

A Firm Foundation 8

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Preacher: Jon Hinkson

[0 : 00] Right, is it? Ready. Excellent. Raul always flatters me when he kind of looks, decides, and then puts his earpiece in.

Sometimes I'll start and I'll see him take it out and throw it away. Or my favorite, my favorite is, I'll start telling him some of my best stories and I'm about a few seconds and he'll say, is this a long story? Because I'm already bored.

I did that to me in surgery. Oh God. It's pouring out my heart. Raul, this is a long story. Okay team, I don't, if you can't see that.

If you're upset and you care, feel free to shift. All right team, well, we have taken up in our series on scripture several questions which commonly suggest themselves to thoughtful inquiring minds. Questions concerning scripture's authority, clarity, historicity, canonicity, transmission. And if you are just joining us and these are questions of interest to you, the recordings are accessible on Trinity website.

[1 : 31] I was supposed to say that. Okay, well, we want to conclude our series on a most practical note.

Come on in, come on in team, you're making it. Perfect timing, we're just beginning here. We want to conclude this series on a most practical note.

Taking up not so much a further doctrine or belief about scripture as a practice with regard to scripture.

For as vital for disciples of Jesus as are their right beliefs about scripture or anything for that matter. Having the right beliefs as James disturbingly reminds us will not necessarily distinguish us from demons.

[2 : 30] As James says in James 2.19, even the demons believe. As Jonathan Edwards glosses this, Satan himself is educated in the best divinity school in the universe, the heaven of heavens.

So we must put these beliefs into practice. That's going to be what we want to focus on in this final session, to explore a practice together.

Namely, how do we engage the scriptures that we now hopefully appropriately esteem. How do we engage the scriptures to our spiritual prophet?

Or, to use the language of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3.16, how do we get the word of Christ to come to dwell in us richly?

And sisters and brothers, I can think of few more vital and practical subjects as this. And this topic is, for me, one that is kind of mingled with wonderful nostalgia and memories.

[3 : 43] For I want to take as my guiding text a passage of scripture that my dad opened up to me when I was a young man. In fact, actually just a little boy.

I can remember it so vividly. Just opening up the scripture and saying, hey, let's work through a passage, son. And what he did, I knew from his life that what he was giving to me was not incidental, but at the heart of his own life and walk with God.

Dad lived in the word. My earliest memories are running through the woods, memorizing scripture with him. We even had this arrangement that if I memorized a verse, I was a really little guy.

If I memorized a verse, he would memorize the chapter in which it was contained. We would do that together. I really got him once, and I memorized one in Psalm 119.

He memorized the whole thing. And if I memorized the chapter, he'd have to memorize the book. But, yeah, it was a good arrangement. Start with the verse.

[4 : 50] Exactly. Exactly. And countless times over breakfast, I would see him kind of with boyish delight. Just he'd open up his Bible and say, look what I found in the word today.

Isn't this fantastic? Look at this. Look at this. And his engagement with the word was not episodic. There was really no ebb or flow.

It was really consistent. In fact, the day that he died, he died in a bicycle accident. And he was rooting the word. Maybe that's why he crashed, because he had his little verse pack with him. He's memorizing scripture. He was riding his bike. But the Lord took him. And so, all this to say, this model came to me with the credit of a godly life, which bore much fruit.

And I want to pass it on. That's what I want to do today. And he took this outline from the book of James. James 1, 21 to 25. Let me read that.

[5 : 57] Read that for us. James 1. James 1, verse 20. Picking up in 21.

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 one 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.

She will be blessed in all she is doing. All right. All right. There we go. The context of this is the role of the word in bringing spiritual life.

[7 : 04] So verse 18, just before, we have been brought forth by the word of truth. So now James goes on to explain how that word sustains the life that it has inaugurated.

And so I'm going to adopt the outline that dad gave me, and illustrate the truths with profuse and delightful reference to the Puritans, particularly.

I'm rather fond of the Puritans. So here are the four steps that dad drew from this passage. First, when we come to the word preparation, verse 21, preparation.

Putting aside all filthiness. Or in the inimitable King James Version, superfluity of naughtiness. What a phrase. Put away all superfluity of naughtiness.

You know, often we dive right in to scriptures. But it's fitting and needful to prepare our hearts for the engagement.

[8 : 15] As Thomas Watson, these people that I'm naming, they're all just famous Puritans. As Thomas Watson put it, many come rashly to the reading of the word. And no wonder if they come without preparation, that they go away without profit.

Or Thomas Manton. They that look for the bridegroom had need trim up their lamps. In agricultural metaphor, weed before you seed.

Weed before you seed. Jeremiah 4 tells us, plow up the fallow ground, sow not among thorns.

Sometimes, you know, if I haven't dealt with my heart and I just dive right into scripture, it's like I'm trying to sow good seed among thorns. We don't want to do that. So how do we put aside all this superfluity of naughtiness?

