prompt more observations. Jonathan Edwards, he took a Bible, broke the spine, and would take a page and he would put blank pages in

between every sort of page.

Every page. So he'd have room to make all these notes. So what I do is I'll take a big piece of paper and then write one little verse or a phrase of scripture in the middle of that page.

And then just start making observations and just write them in all around. So you got massive margins for your observations and then a little verse in. And then that's a good way to start your meditation.

[28 : 13] And then just fill up the page. And use small handwriting and fill up the page with your observations. So a page from Jonathan Edwards' discipline. So clearly this is not the Bible, through the Bible in a year approach.

But it's very, very rewarding. When you slow down, you begin to see things that you would have missed in kind of the flyover or the drive-by.

And those are fine, too. But you need to do this also. And there will be wonderful things. It's, see, I seemed, writes Jonathan Edwards as a young man, I seemed often to see so much light exhibited in every sentence of the Bible.

And such refreshing food communicated that I could not get along in reading. Often dwelling long on one sentence to see the wonders contained in it.

And yet almost every sentence seemed to be so full of wonder. Do you not hear that confession beckon you to give it a try?

[29 : 25] So there's the first step. Retentio. Kind of observing and holding these truths in front of your mind. Here's the second step of meditation.

Remember from Augustine's, Augustine's three steps. Contemplatio or contemplation. Okay. And here we seek to gaze at God through the truths that we have distilled.

Okay. We move then from the breaking down of the truth, observing all these things. That's the analysis, analysis, to break down. Now, this part moves to a gazing at it as a whole.

This is more the intuition, not the analysis, the intuition. So we've got the truths and then we kind of hold it up. The Puritans would kind of draw on gemology to elucidate this. They'd say the first was like the cutting of the diamond.

You know, just think of that, cutting all the fake. And then you do that painstakingly. But now, this part is you hold up the diamond and you're admiring its beauty.

[30 : 30] Just seeing it just shimmer and shine. Okay. From maybe, if you're a musicologist, from studying the score of the music. You're studying the score.

Oh, what's it? Circle of fifths. Oh, how fascinating. To listening to the music. To hearing it. Just being caught up in its loveliness. Okay.

So we take the truths from our study. And as Samuel Ward says, oh, I love this image. We take those truths and we roll them.

Roll them under thy tongue. Chew on them till thou feel some sweetness in the palate of thy soul. So you take it just like a piece of good toffee.

You roll it under your tongue and get all the sweetness out of it. So here, we labor to make our portion, our little portion in meditation, like a window.

[31 : 29] That we look through and try to see God in it. So we want to yearn with all of our strength to see Christ and to behold his glory in that text.

So I ask questions like, how can I adore Christ in this truth? What in this truth that I've seen here stirs me up to praise?

What attribute of God sparkles here? This is where, in Martin Lloyd-Jones' wonderful phrase, the truth begins to shine.

Where you begin to feel God's reality pressing upon you. His attributes begin to blaze. Here, meditation becomes the bellows.

You have one of those for your fireplace. The bellows of our affection. Puritans would often talk about this. Like bellows on the coal that we have taken in. Just makes them begin to shine.

[32 : 35] And this is critical that we do because our hearts are like green wood. We got a bunch of unseasoned wood out. It is so hard to get a fire going with that stuff.

That's the way our hearts are, people. They are. Green wood is not kindled by a flash or a spark, but by constant blowing, says Thomas Manton.

Psalms 139.3. While I meditated, the fire burned. The reason we come away so cold from reading the word, writes Thomas Watson, is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.

And this takes us to Augustine's third step. Delectio. Delectio. We might translate it delight. Delight. And this is where your soul becomes a pallet.

And you taste of the glory that's disclosed. And this can scarcely be called a step. You know, we're not in control of this at all. This is often the accompanying experience.

[33 : 53] We build the altar, but the fire has to fall from heaven. And this is something that God can give to us. And sometimes our hearts do not glow. That's okay.

