

Articles and Sermons :: The Ever-Growing Mountain of Word (Want of Meditation) - Tim Challies

The Ever-Growing Mountain of Word (Want of Meditation) - Tim Challies - posted by ArthurRosh, on: 2013/2/21 23:02

A few days ago I reflected on the human brain, God's masterpiece. Those reflections came as I read the popular book *Moonwalking With Einstein*, a book that deals with the art and science of remembering everything (or anything, for that).

The first lesson is the one I shared in "God's Masterpiece"—that the human brain is a remarkable creation that screams the existence of God. The second lesson is a very simple one: there are no foolproof shortcuts to memorizing. There are techniques that can be employed, but for most people most of the time, memorizing will be long and intense labor. The third lesson has to do with the way we treat books today in comparison to the way people treated books in ages past. While we cannot necessarily assume that the old way is the best way, it is worth considering how different our reading is today from days past.

For those early writers, a trained memory wasn't just about gaining easy access to information; it was about strengthening one's personal ethics and becoming a more complete person. A trained memory was the key to cultivating "judgment, citizenship, and piety." What one memorized helped shape one's character. Just as the secret to becoming a chess grand master was to learn old games, the secret to becoming a grand master of life was to learn old texts. In a tight spot, where could one look for guidance about how to act, if not the depths of memory? Mere reading is not necessarily learning—a fact that I am personally confronted with every time I try to remember the contents of a book I've just put down. To really learn a text, one had to memorize it. As the early-eighteenth-century Dutch poet Jan Luyken put it, "One book, printed in the Heart's own wax / Is worth a thousand in the stacks."

In ancient days, books were a means to mastery and mastery came through memory. There were relatively few books and those books were mastered rather than skimmed. "The ancient and medieval way of reading was totally different from how we read today. One didn't just memorize texts; one ruminated on them—chewed them up and regurgitated them like cud—and in the process, became intimate with them in a way that made them one's own." That sounds very much like what David did when he meditated on God's Word both day and night.

Those who read did so in order to remember. This has important implications.

When the point of reading is... remembering, you approach a text very differently than most of us do today. Now we put a premium on reading quickly and widely, and that breeds a kind of superficiality in our reading, and in what we seek to get out of books. You can't read a page a minute, the rate at which you're probably reading this book, and expect to remember what you've read for any considerable length of time. If something is going to be made memorable, it has to be dwelled upon, repeated.

In his essay "The First Steps Toward a History of Reading," Robert Darnton describes a switch from "intensive" to "extensive" reading that occurred as books began to proliferate. Until relatively recently, people read "intensively," says Darnton. "They had only a few books—the Bible, an almanac, a devotional work or two—and they read them over and over again, usually aloud and in groups, so that a narrow range of traditional literature became deeply imprinted on their consciousness." But after the printing press appeared around 1440, things began gradually to change. In the first century after Gutenberg, the number of books in existence increased fourteenfold. It became possible, for the first time, for people without great wealth to have a small library in their own homes, and a trove of easily consulted external memories close at hand.

Today, we read books "extensively," without much in the way of sustained focus and, with rare exceptions, we read each book only once. We value quantity of reading over quality of reading. We have no choice, if we want to keep up with the broader culture. Even in the most highly specialized fields, it can be a Sisyphean task to try to stay on top of the ever-growing mountain of words loosed upon the world each day.

Few of us make any serious effort to remember what we read. When I read a book, what do I hope will stay with me a year later? If it's a work of nonfiction, the thesis, maybe, if the book has one. A few savory details, perhaps. If it's fiction, the broadest outline of the plot, something about the main characters (at least their names), and an overall critical judgment about the book. Even these are likely to fade. Looking up at my shelves, at the books that have drained so many of my waking hours, is always a dispiriting experience.

That distinction between intensive and extensive is a good one to keep in mind. Iâ€™m convinced there is a time and place for both kinds of reading. There are many books that merit extensive reading and a select few, Godâ€™s Word among them, of course, that demand intensive. By all means read widely, but be sure to read deeply as well.