Well, we check to see if we're cherishing any sin. And David's prayer is a good model here in Psalm 139, 23, where, Search me, O God, and know my heart.

[9 : 19] Try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked, hurtful way in me. And if the Holy Spirit reveals anything, well, we confess it, according to 1 John 1, 9, and he will cleanse us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So we just simply repair to the fountain. In those wonderful words of Zechariah, that fountain opened for sin and impurity.

Or as I told our girls as they were growing up, you know, you wash your hands before the meal. And that's what we're doing with respect to scripture. We're just washing our hands before our meal. The second part of preparation concerns our attitude or our disposition.

Notice how it says there, in humility. In humility. So we place ourselves under the word and recognize its authority.

It judges us. Not we it. So we need to drop our defensive guarded posture. And rather read with a readiness to submit to it.

[10 : 36] And where does God disclose himself? Well, the highest heaven, it says, but also to the humblest heart. Isn't that wonderful?

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

Or Luke 1 puts it this way, 52 and 53. He gives grace to the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things. So we want to come to the word hungry and humble. Hungry and humble. And then in the final phrase of our text in James here. Receive the word. Notice, able to save. This highlights our dependence upon the scriptures. [11:34] We need to welcome the scriptures work in our lives. For the Bible's work in our hearts is God's saving work.

Recall that receiving the word is a condition of salvation. I want to be really careful here. Not for salvation, but of salvation. In other words, if we are being saved, we are necessarily receiving the word.

These things just are correlates. They will go together. They will go together. So there's our preparation. That's the first step.

Preparation. Any questions or comments about preparation? You seeing this in the text? Emerge from the text? Okay.

[12:29] Yeah, pretty straightforward, I guess. All right. So, with heart prepared, we turn to the second step. And that is, again, borrowing from my dad, meditation.

Meditation. And this is suggested by the word that we have in verse 25. What's rendered in our text? Looks intently.

Looks intently. Parakupsis is the word. It's kind of like the image of bending over and peering. It's the same word that's used of John, you know, at the tomb.

Bending over and peering in and looking with all your strength. Referring to the disciples of the sepulchre in Luke 24, 17. Or, wonderfully, that marvelous phrase in 1 Peter 1, 12, about the angels desiring to search out God's saving actions.

They longed to look into salvation. Same thing. So, what is it that we intently look into?

[13:42] What is the object of our meditation? Meditation. Actually, let me add a little sidebar here.

And because as evangelicals, oftentimes we narrow the scope of our meditation. But then we're kind of parting company with a long and hallowed tradition of Christian sisters and brothers who also believe that we can meditate on nature and providence.

So, Psalm 19, the heavens declare the glory of God. Or, Acts 17, God is the shaper of history. So, these are also areas where we can meditate.

It does have a long and faithful pedigree. As Thomas Manton puts it, A gracious heart, that is a believing heart, A gracious heart is like an alembic.

An alembic, it's like an apparatus of distillation. It distills things. A gracious heart is like a distillation apparatus.

[14:56] It can distill useful meditations out of all things it meeteth with. As it seeth all things in God, so it seeth God in all things.

Isn't that wonderful? As it seeth all things in God, in the framework of God. For from him and to him and through him, or through him and to him are all things.

We see all things in God, therefore we see God in all things. Wonderful, wonderful thought. And again, John Owen and his great work on spiritual mindedness.

He actually, the first one that he takes is a characteristic of a spiritual person. is that they are able to discern God's hand in providence.

Interesting, isn't it? Jonathan Edwards' work, Divine Emblems. Everything has a stamp of their creator. So he turns to nature to distill some meditations from.

[16:01] John Bunyan's Divine Emblems, too, is another. In fact, probably the first book of poetry for children in the English language. John Bunyan's Divine Emblems, wonderful, where he says, go to the ant and you'll have a little poem about an ant and some sort of useful meditation for children and for grownups, too.

Those are the book, the stripe of books that parents love to read to their kids because they're so good. So, but nature or history cannot be an adequate supply of any new content to revelation.

Okay? All it can do is really, it cannot inform, it can just impress.

So we know what we know from Scripture, from his revelation. But then this bright, wonderful world and the motions of history can illustrate and impress these truths that we've got from Scripture.

And what a wonderful gift that is, that he surrounds us with all these things because we need impression. We need impressing if we're going to walk a godly life. So, I just add that because sometimes that's new for this most recent generation.

[17:18] Oh, we can meditate on nature and history and stuff, too? Yes, we can. But, but the chief object of meditation is Scripture. And this is the object that James, in our passage, is indicating.

Notice, he refers to it as the perfect law. Parallel to where else in Scripture you would see the law of the Lord in Psalm 1 or Psalm 119.

Okay? Does this just refer to the laws of the Bible like the Ten Commandments? It might seem so, the law of the Lord? No. No. James here, and this is the common biblical idiom, is not speaking of a particular portion of God's word.

Rather, all of God's word considered authoritatively. That's why it's very natural to refer to all of God's word is the law. It's not all law per se, but all of it is authoritative.