Come back again tomorrow. And gaze tomorrow. Maybe your heart will glow tomorrow. And the disciplines just kind of keep you in. It requires lots of skills.

It's kind of like kayaking on some kind of rough water. It takes lots of skill to stay on the river. You've got to have skills to stay on the river.

But it's not the discipline that's the delight. It's the river. It's the river. That's the delight. And all the skills of staying upright on that thing are just so you can get into and enjoy the incredible thrill of the river.

God's person. Sometimes. That's important. Sometimes, writes John Owen. Sometimes, writes John Owen.

[35 : 02] These meditations fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory. There is granted to us a relish and a savor in which lies the sweetness and satisfaction of the spiritual life.

We taste then by experience that God is gracious. And that the love of Christ is better than wine. Or as Richard Baxter put it, Sometimes our meditation, and again, sometimes.

Sometimes our meditations be as the chariot of Elijah that takes us up to heaven. Isn't that wonderful? It's from his Saints Everlasting Rest.

Well, before we move from meditation, I want to underscore one final time its vital importance in the life of the disciple.

As Thomas White writes in his Art of Divine Meditation. It is better to hear one sermon only and meditate on that than to hear two sermons and meditate on neither.

[36 : 18] Or as Baxter quaintly puts it, A man may eat too much, but he cannot digest too well. What a great...

He can eat too much, but he can't digest too well. In fact, the whole point of eating, is it not? Is to digest and to assimilate.

Every sermon, writes James Usher, is but a preparation for meditation. Every sermon is but a preparation for meditation.

Faith is lean, writes Manton, And ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation. In short, without meditation, writes Thomas Watson, All is lost.

All is lost. So let me leave you with this charge from the pen of Thomas Watson. If you have formerly neglected it, he writes, Bewail your neglect.

[37 : 24] And now, begin to make conscience of it. Lock yourself up with God at least once a day in holy meditation. Ascend this hill.

And when you are gotten to the top of it, You shall see a fair prospect. Christ in heaven before you. Let me put you in mind of that saying of Bernard.

Saint Bernard. Who writes, O saint, knowest thou not that thy husband Christ is bashful, And will not be familiar in company?

Retire thyself by meditation into the closet or the field. And there you shall have Christ's embraces. So, we have preparation.

First step. Again, remember the topic. How to engage the word with spiritual profit. First, preparation. Then, meditation. And the third step is application.

[38 : 28] Application. Application. From verses 22 through 24 and 25, the second half. Or, in James' word here in the text, Becoming or being a doer of the word and not merely a hearer.

You saw that. Now, if we neglect this step, We will have lots of company. For we will swell a throng that no man can count. Those who open the word and close it without effect.

Like the fellow who looks in a mirror, But walks away and forgets what he saw. Some gross deformity in his countenance. Or the spinach on his tooth. Or whatever.

And the result is, No benefit at all. Delusion. We're deluded. If we think this is making any difference. In James' word.

And this is pervasive. But perilous. Perilous. You see, Bible study that stops short of a response Becomes a tool of the devil.

[39 : 28] Okay? You heard me say this in church. Bible study can become a tool of the devil. To make us more like the other denizens of hell.

Who are full of truth, but ungodliness. Okay? We know that's what demons are like. They have all kinds of knowledge. Okay? Just not godliness.

And as Thomas Watson writes, Reading without, Reading the scriptures without practice Will be but a torch to light men to hell.

And this may seem an extreme contention, But minds that are seeped in scripture Keep asserting this. Jonathan Edwards has a sermon entitled True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils.

The Devils. Where he talks about Satan is educated In the best of divinity schools. The heaven of heavens. He's got full, he's got lots of knowledge.

[40 : 28] Okay? So that's not what's distinctive. It's actually turning that into godliness That will make us different from the demons. Jesus underscores this necessity of application In Matthew 7, 24.

