

December 28, 2003 by Steve Brandon



God-pleasing Meditation

Psalm 19:14

1. What is meditation?
2. How can I meditate?
3. Why should I meditate?

In just a few days we will be celebrating the New Year. For some of us, this will mean staying up until midnight and celebrate the coming on 2004. For some of us, especially those of us who are older, it means an early night. For all of us, it should be a time of self-examination. It is a perfect opportunity for us to look back on our life this past year and think about it. This past month, it has been my habit to carry the works of Jonathan Edwards to bed with me and randomly read a few paragraphs. A few nights ago, I was reading a sermon given by Jonathan Edwards entitled, "The Preciousness of Time." His words would be appropriate for us to ponder as I begin preaching this morning. In the first section of the sermon, Edwards describes why time is precious.

1. Time is precious because a happy or miserable eternity depends on the good or ill improvement of it. During this life, you have "the opportunity of escaping everlasting misery and of obtaining everlasting blessedness and glory." Much of your eternity depends upon how you use your time.
2. Time is precious because it is very short. When a commodity is scarce, its value is high. When a commodity is plentiful, its value is low. When there is a famine in the land, the price of food is high. When there is a bumper crop, the price of food is low. Though you may not think it now, "it is but a moment to eternity. Time is so short, and the work which we have to do in it is so great, that you have none of it to spare."
3. Time is precious because we are uncertain of its continuance. You may have forty years remaining in your life. You may have one year or one month or one week or one day. You don't know. Perhaps even today may be your last day. Last Friday, an earthquake in Iran killed at least 5,000 people. Some estimates have the death toll as high as 50,000 people. A fatal car crash can happen on your way home from church. "How much more would many men prize their time if they knew that they had but a few months, or a few days, more to live!"
4. Time is precious because when it is past, it cannot be recovered. There are many things which you can part with in this life that you can recover again. Books that are given away can be bought again. A vase that is broken can be replaced. A house that is destroyed in an earthquake can be rebuilt. But time, "when once that is gone, it is gone forever; no pains, no cost will recover it." [\[1\]](#)

As you reflect upon your life this past year, I'd like you to consider this question: Are you pleased with the life that you lived? Did you "make the most of your time"? (Eph. 5:15). Or, did you squander it away?

Last year, we looked at Acts 2:42, the example of the early church. They committed themselves to four things: The Apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. I want you to think about this past year. Were you committed to these things?

Did you commit yourself **to the Apostles' teaching**? The Apostle's teaching is recorded for us in the Bible. Were you a student of the Bible this year? Did you read through the Bible this year? Were you committed to studying the Bible this year? Men, did you lead your family in the study of God's Word this past year?

Did you commit yourself **to fellowship**? Fellowship comes from the Greek word, koinwnia(koinonia), which means, "sharing." Did you share yourself with the church? Did you share of your time and resources with the church? When the church gathers, were you there? Did you seek other opportunities to gather with the church?

Did you commit yourself **to the breaking of bread**? This probably refers to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Christ commanded us to remember Him when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Did you remember Christ this year? Did you consciously bring to mind all of the things that He has done for you? He saved you. He redeemed you. He gave Himself for you. Was He your focus?

Did you commit yourself **to prayer**? This simply refers to your communion with the living God. Did you commit yourself to attend the prayer meeting of our church, which begins at 8:45am? Did you commit yourself to pray together as a family? Did you commit yourself to pray as an individual?

If you have regrets about the way that you spent your time this past year, I have good news for you: next year can be different. As we approach the New Year, we have a perfect opportunity to look forward to what lies ahead of us in this coming year. Like I have done for the past several years, I would like to challenge you to focus your efforts this year on living a holy life. This morning, I would like for us to look at

the spiritual discipline of meditation, which is mentioned in the 14th verse of Psalm 19. My desire for you is that you might make 2004 a year focused on meditation, that you may grow in your love for God.

David writes,

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

This verse is really a prayer. It is a prayer that God would help focus the mouth and the heart to be pleasing to God in every respect. We could discuss much about the mouth this morning. We could discuss what it means to have God-pleasing speech in every circumstance. We could discuss why evil speech is so wicked. We could discuss ways of improving our speech. But, I will save that discussion for another time. This morning, we are going to set our attention upon the "meditation of my heart." Particularly, we are going to set our attention upon this word, "meditation." My message this morning is entitled, "God-pleasing Meditation."

