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Today's Video



Jon: So what's unique about ancient Jewish literature?

Tim: Well, a key feature is that it lacks a lot of the details that modern readers have come to expect in stories and poems.

Jon: And this makes it seem really simple.

Tim: But actually it's very sophisticated literature. Every detail that is given matters.³

Jon: And that's great, but the lack of detail means the stories are often loaded with ambiguities.

3. "The Greek storytelling tendency of loading the story with details is one that modern literary practice has by and large adopted and developed. Precisely for that reason we have to

adjust our habits as readers in order to bring an adequate attentiveness to the rather different narrative maneuvers characteristic of the Hebrew Bible. The underlying biblical conception of people's character is that they're unpredictable, constantly emerging from and slipping back into ambiguity. Thus, biblical narrative style is marked by the art of reticence."

THE ART OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE
ROBERT ALTER

Jon: This is feeling complicated. I don't know if I can do all that.

Tim: Well, you're not expected to notice all of this by yourself or all at once. This dense way of writing forces you to slow down and then read carefully, embarking on this interactive discovery process through the whole biblical narrative over a lifetime of reading and re-reading.

Jon: Ah, okay, meditation literature.

Tim: Yeah, in Psalm 1 we read about the ideal Bible reader.¹⁰ It's someone who meditates on the Scriptures day and night. In Hebrew, the word meditate¹¹ means literally to mutter or speak quietly. The idea is that every day for the rest of your life you slowly, quietly read the Bible out loud to yourself and then go talk about it with your friends, pondering the puzzles, making connections, and discovering what it all means.¹² And as you let the Bible interpret itself, something remarkable happens; the Bible starts to read you. Because ultimately the writers of the Bible want you to adopt this story as your story.¹³

How might these insights help you respond when someone says, “Bible Study? That’s too complicated for me. I tried reading the Bible, but I just didn’t get it” ?

Can you think of an example in your life of when you “meditated” on Scripture—reflected on a certain passage over and over again, helping you see it more in depth?

(e.g: sermon series, key passage during VBS or retreat, verse you posted on a piece of paper by your desk, plaque at home)

From “The Kindled Heart: Luther on Meditation”

by John W Kleinig

Lutheran Theological Journal 20/2&3, 1986, 142-154



Kleinig:

[Luther] defines meditation as a “continual chattering and conversation with the mouth.” When a person meditates, he says or sings the same words to himself over and over again. In fact, it is best to meditate out aloud, if possible, for the spoken word needs to go through the ears to penetrate the heart. Meditation involves a kind of extroversion. The written word, spoken out aloud, needs to occupy our full physical and mental attention.

Hearing is as much a physical as a mental activity, for words also affect us physically and emotionally. Since most of our hearing and reading is rather superficial and merely intellectual, we aren't touched and moved by God's Word. If the Word of God is to have its desired effect on us we need to assimilate it both physically and mentally.



Luther

You should not only meditate inwardly in your heart but also outwardly by repeating the words out aloud and by rubbing at the written word

[like a sweet-smelling herb],
by reading and rereading it, carefully,
attentively and reflectively,
to gather what the Holy Spirit means by them.

(Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings, *Luther's Works*, Volume 34, Page 286; here this is Kleinig's own translation)



Kleinig

Luther fastens on the traditional notion that a person who meditates is like a cow chewing its cud. The cud was the material which was first memorized and then recalled again and again. It was thus savoured and absorbed so that it could be assimilated and give nourishment to the person. This metaphor was traditionally employed to describe the affective rather than the cognitive side of meditation.

Luther

To chew the cud, however, is to receive the word affectively and meditate with supreme diligence so that (according to the proverb) one does not permit it to go in one ear and out of the other, but holds it firmly in the heart, swallows it, and absorbs it into the intestines.

(Commentary on Deuteronomy 14:1, *Luther's Works*, Volume 9, Page 136)



Luther

This meditation consists first in close attention to the words of the Law, and then in drawing together various parts of Scripture. And this is a pleasant hunt, a game rather like the play of stags in the forest, where “the Lord arouses the stags, and uncovers the forests” (Ps. 29:9). For out of this will proceed a sermon to the people which is well informed in the Law of the Lord.

(Psalms 1 and 2 from Works on the First Twenty-Two Psalms, 1519 to 1521, *Luther's Works*, Volume 14, Page 296)

Further explanation by Kleinig:

Luther explains, in his commentary on Psalm 29, that the stags are those who are “quick and adept in their meditations”, by which their beloved Lord leads them through the hills and forests of the Scriptures to show them “the woodland pastures” for them to graze upon (*LW*, 10:136).

Psalm 1:1-2

Blessed is the man

**who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
²but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**



Luther

[In Psalm 1:2, for “meditate”]: Augustine has in his translation, “to chatter,” really a beautiful metaphor, because chattering is an exercise of the birds. Therefore it is the office of a man whose proper duty is to converse on something, to discourse about the Law of the Lord. Even the poet uses meditating in this way: “You make out of delicate reeds the song of the muse of the forest” (Vergil, *Bucolics*, VI, 8). It is not possible to describe satisfactorily the strength and beauty of these words.

You see in how many places the Scriptures teach of love, tolerance, friendliness, good will, kindness, and mercy. When you have taken these together, have you not lovingly chattered and meditated on the Law of your Lord? Note this well: It is the mode and nature of all who love, to chatter, sing, think, compose, and frolic freely about what they love and to enjoy hearing about it. Therefore this lover, this blessed man, has his love, the Law of God, always in his mouth, always in his heart and, if possible, always in his ear. “He who is of God hears the words of God” (John 8:47); and “Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage” (Ps. 119:54); and again, “I will delight in Thy statutes, I will not forget Thy Word” (Ps. 119:6).

(Commentary on Psalm 1:2 (“meditate”), *Luther’s Works*, Volume 14, Pages 296, 297-298)

The Fruits of Meditation



**Jesus is the Vine. We are the branches.
If we remain in Him, we can bear much fruit
—deeds and actions that display His life to the world.**

Kleinig

The point of meditation for Luther is, quite simply, to let the Holy Spirit preach the Word of God inwardly to the conscience of the believer. Now this preaching goes far beyond the intellectual exercise of working out the meaning and application of a portion of Scripture. It is the activity of the Holy Spirit who affects the person physically, mentally, and emotionally through the Word.

The more a person inwardly contemplated the incarnate Son of God in the Gospel, the more he would outwardly fulfil the duties of his vocation as commanded by God in the Decalogue. The hearing of God's Word and the reception of the Spirit through meditation on it, led first to "external works" and then to "the teaching of others". The person who meditated produced its fruit by a life lived in service of his neighbour. This was followed by the teaching of others, whether as a member of the church or as a pastor.

What would it look like for these "fruits" to be present in your life?

What will help you see those "fruits" develop?

In the glorious company of the saints...



Luther

Let him who wants to contemplate in the right way reflect on his Baptism; let him read his Bible, hear sermons, honour father and mother, and come to the aid of a brother in distress. But let him not shut himself up in a nook . . . and there entertain himself with his devotions and thus suppose that he is sitting in God's bosom and has fellowship with God without Christ, without the Word, without the sacraments.

(Commentary on Genesis (19:14), *Luther's Works*,
Volume 3, Page 275)