Remember that. The wise men who built his house upon the rock. That metaphor. But you remember what the contrast was. Don't you? Was it that the fool didn't hear the words?

No! Heard them! What was it? Didn't act upon them. That's the contrast. Those who apply and those who don't. Not acquaintance with Christ's words.

But their application. Matthew 7, 24 through 27. In other words, Mark 4. Use it or lose it.

Whoever has more will be given. Whoever has not. Even what they have will be taken away. Use it or lose it. So this crucial step Naturally becomes the focus Of intense spiritual warfare.

[41 : 35] You remember Jesus said The devil comes And takes away the seed of the word. That is he would keep The would-be disciple The would-be disciple Because you don't know if you're a disciple Until you act upon the word.

Satan would keep the would-be disciple From acting upon the word. That's what he wants to do. So where's the devil right now? He's sitting right on our shoulders. Eager to help us To just have this go In one ear and out the other.

You're familiar with C.S. Lewis' screw tape letters. The correspondence between Kind of junior and senior tempters. Wormwood and screw tape. Here's one bit.

The great thing Wormwood is to prevent his That is Wormwood's new Christian client. He's just He's just Just come to Christ.

The great thing is to prevent his Doing anything. As long as he does not Convert it into action It does not matter How much he thinks about His new repentance.

[42 : 38] Let the little brute Wallow in it. Let him If he has any Bent that way Write a book about it. That's often an excellent way Of sterilizing the seeds Which the enemy By enemy He means God Plants in a human Soul Let him do anything Anything but act.

So we must remember That our aim is ultimately Not to master the scriptures But for them To master us. That's what we want.

We get into the word So it can get into us. That's the whole point of it. And to this end We must keep Telling ourselves That God In it Is addressing Me.

He's addressing me. Kierkegaard In a sermon On this very verse Wonderful. The sermon is entitled What is required In order to look at oneself With true blessing In the mirror of the word.

So he's drawing Right from this passage. And he writes The first requirement Is that you must Not look At the mirror But you must Look to see Yourself In the mirror.

[43 : 52] See the difference there? Isn't that profound? Don't look at the mirror. The Bible like a mirror. Well what are you supposed To do with a mirror? Just look at the mirror? No. Just look at the Bible? No. You want to see yourself In the mirror.

And remember I continue with Kierkegaard And remember To say to yourself Incessantly It is I To whom it is speaking. It is About It is I About whom it is speaking.

Let me Briefly touch on a few Practicals Here of application. If you're having difficulty Coming up with an application Consider the categories Of 2 Timothy 3.16 You remember All scripture is given And is profitable for Doctrine, reproof, Correction, instruction, And righteousness.

Okay so Doctrine Is there anything That I need to believe? That's to act. To believe something Is to act. Reproof Is there any error In my life That this refutes?

Correction How do I Reform my life? Training in righteousness Discipline In other words Doctrine Tells me what the path is It shows me If I've gotten off the path It tells me How to get back on the path And it tells me How to stay on the path Really comprehensive So those are some categories To think through Also in your effort To formulate your applications Here are six Well One of the things I do Is I try I also consider The different hats That I wear In application Okay I'm a disciple What difference Does this truth make As a disciple?

[45 : 36] I'm also a husband I'm a father I'm a son I'm a friend I might be an employee So these are the different hats And then I ask questions If If this is what God is like What difference does it make For how I live today As a Father As a friend As a And on and on like that What What emotions Attitudes Behaviors Flare up in me As a father As a All the way through When I'm forgetful Of this truth These sorts of things So here quick Six tips To make it take One When I try to formulate An application One Be specific Be specific Okay So it's not a good application To say My application is to Become a better person That's altogether Too vague Okay I need to become More like Jesus Great How would that be?