It comes to us that way, and it highlights that aspect. So, that's what's going on there. And the term is a helpful one, for it reminds us that we need to accept its authority completely. If you get rid of what you don't like, you can't wrestle with God.

[18:32] God can't challenge you and correct you. It can't then be a life-changing encounter. As we consider meditation, let me enforce how vital it is for the disciple, but alas, how commonly neglected.

As Richard Baxter writes, why so much preaching is lost among us. And professors, not university appointments, but those who claim to have faith, professors, you know.

And professors can run from sermon to sermon, and are never weary of hearing or reading, and yet have such languishing, starved souls.

I know no truer or greater cause than their ignorance and unconscionable neglect of meditation. Isn't that interesting?

And pretty scary. So, there we are running from sermon to sermon to sermon, getting all this stuff, and yet our souls can still be languishing, languishing, starved souls.

[19:46] And he says, it's the lack of meditation. The lack of meditation. Yeah. But I'm sure that the reason for that is because they were much more distracted by media than we are today.

So, I'm sure we don't have these sorts of problems. It is helpful to consider meditation in relation to, first, the dynamic, how it works, and then the discipline, how we work at it.

Okay? How it works, and then how we work at it. So, first, the dynamic. How does it work? Psalm 1 tells us that the one who meditates is like a tree.

And just, you know, running with a better word. Water comes in one end and fruit at the other. Okay?

Unlike a pipe where it's water in, water out. Okay? A change, a change takes place in the substance of the tree. And this is what meditation does.

[21:03] Meditation. Here's an important phrase. Meditation makes the word flesh. Meditation makes the word flesh.

It takes the principles and truths and works them into our being. Meditation. Meditation. Meditation. Emotionally. Affectively. Actively. Actively. The word becomes us.

Meditation is a way to make the Bible like the burning bush before Moses. out of which God speaks to us directly and arrestingly.

Meditation is the descent of the mind into the heart. And as with the Mount of Transfiguration, the truth begins to shine.

And as with the Mount of Transfiguration, you remember, as the truth is transfigured before us, that's what transforms us.

[22:13] Truth in its transfiguration, that's what transforms us. Truth works into and explodes in the heart like a combustion engine, kind of imparting the soul with speed and strength.

Or think of the heart like photographic film. I don't know. Remember that ancient thing that we happened so long ago? The photographic film, chemically treated to make it sensitive to light.

Okay? And that's the Holy Spirit working on the heart to make it sensitive to the impressions.

And then meditation brings the truth like light, impressing itself upon the heart that's prepared or sensitized by the Holy Spirit.

And the corresponding images that it creates, that are produced, are these new affections. What then our heart longs for and is delighted with.

[23:23] That's the change. It's a wonderful one. And meditation actually reworks the affectional currents of our heart such that they can start flowing in different directions.

Like they did with the Chicago River. I don't know how they do this, but they actually got the river to start flowing in a different direction. And that's what meditation does to our hearts.

And oh, do we not have a need for that, for some change in the currents. And simple Bible reading, even Bible study, and I'm really a fan of Bible reading and Bible study.

You know, don't get me wrong here. But even these things will not achieve this. Such inner working really requires meditation.

As Thomas Watson writes, study is the finding out of a truth. Meditation is the spiritual improvement of a truth.

[24 : 36] The Puritans would use improvement, that it changes us, it makes us different people. That's what they meant by improvement. The spiritual improvement of a truth. The one searcheth for the vein of gold.

The other digs out the gold. Study. Oh, listen to this metaphor. Study is like a winter sun that hath little warmth and influence.

Meditation melts the heart when it is frozen and makes it drop into tears of love. What a wonderful metaphor.

A winter sun. Or again, with a similar metaphor. This is Thomas Watson. There is as much difference between the 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. The sun hath a sweet influence.

[25 : 55] It maketh the plants to grow and the herb to flourish. So, or likewise, knowledge is but like a torch lighted in the understanding which hath little or no influence.

It maketh not a man the better. 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 in a truth.

That is, pulls life out of the truth. If we would experience real change, we must give ourselves to meditation.

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

[27 : 05] Wow, I mean, this is really forceful claims. But these people have credibility. They really do. A man shall as soon live without his heart, as he shall be able to get good by what he reads without meditation.

Excellent. You say that study is like looking at a meal, but meditation is eating it.

Excellent. And in fact, I'm going to use, Baxter's going to use a metaphor just like that in just a moment. That's excellent. Saints have a lasting rest or the Reformed passage? Saints have a lasting rest.

Yeah, yeah, that one. No, yeah. So these are some vaunting claims, friends. You know, do you feel like it overstates the case or do you feel the ring of truth to this?

So how may we practice this vital discipline? Okay, so we were looking at the dynamic, you know, how it works. Now, the discipline that we must practice, how we work at it, okay?

[28 : 22] Meditation is the essential discipline of all of the disciplines. And really, it's a compound discipline involving both study and prayer.