David prayed, "May the ... meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD." Is this your prayer this morning? Do you really desire to have your heart's meditation to be pleasing in God's sight? Are you concerned that your thought life would be pleasing to God? Do you desire to seek God's satisfaction in your thoughts? If this isn't your prayer this morning, you might as well close your Bible and leave the church. David's desire ought to represent the desire of every child of God.

My outline this morning will take the shape of three questions. Here is first one.

1. What is meditation?

Unfortunately, when we think of the word "meditation," our thoughts are often taken to a high mountain in eastern Asia, where a bearded man with orange clothes sits in the Lotus position with his eyes closed and humming to himself. But meditation isn't only an eastern religious concept. The Bible speaks often of meditation. The idea here in Psalm 19:14 is simply the idea of thinking. You might even translate verse 14, "let ... the thoughts of my heart be acceptable in Your sight." But it is more than thinking. It is the thinking that constantly runs through the mind again and again and again. It is focus and intention of the heart. You might translate verse 14, "let ... the continual, running flow of the thoughts of my heart be acceptable in Your sight." Meditation refers to those thoughts that we continually bring to the forefront of our mind.

The word that is translated as "meditation" can be used in a positive sense or in a negative sense. **You can meditate upon good things**, like Asaph, who wrote in Psalm 77:12-13, "I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will **meditate** on all Your work, and muse on Your deeds" (Ps. 77:12-13). Asaph is describing how he has been intentionally bringing to mind again the great works of God. It is the deliberate contemplation of the same things over and over and over again. If you would read Psalm 77, you would discover that Asaph was doing this, because of his troubling circumstances. His sorrows and afflictions had caused him to question God. He thought that God's lovingkindness had ceased (Ps. 77:8). He thought that God had forgotten to be gracious (Ps. 77:9). Then, it is almost as if Asaph comes to his senses and says, "No, that can't be." Then, he brought to mind the wonderful workings of God. He intentionally directed his mind to think of God and what He has done. It brought him comfort in his distress.

The negative side of meditation is that **you can meditate upon bad things**. One example of this is the meditations of the kings and rulers who were "*devising* a vain thing ... against the LORD and against His Anointed" (Ps. 2:1-2). Day and night, they would think (or devise, or meditate) of ways to thwart the plan of God. This is how this word, meditation, is used. Another example is given of the evil men spoken of in Proverbs 24:1-2, "Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; For their minds *devise* violence, and their lips talk of trouble." Solomon is describing those who spend their time in thinking about how they cause trouble. These are the terrorists, who think about hijacking airliners and crashing them into buildings. These are the bank robbers, who plan where and how they are going to rob a bank. These are those who figure out ways to dodge paying taxes. These are those who think about somehow getting around the system. The point is that they are constantly thinking about the wickedness that they can do for their own advantage. It is their constant thought, day and night. They are meditating upon the evil they can do.

The burden of my message, obviously, is for you to meditate upon the things of God. The burden of my message is for your constant, repetitive thoughts to find favor with God. This is the heart of David, "Let the ... meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD." David prays, "O God, may my thoughts be such that you are well pleased with them, that you might accept them."

Suppose this morning that we would take all of your thoughts from this past week and would project them onto a giant screen behind me for all to see. What would they say about you? Would they demonstrate your godliness? Or, would they condemn you? Would they be acceptable in God's sight? Or, would they be unacceptable in God's sight? Are there any thoughts that you may have had this week of which you would be ashamed? Did you think any ungodly thoughts this week? If you did, you are guilty before God, and you are in need of reforming. Did you covet anything this week? Did you see anything this week that you really wanted? Coveting is a sin of the mind. Did you think or say anything against another individual? Anger is a sin of the heart (Matt. 5:22). Did you "look on a woman to lust for her" (Matt. 5:28)? Jesus said that this is a sin of the heart. Were you humble in mind at all times this week? (Phil. 2:3) Humility is an attitude of the mind. Were the truth known, we would all stand condemned before the Lord because of our ungodly meditations that took place in our hearts this week.