Okay See You need to be specific Second Be concrete Okay How When What will it take? It's kind of like those meetings That we have You know In the quad At Yale You run into a friend Oh Oh Good to see you Yeah Let's do lunch Yeah Let's do lunch And you part If it doesn't go in the schedule It's not happening It's got to be Got to be concrete about it Be Third Be realistic Don't be over ambitious I've got to outline The whole Bible In these six different colors Yeah No Start small And succeed And build on your successes Despise not the day Of little beginnings Okay So be specific Be concrete Be realistic Be accountable Solicit some support To buttress your resolve Hey Will you ask me How I'm doing about this?

I want to do a better job Remembering to tell my wife That I really love her And not just that I do But how it is I want to explain it to her How I love her Will you ask me Every time you see me How's it going with that?

Because I tend to be forgetful of that So be accountable And finally Or penultimately Begin Begin Now this is important So many promises That we make Are just writing on sand When they're not Acted on promptly Have you noticed that?

George MacDonald observes Good notions Must take advantage Of their first ripeness Their first ripeness And this is where Our determined applications Are so often scuttled He will not lose his loaf Who has taken care At once to eat it Writes Spurgeon Neither can he be deprived Of the benefit of the doctrine Who has already acted upon it Most readers and hearers Become moved So far as to purpose To amend But alas And I'm continuing with Spurgeon All of these are wonderful metaphors But alas The proposal Is a blossom Which has not been knit And therefore No fruit comes of it They wait They waver And then they forget Till Oh And here Let this metaphor

[49 : 06] Stay with you Till Like the ponds In the nights of frost When the sun shines by day They are only thawed In time To be frozen again That fatal tomorrow Is red Is blood red With the murder Of fair resolutions Kierkegaard writes The next hour After the one we call The quiet hour Is the critical hour The critical hour Accordingly urges The best thing to do therefore Is promptly to say to yourself I will promptly begin To prevent myself From forgetting Promptly At this very moment I promise myself And God Even if it is just For the next hour Or for this very day This long It shall be certain I do not forget Finally be sensitive

To the spirit It sounded mechanical here But it's basically relational It's the spirit Speaking to our soul George MacDonald writes You can begin at once To be a disciple Of the living one By obeying him In the first thing You can think of In which you are not Obeying him We must learn to obey him In everything And so must begin somewhere Let it begin at once In the very next thing That lies at the door Of your conscience Okay So there is The application Finally In two seconds Because we need to rush up Because I think We need to end early I apologize for this Continuation Continuation Verse 25 And continues in it So this indicates That persevering The perseverance In engaging in scripture And perseverance In the truths That our engagement prompts Our meditations And applications Ought not to be A mere instance Or spasm Or episode But rather A biding lifestyle We need to keep at it William Bates

If the bird Leaves her nest For a long space The eggs chill And are not fit For production But where there is A constant incubation They bring forth So when we leave Religious duties For a long space Our affections Chill and grow cold And are not fit To produce holiness Or comfort To our souls And notice Verse 25 Not having Become But having Become It is your continuation Our continuation Or

our failure To continue That is determining What we are becoming Or what we are not Becoming
Your pattern Our pattern For good or ill Will become our character And finally Our destiny So
remember The parable of the soils That chilling utterance They were only temporary They were
only temporary The only adequate response To the word Is to continue in it Alright So friends Will
we not Commit ourselves With new zeal

To engaging God's word Fruitfully If we fail We can scarcely Hope to grow And change And we will
Sadly supply More evidence To the common Tragic conclusion That I heard In the sauna It isn't true
Christianity Doesn't make Any difference I've watched Christians up close For years They are no
different From the rest of us It's all A lie No Rather may it be Said of us As was said Of Peter and
John In Acts 4 They recognize them As those Who had been With Jesus That's what we want For
the honor Of him Whose name That we bear Thank you I'm so sorry That we They've asked us To
head up A little early Given the Things that we Need to set up For a little bit So thank you Friends
Blessings on you And see you Hopefully Next week You
You You Thank you.