As Thomas Manton explains, meditation is a middle sort of duty between word and prayer and hath respect to both. The word feedeth meditation and meditation feedeth prayer.

And the prayer that arises is what we might call answering prayer. Okay, this is distinct from calling prayer. Okay, Peter steps out of the boat.

Help me, Jesus, I'm drowning. Okay, that's calling prayer. Okay, really great. And we want to do it all the time. All right. But in answering prayer, God chooses the subject.

He sets the tone and he commences the conversation. You see, meditation begins with Bible study but proceeds to prayer.

[29 : 33] But see there, but God is choosing what the subject matter is of the conversation with that. In the wonderful phrase of Richard Baxter, meditation is taking the truth and praying it down into your soul until it catches fire.

Praying the truth down into your soul until it catches fire. Helpful on the meditation process, I find Augustine. There are a few of them I'm talking about.

Augustine of Hippo, 354 to 430. And he speaks of meditation as the ascent of the soul into God and breaks down the discipline into three steps.

Okay, three steps. The first he calls retentio. Retentio. Okay. And this is the distillation of the truths of scripture and holding them centrally before our mind.

Basically, Bible study. And here, observational skills are really key. So pray with David for powers of observation as we do this.

[30 : 50] Psalm 119, verse 18, open my eyes. And you grow in this, we grow in this, by forcing ourselves to do it and just staying at it.

Kind of like what we know to do with our kids when we're teaching them to eat a meal. Good, take a bite. Good, good. Okay, take another one. Yep, lift the fork, open the mouth, put it in.

Chew, chew, chew. Good, okay. Now take another one. You just have to keep at it. We don't do this naturally. Louie Agassiz, 19th century Harvard naturalist, would have his students observe a fish in a bowl for two whole days.

Graduate students would come up and he was the most, you know, father of natural science in America, Louie Agassiz. I mean, you'd study with him, you were going to be great. And they'd show up, you know, pretty confident that they were the cat's pajamas and he'd say, here, stare at this fish and make some observations.

And he would make them do it. He would hold their head to the bowl for two days. Two days. And they'd go crazy. But they'd get to be good. You know, one time he was asked, what was your greatest contribution scientifically?

[32 : 09] And this guy had a CV and he said, I have taught men and women to observe. That was his greatest, that's what he felt to be his greatest contribution.

And lingering is required. This is not cursory, but protracted. Thomas Manton writes, the Christian is like some heavy birds as the bustard, I guess the buzzard, and others that cannot get upon wing without a run of a furlong or two.

Have you seen those things? What a great image. You see him kind of flapping, trying to get up off the ground. And we're like that. Manton again writes, content not thyself with the surface of the truth, like a swallow skimming the water of a lake.

But get into the bowels of it. Puritans are a real model here. They would see the text like a multifaceted diamond.

And they'd kind of hold it up and gaze at it for a long, long time, make observations, and then just slightly turn it, look at another face of it, then slightly turn it, keep looking at that.

[33 : 28] Often they would write entire books on a single verse. On a single verse. A common phrase that is always spoken with this thrill and delight is, ah, this verse is full of matter.

It's full of matter. Here's perhaps my all-time favorite Richard Baxter quote. Okay? 57thly. Unbelievable!

57thly. He's given you a list of his observations. You know in his sermon, 57thly. You know, even the most stalwart preacher today will never get to 57 points. But they did. Routinely.

57thly. Ah. Yeah, that has a savor of heaven about that. And we need to, we need to break these observational barriers. You know what I mean?

Well, you're staring at the Bible, you think you've got everything, you think you've got everything, but you stay at it, and then suddenly, boom! And then so much more comes in.

[34 : 33] I used to do this with disciples in the early days where we'd take John 3.16. They'd even memorize. They thought, I know it! I know it! Say, all right, men, we're going to make 100, and women, I did it with my daughters too, we're going to make 100 observations.

And, you know, it was agony keeping them there, you know, just like eating. Take another bite of peas, you know, there's nothing more, no, no, no, no, no, no. You know, I'd physically hold their head, you know, so they can't move. You know, we'd fetter them.

But it was one of the most exciting experiences they had. They'd get to 100 observations on a single verse, and it changed their lives. It changed their lives. They couldn't believe it.

Oh, my goodness. Well, some practical aids for the process. You know, when you're looking at a text, paraphrase it. You think you understand it? Try to put it in your own words. Whoa, pretty challenging.

Outline it. Forces you to discern connections. Here's one. Isolate one word. What is this ad? What if I take this word away? What goes missing?

[35 : 41] Just one word. Bombard it with questions. The journalistic questions. These prompt observations. Just like reading a book.

You know, you want to, you know, before you go into a book, go into a book with questions, or else you're not going to end up with answers. You know, like, oh, wow, I just, I just read War and Peace. Wow, well, what was it about? Oh, Russia? Start with questions, or you're not going to end up with any answers. Here's a leaf from Jonathan Edwards.