If we committed the sins in body that we thought of in our hearts this week, some of us would be thrown in prison. It is because our hearts are wicked. Listen to what the Bible says concerning the extent of the wickedness of our hearts.

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Gen. 6:5)

This verse shows the extent of the sewage that is in our minds. It is not just the thoughts of our hearts that are evil; it is the formation of the thoughts that are evil ("the intent of the thoughts"). It is not just a few of the formations of thoughts that are evil; it is without exception that the formation of the thoughts of the heart that are evil ("every intent"). It is not that our thoughts are mostly evil; it is that they are exclusively evil ("was only evil"). It is not that our thoughts are sometimes evil; it is that they are perpetually evil ("only evil continually"). Our hearts are filled with garbage. The formation of our thoughts are without exception, exclusively, and continually evil. This was true before the flood (Genesis 6:5). This is just as true after the flood. Genesis 8:21 says "the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth."

As we consider this, I trust that you will see your need for Jesus Christ. Apart from faith in His blood-cleansing sacrifice, we would all stand condemned before the Lord, based upon our thoughts this week. The good news of the gospel is that by faith in Jesus we can stand before God and be declared "not-guilty," because Jesus took the punishment that we deserved for our sin in His body on the cross. It is the one who sees the wickedness of his heart, confesses his wickedness, and longs for a clean and pure heart who will know of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. I say all of that in order to ask you this: Does your mind need cleansing this morning?

Can you say with the Psalmist, "Let the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight?" Is this your desire? This is the cry of the believer in Jesus Christ. "God, may you cleanse my heart and my mind?" This New Year, I would like for you to seek to have "God-pleasing Meditation."

What is meditation? It is the thinking that constantly runs through the mind again and again and again. Meditation is that activity that takes place in our minds all throughout the day. It is what occupies our thoughts. Consider Psalm 119. That Psalm was written by a man who knew how to meditate on the word of God. Meditation isn't something that we do for fifteen minutes each day away in your closet. It is something that you can do all through the day in your shower, while dressing for the morning, while in your car, while exercising, while cleaning, while walking, while eating, and while you lie in bed.

Psalm 119:97 says, "O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation **all the day**." You're always thinking about something. Just try thinking of nothing. You can't do it. When you're in the shower, you are thinking about something. When you're getting dressed in the morning, you're thinking about something. The Psalmist says that He thinks of God's law "all the day" long. Throughout the entire day, you are thinking about something. It should be God's Word!

2. How can I meditate?

How do I meditate? That's a good question, so let's look at the answers to it.

a) Love the Bible.

We have already focused upon the last half of verse 97. Now let's look at the first half which is the motivation of the meditation.

"O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day." (Psalm 119:97)

Notice the connection in the Psalmist between his love and his meditation. I would contend that you think about the things that you love most. Perhaps you think of your children. You think of them because you love them. Perhaps you think of your job. You might think of it because you love what your job provides you (money to purchase the things you need). Perhaps you think of an upcoming vacation. You think of it because you love your vacation. Perhaps you think of sin. You think of sin because you love sin.

I want you to have a love affair with the Word of God. And when you do, the law of the LORD will be your meditation and delight. Psalm 119:97 says, "O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day." When you go about your daily activities, you are thinking of something. If you love the truth in the Scriptures, you will meditate upon them.

Look at verses 47-48 and notice the connection between love for the Word and meditation.

"And I shall delight in Your commandments, which I love. And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love. And I will meditate on Your statutes." (Psalm 119:47-48)

My burden, as your pastor for this next year is for you to direct your mind upon God's word, that you might meditate upon it.

b) Know the Bible.

Imagine yourself, alone on a deserted island. Nobody is around. You have nothing, but one book. This book is entitled, *How to Survive on a Deserted Island*. In the book, it explains how to start a fire without a match; how to trap animals; how to make a bow and arrow; which plants are edible and which ones are not; how to raise a crop; how to secure enough water for yourself; how to build a shelter with minimal effort; and much more. Now, let me ask you, "How would you treat that book?" It would be your prized possession. You would make sure that it didn't get wet. You would study and know its pages. It would be easy, because the book would contain the things necessary to living. You would desire and know this book because you are dependent upon it. The Bible is no different. It is a survival manual for life. It tells you how to survive in this life and how to prosper in the life to come.

