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## **MEDITATIVE BIBLE STUDY AND WORSHIP**

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Jim Abrahamson, who was the founding minister of the Bible Church in Chapel Hill, NC, is one of my closest theologian friends. We meet and have lunch almost every week for fellowship and theological discussion. Recently, we were discussing the need for seminaries to teach Bible study. Most of them teach Bible interpretation, but what they are teaching is what others teach in their commentaries and textbooks. It is mostly about rhetoric. Jim said that when he when attended Dallas seminary he had one professor named Howard Hendricks, who taught him to do **meditative** Bible study. He said this method taught him how to get the most out of his time in the Word. He then went on to describe how it was done. I have to admit that previously, the Bible told me to meditate on the Word. I also read about meditating on the Word and saw it described in books on how to study the Bible, but when I tried it, it did not do much to illuminate my mind. I guess I did not know how to meditate. Having used the method taught by Hendricks for two weeks now, I have to say it has revolutionized my Bible study.

After lunch that day, I thought at length about our conversation, and finally decided to give Hendricks' method a real try. Although Jim said Hendricks told him to take a single verse, I modified his instructions and go about it this way. Each morning I read three chapters in the Bible. Before I start, I ask the Lord what he wants to say to me in the Word. I then read the three chapters, and note which passage(s) seem illuminated or create questions in my mind.

This morning I came to the story in John where Jesus was talking to the woman at the well. When I came to the statement that said people would come to worship God in spirit and truth, I asked myself what that meant. I was reading in the *Living Bible*, and it did not read the same as the *New International Version* (NIV); so I got out the *Contemporary English Version* (CEV), and it read more like the *Living Bible*. What the Living Bible and CEV say is we should worship God guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Neither the NIV nor the Authorized version (King James Version) was as explicit. I then read other scriptures relating to worship.

Walking, praying and worshipping “In the Spirit” means for me to be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. I learned this years ago in a little book entitled *Pray in the Spirit* by Arthur Wallis (Christian Literature Crusade)<sup>1</sup>. I’ve pray in the Spirit ever since reading that book. I learned to ask God what he wants me to pray about and who I should pray for. I know the Bible tells me to pray about certain things, like to pray about my family, neighbors, pastor, church, work place, the government, leaders, and the sick; so I do pray for them first. I then get quiet and let him suggest other things and people. Most of the time I say, “OK what do you want to say to me?” Sometimes he says something, and many times he does not, but I give him time to speak if he wants to.

For example, one morning I asked him what I should pray about, and he didn’t say anything. After a few minutes I said, “OK, I’ll just listen. I was driving at the time, and went only a few hundred yards when suddenly out of the silence the thought came to my mind. “You don’t take Satan seriously enough!”

I responded, “Yes I know. I’ll do better.” And I have.

As I thought more about worshipping in the Spirit, I had all kinds of questions. The first, and most important, was why would God tell us to worship himself? As a human, I would think this would be a prideful endeavor. If we are to be humble, and he is the model of what humbleness is, why should he want praise and thanks? As I pondered this question it suddenly came to mind that a song I like says God created us in his image to be his treasure, and he finds pleasure in us. I wrote about parental love recently, and God emphasized the fact that the expression of love is a two way interchange. He loves us first, and we love him back. I said in my parental love essay, we were created with a radical need for love, and if God created us in his image, we have a radical need to give love. What he does in guiding our worship is to help us express it to him. That’s what worship is! We express our love for God, and he returns our love! It is a back and forth proposition. I have to admit that I do not remember thinking of it that way before. In the past from a worldly point of view, it seemed more like what I was saying was flattery.

This then caused me to wonder why we should love God. I cannot see him, touch him, smell him, taste him, or even hear him speak with a voice like mine. There are several reasons I can mention in answer to this thought. Each one of these is revealed in scripture. See if you can find the references in your study Bible.

1. He created us. Our earthly father was his instrument. He put our genes together so we would be who he wanted us to be.
2. He knew us when we were being formed in our mothers’ wombs, and he loved us then.
3. We love because he first loves us.

4. He protects us just as our earthly father does.
5. He supplies all our needs.
6. He never leaves us. He is always available. Many earthly fathers are too, but these days many are tragically not available.
7. He gives us eternal life if we believe in his Son. Our earthly father cannot do it. Our earthly fathers, though, can witness to us in word and deed the desirability of believing in Jesus so we can have salvation and eternal life.
8. He incarnated himself in Jesus so mankind could have a person we could see, hear, and touch to make believing easier. When the people of his day saw him, they were seeing the Father. We now see him in those who have surrendered to him and are authentic Christians.
9. He joins his Spirit to our spirit to assure us of our adoption.
10. He also gives us his Spirit so we can have the power to live according to his law. This power also shows us who he is, and what he is like, as well as who we are.
11. He gives us the mind of Christ. He installs himself in us.
12. He gives us wisdom and knowledge just like our earthly father should and many times does. He teaches us how to live life.
13. Finally, He gives us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self control.

These reasons are sufficient for me although you may be able to think of others, so God is worthy of our love expressed in praise and thanksgiving.

If you are one of many who are not truly worshiping in the Spirit, take stock of your situation and ask yourself if you are quenching the Spirit by neglecting your prayer and Bible study time. Are you grieving the Spirit by continuing to sin? If you are sinning (and we all do), you need to repent every day in your prayer time. He took your punishment, and you contributed to his suffering. He is suffering for you whether you repent or not. If you are quenching the Spirit, you need to set aside some time each day and pray and read your Bible. Prayer, meditative Bible study, and worship are the way we communicate with God to maintain our relationship with him. If you do not know what to pray about and for, read my book *The Nuts and Bolts of Discipleship*. I list all the things that the Bible tells you to pray about. If you want to jack up your worship, just tell the Lord you want to do so, and ask him to anoint your worship. Be careful, though, for he may ask you to shout, raise your hands, or dance. Prayer, Bible study and worship will all be enhanced if you absolutely surrender to him.

I am writing this because I know that most church members do not read their Bible or pray very much. You may be one of those who read the Bible only once a week and average praying only one minute a

day. Let me say that devotional books or guides will not do it. One or two Bible verses are not enough. Then, what the commentator says in devotional materials may not be what God will say to you about that same scripture. Some devotional materials are worth reading, but only after you do your own reading in context and meditate on what you have read.

Let me repeat myself and say that prayer is a conversation between two people who love one another. Bible study is the same!

One final comment is necessary. The Holy Spirit was given to us for several reasons:

- He is given to us so we have power over sin.
- He is given to amplify our knowledge and wisdom. He does this by providing understanding (illumination) of his Word.
- He is given to us to conform us to the image of Christ.
- He is given to us to reveal Jesus and God to us.
- He is given to us to give us a witness to the reality of God in our lives.
- He is given to us to reveal the reality and nature of Satan and his works. He does this by revealing the existence of the supernatural realm and its inhabitants.

The gifts we receive are only a secondary reason for receiving the Holy Spirit. There are other reasons, but these are most important.

Try meditative Bible study and worshiping in the Spirit. They will bring you closer to God!

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1. *Pray in the Spirit* is still in print. Amazon.com has it.