This is a discipline that he had. He took a Bible and broke open the spine, and then he would put blank pages between the pages of text, and it was already one that had the massive margins. And then he would just, he would just make observations all over this blank Bible. And this is what I'll offer to you.

[36 : 42] If I need to preach on something, or if I need to meditate on something, I'll just take a big piece of paper, just write the verse out in the middle of the thing, and then there's just white, and then just fill it with observations.

Fill it with observations. And clearly, this is not the kind of through the Bible in a year approach, but it's very, very rewarding. When you slow down, you will see things that you would have missed kind of with the flyover or the drive-by technique.

It was like that's when we talked on the phone or on our ride, Psalm 119, 36 and 37. Turn my heart from, incline my heart to your testimonies and not to covetousness.

Turn my eye away from looking at worthless things and revive me in your way. And all those first words, me and you, I found out that it was God who turned my eyes.

Yes. It was God who revived me. Yes. It was God who inclined my heart to his ways and not me.

Yes. He was doing it. That's how you find, oh, I don't do anything.

[37 : 50] It's him who does everything. Excellent. It's the glory of scripture. That's a great idea. I never saw that. Yeah. I'm like, oh, I don't do this. He does it. Yeah. Fantastic. Yeah, that's right. That's right.

I mean, you will go away laden with riches if you linger and meditate. Absolutely. It seemed, writes Jonathan Edwards, it seemed, or sorry, I seemed often to see so much light exhibited by every sentence 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.

Don't you hear that confession beckoning you? Come on and see. Come on and see. So there's the first step.

Retentio. This is kind of Augustine's how do we do this. Second step. Contemplatio. Contemplatio. Contemplation, I guess. Here, we seek to gaze at God through the truths that we have distilled.

[39 : 06] Okay, we move from breaking down the truth, analysis, to gazing at it as a whole, intuition, so to speak.

Okay? And the Puritans would draw from gemology to elucidate. You know, they would say, well, the first is cutting the diamond painstakingly.

And then the second is holding it up and admiring its beauty. Admiring its beauty. Or if you're a musician, you're moving from studying the score to actually hearing the music.

And so, we take the truths from our study and, says Samuel Ward, oh, I love this.

We roll them under, roll them under thy tongue. Chew on them till thou feel some sweetness in the palate of thy soul.

[40 : 07] Isn't that great? I remember when I was little kids, missionary kids, once a week, we'd go to the candy store and we'd each get to get one piece of candy. And I'd get the toffee because it was so good and it would last a long time and I'd find that part of your tongue that was most responsive to sweetness and I would roll that thing under my tongue and it would last me all five blocks walking home.

You know, and that's what he says, do it with scripture. You know, roll them under thy tongue.

Chew on them till thou feel some sweetness in the palate of thy soul. Isn't that a wonderful image?

Oh, Samuel Ward, thank you, dear brother. And here, we labor to make our portion in meditation become a window or an oculus and we want to yearn with all of our strength to see Christ, to behold his glory in that text.

Christ. So, I ask myself there, how can I adore Christ in this truth? What here stirs me to praise?

What attribute of God sparkles here?

This is where, in the wonderful phrase of Martin Lloyd-Jones, the truth begins to shine. The truth begins to shine. Where you begin to feel his reality pressing upon you and his attributes begin to blaze.

[41 : 40] Here, meditation becomes the bellows of the affections. Remember those things? You know, on the coal. That's Thomas Watson.

Like bellows on the coal of what we have taken in in our Bible study. So, meditation is bellows. This is critical because our hearts, are they not?

Our hearts are like green wood. They're like green wood. Thomas Manton writes, green wood is not kindled by a flash or a spark, but by constant blowing.

Wonderful. Then, Psalm 39.3, while I meditated, the fire burned. Again, Watson, the reason we come away so cold from reading the word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.

And this takes us to Augustine's third step, dilectio. delight. Oh, oh, oh, sorry. Yeah, yeah, here we go. Dilectio.

[43 : 06] Delight. Delight. And this is where your soul becomes a palate and you taste of the glory that's disclosed.

And we can scarcely, this can scarcely be called a step because we're not in control of this. It's kind of like whitewater rafting. Have you done some of that?

Or kayaking in these great Vermont streams where it takes a lot of skills, but the thrill isn't the skills. It just takes skills to stay on the river, but the thrill is the river.

It's the river. And that's what we're coming into now. You know, just the thrill of the river. That's the delight. Skills are just to keep you there. Turn over my canoe so fast.

And it's often, you know, we're not in control of this. It's often, but it is often the accompanying experience.

[44 : 10] The accompanying experience. We can build the altar, but the fire must fall from heaven. And sometimes our hearts don't glow. My heart doesn't glow.

A lot of the time my heart doesn't glow. It's okay. I'll come back tomorrow. And I'll gaze again tomorrow. It's all right. I learned a lot. You know, it's okay. Sometimes, writes John Owen.