When many of the disciple of Jesus withdrew from Him, Jesus turned to His twelve disciples and asked them if they wanted to leave with them also. Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). The Bible contains "words of eternal life." On the island, you would know the contents of the survival manual. In life, you should know the contents of the divine survival manual. If you

want to live forever, you ought to love the Bible and treat it well. The Bible tells us of God. The Bible tells us what to believe. The Bible tells us of Jesus. The Bible tells us how to enjoy God. The Bible tells us how to avoid hell.

To know the Bible, you need to read the Bible. This past year I placed before you a Bible reading schedule. It takes you through the entire Bible in a year. It takes you only 15 minutes of reading out loud (which is slower than many of us can read silently) each day to get through the entire Bible. With very few exceptions this past year, we began our worship services thinking about a verse that we read that week. I plan on doing this again. You have a Bible Reading schedule in your bulletin. I encourage you to take it out right now and place it in your Bible. I encourage you to keep it in your Bible and read through the Bible this year with us. Again, each week, we will prompt our worship from some text of Scripture that pertains to the reading last week. " [\[1\]](#)

c) Linger in the Bible.

More than just knowing the Bible, you should linger in it. You should go slowly. This past week, Yvonne's parents stayed with us. In order to get the full effect of Christmas, we took them to the Festival of Lights on Friday evening. For those of you who don't know, the Festival of Lights is a display of Christmas lights that are set up each year in Sinnissippi Park. Each display is sponsored by a business. It is a way to advertise and to spread the holiday spirit. Some of the displays are simply painted boards with spotlights on them. Others are shapes made from strings of Christmas lights. Some are computerized light panels. While we drove through the park, we drove very slowly to take in the beauty of the displays. (My favorite display showed Santa Claus and his reindeer smashed against a fence that they hit on their way around the world. It was done by a fence company and was quite humorous.) There are times to travel 65 miles per hour on a road, such as when you want to see the country. It is good to read through the Bible each year. But, when meditating upon the Scriptures, you need to go slowly. You take a portion of Scripture and you read it. Then, you read it again. Then, you read it again. You start thinking about it. Pretty soon you begin to memorize it. It begins to change your thinking. It begins to impact your life.

I could give you illustration after illustration of how this has taken place in my life. Last week I preached from Phil. 2:6-8. It describes the extent of the humility through which Jesus descended to become one of us. He went from glory with the Father to humiliation with us. His humiliation was a painful and shameful death upon a cross. This week, my meditation has been upon Phil. 2:5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." The truth has impacted me this week. I have sought this week to be a humble servant. If Christ came as low as He did, certainly I can as well.

Another verse that has been on my mind recently is John 17:24. Jesus was praying, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory." When we get to heaven and be with Jesus, we will see His glory. This is why He wants us to be there. Jesus wants to display His full and undiminished glory for all to see. Jesus wants for us to see His glory. Jesus is like the child who wants to show his mother what he has made in Sunday School. This verse has helped me focus upon what is important in life. The glory of Jesus is important.

As you take a verse or two of Scripture and think upon it, it is like a cup of tea. When you make tea, you take a cup of hot water and begin dipping your tea bag into it. With the first dip, some of the flavor of the tea is absorbed by the water, but not much. With the second dip, a bit more of the tea is absorbed. More and more, the tea in the bag begins to influence the water, so that it turns light brown and tastes like tea. The more the tea bag is in the water, the darker the water turns, until it is deep brown. This is what meditation does. (This illustration was taken from Donald Whitney's book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, p. 44).

As we linger over the word, it begins to have its influence upon us. This is ultimately what we want anyway, isn't it? We want God's word to impact our life and change us. It will change you as you linger over it.

d) Memorize the Bible.

