

## *Training Through Meditation*

Our text speaks.

**But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed** (Luke 5:16).

Recent studies of the original languages of the Bible have shown that, since most of the authors of the New Testament had the mother tongue of Aramaic (not Greek, the language the New Testament was written in), when they wrote they were thinking of that tongue. The word for *prayed* does not just refer to what we think of when we hear it. It has the notion of interacting with the Scripture. It has the notion of meditation.

This changes our understanding of what was meant when it says Jesus prayed all night long, for example. He did not just spend his whole time in one long breath calling out to his Father. How could he concentrate for so long? Wouldn't he run out of things to pray about? Most likely he chanted the Scriptures that he had available to him. By this time he would have memorized Scripture, so by heart he would take that Word and speak it back to God. Try doing that when a verse catches your attention: whisper it again and again, speak it back to yourself until you begin to understand what it's really saying. In this way we're not just reading the verse. We are, so to speak, helping it come alive and placing the word on our tongues. We are also called to meditate on the Scriptures and to "pray back the Scriptures" to God. Take this text as an example. I think in this case particularly, every word is important. Notice it begins with a contrast word, *But*. What's the contrast? Jesus led a busy life. Yet he often withdrew to pray. So praying back, we call out to the Father, "God, if Jesus your Son needed to take time out to pray, who am I not to do the same? Help me. Motivate me." Take a moment to reflect on the next word, *Jesus*. A song comes to our minds when we think of the Name. "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear" (John Newton). We breathe in the sweetness of that Name. We drink it in. We look at the next word, *often*. That is a pretty all-encompassing word! Who can follow Jesus to such an extent as doing the same thing? "Lord," we pray back from the Scripture, "I know you say that you are at work in me both to will and to act according to your good purpose. Right now I don't feel like I have the will to do this. Give me that will, please give me that will!" And so we move on to the next word.

Richard Foster writes about the meaning of meditation: "Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word. It is that simple. I wish I could make it more complicated for those who like things difficult. It involves no hidden mysteries, no secret mantras, no mental gymnastics, no esoteric flights into the cosmic consciousness. The truth of the matter is that the great God of the universe, the Creator of all things desires our fellowship." This is the purpose of meditation, see. It is meant to connect us with God himself, to hear him speak to us. Meditation is meant to assist us in entering into the presence of God himself. For the believer, God is not somewhere "out there," nor is it simply true that he is near to us. For us who believe Christ is in us, inside us, and meditation helps us meet him there.

So when we engage in this training, keep moving back to the awareness that Christ is right there, inside you. This is especially important when we “lose concentration.” To get it back, go back inside and look for Christ there.