John Owen. Sometimes. Sometimes these meditations fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory. There is to us granted 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. John Owen.

[45 : 12] Meditations on the glory of Christ. Or, as Richard Baxter put it, sometimes, don't be discouraged if it doesn't happen often, sometimes our meditations be as the chariot of Elijah and take us up into heaven.

Isn't that wonderful? Again, that's saints' everlasting rest. 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, 1672, so these are periods still, it is better to hear one sermon only and meditate on that than to hear two sermons and meditate on neither.

Okay? Or as Baxter quaintly put it, Raoul anticipated him here, a man may eat too much, but he cannot digest too well.

Isn't that great? A man may eat too much, boy do I know that, but he cannot digest too well.

[46 : 34] Saints' everlasting rest. Near the end, page 549. In fact, the whole point of eating, surely, is to digest and assimilate it.

That's the whole point. Every sermon, writes James Usher, is but a preparation for meditation. Every sermon is but, nothing but, a preparation for meditation.

Which is a preparation for the consummation. Yeah, excellent. That's great. Yes, that's right. It will accustom us to our occupation for eternity.

That's right. Faith is lean, writes Manton, and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation.

So, as Thomas Watson writes, a Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation, the truths of God will not stay with us.

[47 : 37] The heart is hard, and the memory is slippery. And so, without meditation, all is lost. All is lost. Christ, so let me leave you with this charge from the pen of Watson.

If you have formerly, formerly neglected it, bewail your neglect, and now begin to make a conscience of it. Lock up yourself with God at least once a day by holy meditation. Ascend this hill, and when you are gotten to the top of it, you shall see a fair prospect. Christ and heaven before you.

Let me put in your mind that saying of Bernard. He's talking about Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Bernard. 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 thou shalt have Christ's embraces. So, we have preparation, then meditation, and the third step is application.

[48 : 56] Application. Verses 22 through 24 and 25. Or in the words of James here, our original text, becoming or being a doer of the word and not merely a hearer.

Now, if we neglect this step, we will have lots of company, for we will merely swell a throng that no man can count.

Those who open the word and close it without effect, like the fellow who looks in the mirror, but walks away and forgets what he saw, the gross deformity, okay, the spinach.

and the result is no benefit at all. Deluded. Deluded, James says. And this is pervasive, but perilous.

Perilous. Bible study that stops short of response becomes a tool of the devil to make us like the other denizens of hell, full of truth and ungodliness.

[50 : 16] Or in Watson's words, reading without practice will be but a torch to light men to hell.

Okay, now this may seem an extreme contention, but minds more steeped in scripture assert the same thing.

Jonathan Edwards has a sermon called True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils. Okay, True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils in which he says, Satan is educated in the best school of divinity, namely the heaven of heavens.

Okay, so it's not just knowledge. And Jesus underscores the necessity of application. Matthew 7 from Sermon on the Mount, 7, 24 through 27. Remember contrasting the person that builds their house on the rock and the person that builds on the sand.

Do you remember what the contrast is? What is the difference between the one who builds their house on the rock and builds their house on the sand?

Was it hearing the words? Anybody remember? No. No. That's right. That is correct. It is he who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice.

[51 : 47] Remember that's the contrast. The guy whose house is on the sand, oh they hear all these words, they hear all these words. They might give a tentative lunch. So that's the contrast there.

Not an acquaintance with Christ's words but their application is determinative. In other words, Mark 4 24 and 25, Jesus makes a similar point.

Use what you've got or lose it. Use or lose. He who has, more will be given. He who has not even what they have or thought he had will be taken away. Apply or forfeit.

Apply or forfeit. And this crucial step naturally becomes the sure focus of spiritual warfare.

Remember what Jesus said in the parable of the soils?

The devil comes and takes away the seed. The seed of the word that's been strewn on us. The devil comes and takes away the seed. That is, keeps would-be disciples from acting on it.

[52 : 55] You're no doubt familiar with C.S. Lewis's Screwtape letters, the correspondence between junior and senior demons, Wormwood and Screwtape. So here's, the great thing, writes Screwtape to Wormwood, is to prevent your, Wormwood's Christian client, who he's trying to keep from becoming, is to prevent him doing anything.

As long as he does not convert it into action, it doesn't matter how much he thinks about this new repentance. Let the little brute wallow in it. Let him, if he has any bent that way, to write a book about it.

That's often an excellent way of sterilizing the seeds, which the enemy, because he's referring to God when he says enemy, these are demons, which the enemy plants in the human soul.

Let him do anything but act. We must remember that our aim is ultimately not, not really 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. And to this end, we must keep telling ourselves that God is addressing me when we read it.

[54 : 18] Kierkegaard, in a sermon on this very verse, entitled, What is required in order to look at oneself with true blessing in the mirror of the word? It's a wonderful sermon.

He writes, the first requirement is that you must not look at the mirror, but must see yourself in the mirror.