One of the things about meditation is that we are to do this all the time. Rather than thinking of evil things, we are to focus our minds upon the truth of the word. In order to do this, we need to have the scriptures on our mind wherever we go, even when we don't have a Bible handy. The only way to do this is to memorize it. Often, when the word "memorization" is mentioned, there are those who say, "I can't memorize." Certainly, as you grow older, it gets more and more difficult. However, I would contend that for the most part, memorization is desire. If I would give to you \$10,000 for every verse of scripture that you memorized this week, could you memorize Scripture? Memorization is more about desire than it is about ability. (This illustration was also taken from Donald Whitney's book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian life*, p. 38).

Look at Psalm 119:148, "My eye anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Thy word." The Psalmist is saying something like, "I love the night-shift. Because on the night-shift, all I have to do is watch out for the enemy. It is normally a slow job, so I can spend my time meditating on Your Word!" The only way to meditate upon it during the night watches is to have it memorized in your heart. Many of our children are in programs to memorize verses in the Bible. It will pay them huge dividends down the road. But don't think that this excludes you. I would encourage you to spend some time working on memorizing the Bible this year. You might try writing out some flash cards or developing an accountability relationship with another person in the church to help you memorize.

e) Avoid Distractions.

As I have said, your mind is always thinking about something. You will either put the object of thinking in your mind, or someone (or something) else will put it there. If you are in the habit of turning on your radio every time you get into your car, you are letting someone else put thoughts in your mind. If you are in the habit of turning on the television when you arrive at home, you are letting someone else put thoughts in your mind. Learn to be content with silence. Don't be a slave to other noise around you! Resist the temptation. Don't turn on the button. Take time to think of God. Perhaps you might want to place a sign over the power switch to the television or radio that says, "meditation distracter."

Don't think that it is just the radio and the television that can distract you. There are plenty of other things to distract you as well. It could be the newspaper, your hobbies, your computer, or your telephone. Learn to discipline your mind to focus upon the truth of God's word.

At this point you might be wondering, "This meditation stuff is all well and good, but is it really important?" I want to convince you that it is indeed important. Let me give you some reasons why it is important.

3. Why should I meditate?

a) Meditation is important because God commands it.

Before Joshua took charge of leading the people of Israel, God said to him, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success" (Joshua 1:8). Joshua was to read it. Joshua was to think about it. Joshua was to memorize it. The same applies to us. God's word is to be on our heart all the day and all the night, that we might be careful to obey it.

The New Testament says it this way, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2). Paul wrote, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

b) Meditation is important because it will keep you from sin.

The Psalmist writes, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). The Psalmist is saying, "I have taken Your word and I have learned it and I have tucked it away carefully in my heart so that when opportunities to sin come my ways, I will be sure to remember Your word and obey your word and avoid the sin that tempts me." It works like this. Suppose you are tempted by wicked people to be involved in some wicked things. Proverbs 1:10 pops into your mind, "If sinners entice you, do not consent." You are reminded of the wickedness involved in following people and refuse to follow them. Perhaps you have been tempted to sin in times when nobody is around. Proverbs 15:3 comes to mind, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good." Suddenly, you remember that God is watching you and the truth enables you to thwart the temptation. Consider that Jesus responded to every single temptation against Him by quoting a verse of Scripture (Matt. 4:1-11). I have personally experienced this in my life. As situations in life have come upon me, it has been the Scripture that I have hidden away in my heart that has helped me in the day of distress.

I heard of a man who was given a Bible when he was a young boy. In it, his mother had written these words: "This book will keep you from sin and sin will keep you from this book." It's true.

In recent days, I have been reading a devotional book by John Piper entitled "Pierced By the Word." In Chapter 16, he gives advice on how to conquer temptation.

Too many people think they have struggled with temptation when they have prayed for deliverance and hoped the desire would go away. That is too passive... Gouging out your eye may be a metaphor, but it means something very violent. The brain is a "muscle" to be flexed for purity...