Isn't that a wonderful observation? As a result of meditating on that very passage, you know, what do we do? You know, just looking at the Bible, that's just like looking at the mirror. But what's the point of looking at a mirror?

Not seeing the mirror. It's seeing yourself in the mirror. That's what James' image is about, seeing ourself in the mirror. Kierkegaard continues, and remember to say to yourself incessantly, it is I to whom it is speaking.

It is I about whom it is speaking. Let me briefly touch upon a few practicals of application.

[55 : 25] a helpful question to ask is, Lord, what is it in this passage or this truth that you are seeking to impress upon me?

And why do you want me to know this now, today, at this moment in my life? Lord, what is it in this particular passage and truth that you are seeking to impress on me, and why do you want me to know it now, today?

in this particular moment. And if you're having difficulty coming up with an application, consider the categories of 2 Timothy 3.16. Remember, all scriptures inspired by God and is profitable for, and then use these categories.

Doctrine, teaching truth, reproof, refuting error, correction, reformation of life, teaching and righteousness, that is, discipline in right living, in other words, the road, how you got off it, how to get back on it, and how to stay on it.

It's really comprehensive. It's wonderful. Also, I find helpful, consider each hat that you wear. I'm a disciple of Jesus.

[56 : 44] I'm also a husband. I'm a father. I'm a son. I'm a friend. I'm an employee. I'm a cyclist. I'm a cyclist. Exactly. And if this is really what God is like, what I found here in Scripture, what difference does that make for how I live today as a father, as a husband?

Then you put your different hats on. How does this make a difference for me in these different roles that I have? What emotions, attitudes, behaviors flare up in these different arenas, in these different roles that I have?

What flare up when I am forgetful of this truth? How would my private life, my family life, my church life, my friend life, my cycling life be different if I grasped this more deeply?

So these are really helpful application questions. And here are six quick tips to make it take. So one, be specific in your applications.

Be specific. Not, you know, it might be sincere, but here my application is I'm going to become a better person. That's my application. Or I'll be more like Jesus.

[58 : 06] Great, but too vague. It's too vague. Be specific. Second, be concrete. How, when, what will this take? Okay?

Yeah, you meet in the quad. Oh, let's do lunch. Yeah, that'd be fun. Let's do lunch. Oh, if you haven't pulled out your schedule book and figured it out, it's just never going to happen.

You've got to be concrete. Be realistic. Don't be overambitious. I'm going to outline the whole Bible in multicolored, you know, no, start small and succeed and then just build on your success.

I'm going to stop sinning today. That's right. Sincere, but you'll judge. Fourth, be accountable.

Solicit some support to buttress your resolves. Hey, will you ask me, this is what I'm working on, will you ask me how I'm doing on this? That's lacking in our church, in all churches.

[59 : 12] Yeah, often it is. Yeah, yeah, and having the relationships, the thick fabric of relationships where people will care enough to be lovingly intrusive in your life to ask you, you know, write out the ten questions you hope to God no one ever asks you.

Write them down on a piece of paper and give them to your friend to ask you, you know. So, and fifth, begin, begin.

So many promises are writing in the sand, for they're just not acted upon promptly. As George MacDonald writes, he observes, good notions must take advantage of their first ripeness.

Isn't that good? And this is where our determined applications are so often scuttled. I will not lose, or he will not lose his loaf, who has taken care to eat it at once.

That's Spurgeon. He will not lose his loaf, who has taken care to eat it at once. Neither can he be deprived of the benefit of the doctrine, who has already acted upon it.

[60 : 27] Most readers, look at this image. Oh, my goodness, metaphor. Most readers and hearers become moved so far as to purpose to amend.

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, here, oh, image, till, like the ponds in nights of frost, when the sun shines by day, they are only thawed in time to be frozen again.

Oh, that fatal tomorrow is blood red with the murder of fair resolutions.

It is the slaughterhouse of innocence. Spurgeon. Yeah, Kierkegaard Simone writes, the next hour, after one we call the quiet hour, that's when you've been meditating and you have the impression, the next hour, after the one we call a quiet hour, is the critical hour.

[61 : 48] Accordingly, he 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 in God, even if it is just for the next hour or for this very day, this long, it shall be certain that I shall not forget.

That second of the critical hour. So finally, those were five tips to have it taken, and the sixth, final one, be sensitive to the spirit. Sometimes when you make lists, it can sound really mechanical, but at the end, this is not a mechanical thing, it's a relational thing.

It's the indwelling spirit who's in us, who's personal. The spirit speaks to our soul. You can begin at once to be a disciple of the living one, writes George MacDonald, 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 be at once, and in the very next thing that lies at the door of your conscience.

That's good. So, preparation, meditation, application, and finally, and briefly, continuation.

[63 : 13] Continuation, verse 25, and continues in it. And this indicates perseverance in engaging the scripture and perseverance in the truths that engagement prompts.

Our meditations and applications ought not to be a mere instance, a spasm or an episode, but rather an abiding lifestyle. Keep at it.

Keep at it. Here's William Bates writes, 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, then they bring forth. So, when we leave religious duties for a long space, our affections will chill and grow cold, and we are not fit to produce holiness and comfort to our souls.

notice verse 25, not having become, but having become. So, it is your continuation, our continuation or failure to continue, which is determining what we are becoming, who we are becoming.

[64 : 34] This is very sobering. Okay? Your pattern, my pattern, for good your ill, will become my character, and finally, your destiny.

Remember the parable of the soils, and that chilling utterance, they were only temporary. They were only temporary. The only adequate response to the word is to continue in it.

but of course, to continue, we must first begin, and I conclude these reflections and our series on scripture with an appeal to you.

Oh, friends, will we not commit ourselves with fresh zeal to engage God's word? Would not a fitting response to what we have considered together be a re-energized practice of meditation upon God's word to reinvigorate a once but perhaps last fading habit?

Or perhaps not renewed but a new habit? Either way, would it not be fitting? Well, in the hope that it may be so, may I propose that we give it a try?

[66 : 00] Shall we stick our toe in the water together? concretely, just take for your portion Psalm 1. Psalm 1.

And spend a dedicated season. Steal away to an undisturbed place and for an hour of unhurried meditation sometime this week, let us discover if God does not richly meet us and graciously work in us what is to his great pleasure and ours too.

Those things wonderfully come together in the realm of grace. His good pleasure and our good pleasure come. Let us stick that toe in the ocean together.

together. Well, team, that concludes our series. Thank you so much. It's been a joy and I can't wait for the next series that we're going to do on who knows what.

Any questions? That's for the elders to figure out. But you guys can always pitch in some requests. Any questions or comments? I know I've run a little bit late, but it is the last time, so forgive me.

[67 : 13] Questions, comments? Cavils, scarves, critiques, too. That's always fine. One of the reasons why Luke's telling of the encounter of Mary at Jesus' feet, the house of Mary and Martha, I think in that moment she realized just how much Christ was meditating on her and gazing upon her.

Yeah, that's a great point. That's a wonderful thought. As much as we do this, as best as we can do it, he does this even more upon me.

Yes, it's a wonderful dynamic that we see. As we cling to him, his right hand upholds us. So as we're gazing at him, that gaze is right back, and that's what makes it fruitful.

Absolutely great, thank you. Yeah, Susie. So in terms of the application you mentioned about asking God, what do you want me to know and learn, and what are you trying to teach me in this season, how do you know if that passage is really?

Yeah. Is where you're going to find it? Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So the wonderful thing about providence is God is able to direct you.

[68 : 40] Have you not noticed how when you are actually practicing this and you're meditating, you're spending time in scripture, how those, what you get in scripture, the things that are able to impress you, maybe even inscribe you, become for that time a lens through which you see everything and how those are often the very things that God wants you to be able to see and he's provided those lenses and so providentially he works such that where he has guided you in scripture and it might seem to be completely random to you where you're just, you know, I haven't read this in a while, let me just read this and God can take any number of things from his scripture and use them particularly for just what our need is so we leave it to him and in some ways when you just go to the word he is, he is picking, even though we pick the spot he'll pick the truth to impress you and the spirit will do that, so you just trust him in that, don't worry about oh no I'm looking in the wrong part of the Bible, if I don't find just the right part God can't speak to me, no no he can, he can use all of his word to do this, sometimes it takes years to learn the lesson, it could be that the lesson is patient, you know, that's right, that's right, that's right, some of us are on the remedial program,

I'd say, I certainly am, I just don't read the Bible, open it up and then point and then think this is going to speak to me, I never read the Bible, yeah, you know, he says, look, don't be like a horse, you know, a horse or a mule with a bit bridal spur, you know, in other words, have some sort of renewed sanctified mind and think through these things, but here's the good news, even if you don't, God can still use that, even if you do, you know, you flip open the Bible or if, you know, I'm not particularly good, you know, we don't, as elders, we don't cast lots, you know, we try to have the mind of Christ, we don't cast lots, but you know what, you know, if our hearts were humble and we were really seeking the Lord, he could direct us through lots, you know, he did even the choice of an apostle, you know, so, yeah, there's a nunnery in southern France and they've written out the entire Bible on little slips of paper that they have in a huge cauldron, just one verse at a time, and every day, you know, the head abbess, she just reaches in and she pulls out one, it's like a fortune cookie, you know, but it's the scripture, you know, it's the word, and she reads that and they approach their whole day in light of that verse and you think, good grief, surely there's a more fruitful way to, you know, discerning, engage the word, but that's what they do and, you know, God blesses it. He guides them into some really fruitful paths, you know, and contemplate on Jesus wept. Yeah, there you go, yeah, that's right, that's right.

All right, thank you team, we will, yeah, I don't know what's, does anybody know what we're doing next week? I guess this is, something's starting, I'm sure we'll hear it in the service, I'm sure it'll be announced in the service.