For example, have you ever in the first five seconds of temptation, demanded of your mind that it look steadfastly at the crucified form of Jesus Christ? Picture this. You have just seen a peek-a-boo blouse inviting further fantasy. You have five seconds. "No! Get out of my mind! God help me!" Now, immediately, demand of your mind - you can do this by the Spirit (Romans 8:13). Demand of your mind to fix its gaze on Christ on the cross. Use all your fantasizing power to see his lacerated back. Thirty-nine lashes left little flesh intact. He heaves with his breath up and down against the rough vertical beam of the cross. Each breath puts splinters into the lacerations. The Lord gasps. From time to time he screams out with intolerable pain. He tries to pull away from the wood and the massive spokes through his wrist rip into the nerve endings and he screams again with agony and pushes up with his feet to give some relief to his wrists. But the bones and nerves in his pierced feet crush against each other with anguish and he screams again. There is no relief. His throat is raw from screaming and thirst. He loses his breath and thinks he is suffocating, and suddenly his body involuntarily gasps for air and all the injuries unite in pain. In torment, he forgets about the crown of two-inch thorns and throws his head back in desperation, only to hit one of the thorns perpendicular against the cross beam and drive it half an inch into his skull. His voice reaches a soprano pitch of pain and sobs break over his pain-wracked body as every cry brings more and more pain.

Now, I am not thinking about the blouse any more. I am at Calvary. These two images are not compatible. If you will use the muscle of your brain to pursue - violently pursue with the muscle of your mind - images of Christ crucified with the same creative energy that you use to pursue sexual fantasies, you will kill them. But it must start in the first five seconds - and not give up. (Pierced By The Word, pp. 69-71).

Let's look at what the Psalmist writes in Psalm 1,

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2)

The one who delights in the law of the LORD is protected from sin through his meditation. He doesn't walk with the wicked or stand with the sinners or sit with the scoffers. His meditation on God's Word protects Him from those snares.

c) Meditation is important because it shapes your life.

When I was a child, I learned a simple phrase: "You are what you eat." The truth is a Proverb. Generally speaking, if you eat well, you will be good health. If you eat poorly, you will be in poor health. If you eat nothing but McDonalds, potato chips, ice cream, and Snickers, you will not be healthy. If you eat food that is high in fat and cholesterol, your arteries may very well begin to clog and your days will be few. If you eat well-balanced meals from the four basic food groups, for example, eating enough vegetables, drinking your milk, choosing low fat meats, and eating the right amount of carbohydrates, then your body will respond appropriately, often with good health. This is because "you are what you eat."

The corresponding spiritual reality is this, "You are what you think." If you fill your mind with good thoughts, with profitable thoughts, and with godly thoughts, you will be a godly individual. But, if you fill your mind with wicked thoughts, with deceptive thoughts, and with sinful thoughts, you will be an ungodly individual.

The Bible says it this way in Proverbs 23:7, "as he thinks within himself, so he is." Jesus said, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good" (Luke 6:45).

d) Meditation is important because it is crucial to your Biblical discernment.

Do you want to be kept from error? Do you want to know the truth without being deceived? Then meditate! When Martin Luther wrote a preface to the Wittenberg Edition of his works, he described his three most important guidelines for the student of God's word. The first guideline he called, "Oratio," by which he meant, "prayer." He told his readers to "despair of your reason" and to "pray to God with real humility and earnestness, that he through his dear Son may give you his Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding." The third guideline he called, "Tentatio," by which he meant, "affliction." It is through the experience of trials that you learn to trust "how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is." The second he called, "Meditatio," by which he meant, "meditation." Luther writes,

"you should meditate, that is, not only in your heart, but also externally, by actually repeating and comparing oral speech and literal words of the book, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so that you may see what the Holy Spirit means by them. And take care that you do not grow weary or think that you have done enough when you have read, heard, and spoken them once or twice, and that you then have complete understanding. ... You will be like untimely fruit which falls to the ground before it is half ripe." " [1]

If you want to understand and discern the contents of the Bible, you need to meditate upon its truths. You need to constantly think about them. Our New Year begins in a few days. Can you pray with David, "Let ... the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

I wish you a Happy New Year. I wish you a Holy New Year, as you seek to make this year a year of meditation upon the truths contained in the Bible.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 28, 2003 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] If you are interested in pursuing things further, several items mentioned in this sermon have been posted to www.rvbc.cc: Jonathan Edwards' sermon, "The Preciousness of Time," a Bible reading schedule, and the complete text to Luther's preface to the Wittenberg Edition of his works.