Some quotes to meditate on:

The constant habit of perusing devout books is so indispensable, that it has been termed the oil of the lamp of prayer. Too much reading, however, and too little meditation, may produce the effect of a lamp inverted; which is extinguished by the very excess of that aliment, whose property is to feed it.
Hannah More

Give yourself to prayer, to reading and meditation on divine truths: strive to penetrate to the bottom of them and never be content with a superficial knowledge.
- David Brainerd

Prayer that is born of meditation upon the Word of God is the prayer that soars upward most easily to God's listening ears.
- R.A. Torrey

It is not mere reading, but meditation -- "meditation all the day," as the Psalmist says -- which extracts the sweetness and the power out of Scripture.
- James Stalker

As you read, pause frequently to meditate on the meaning of what you are reading. Absorb the Word into your system by dwelling on it, pondering it, going over it again and again in your mind, considering it from many different angles, until it becomes part of you.
- Nancy Leigh DeMoss

I know of no way to experience unbroken union and communion with our beloved Lord Jesus apart from a conscious, deliberate choice to spend time alone with Him each morning.
- Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Do not lose yourself in your everyday work and activities. Rather, lose yourself in God. When you are doing work, let your innermost heart be centered on Him. Live in His presence and abide in Him. Then your work will follow you into eternity, and you will reap a rich harvest.
- Basilea Schlink

When we find our souls at all declining, it is best to raise them up presently by some awakening meditations, such as of the presence of God, of the strict reckoning we are to make, of the infinite love of God in Christ and the fruits of it, of the excellency of a Christian's calling, of the short and uncertain time of this life, of how little good all those things that steal away our hearts will do us before long, and of how it shall be for ever with us hereafter, as we spend this short time well or ill. The more we make way for such considerations to sink into our hearts, the more we shall rise nearer to that state of soul which we shall enjoy in heaven.
- Richard Sibbes

Continued meditation brings great profit to the soul. Passant and transient thoughts are more pleasant, but not so profitable. Deliberate meditation is of most use because it secures the return of the thoughts.
- Thomas Manton

The end of study is information, and the end of meditation is practice, or a work upon the affections. Study is like a winter sun, that shines, but warms not: but meditation is like a blowing upon the fire, where we do not mind the blaze, but the heat. The end of study is to hoard up truth; but of meditation to lay it forth in conference or holy conversation.
- Thomas Manton

What is the reason there is so much preaching and so little practice? For want of meditation.... Constant thoughts are operative, and musing makes the fire burn. Green wood is not kindled by a flash or spark, but by constant blowing.
- Thomas Manton

Meditation is love's nourishment.

- Jack Hyles

The more you read the Bible; and the more you meditate on it, the more you will be astonished with it.

- Charles Spurgeon

Each time we surrender our minds to meditate on base and sordid objects their grip on our lives is intensified. To think we can decrease our affinity for sinful pleasure apart from a concentrated fixation on the spiritually sublime is simply delusional. (Phil. 4:8)

- Sam Storms

When we find a man meditating on the words of God, my friends, that man is full of boldness and is successful.

- D.L. Moody

Now, as old Dr. Bonner, of Glasgow, said, "The Lord didn't show Joshua how to use the sword, but He told him how he should meditate on the Lord day and night, and then he would have good success."

- D.L. Moody

So often we try to develop Christian character and conduct without taking the time to develop God-centered devotion. We try to please God without taking the time to walk with Him and develop a relationship with Him. This is impossible to do.

- Jerry Bridges

The person who never meditates with delight on the glory of Christ in the Scriptures now will not have any real desire to see that glory in heaven. What sort of faith and love do people have who find time to think about many other things but make no time for meditating on this glorious subject?

- John Owen

We live, in fact, in a world starved for solitude, silence, and private: and therefore starved for meditation and true friendship.

- C.S. Lewis

When you cease from labour, fill up your time in reading, meditation, and prayer: and while your hands are labouring, let your heart be employed, as much as possible, in divine thoughts.

- David Brainerd

Meditation is the tongue of the soul and the language of our spirit; and our wandering thoughts in prayer are but the neglects of meditation and recessions from that duty; according as we neglect meditation, so are our prayers imperfect, - meditation being the soul of prayer and the intention of our spirit.

- Jeremy Taylor

It is not hasty reading, but seriously meditating upon holy and heavenly truths that makes them prove sweet and profitable to the soul. It is not the bee's touching on the flowers that gathers the honey, but her abiding for a time upon them, and drawing out the sweet. It is not he that reads most, but he that meditates most on divine truth, that will prove the choicest, wisest, strongest Christian.

- Joseph Hall

Meditation is the soul's perspective glass, whereby, in her long removes, she discerneth God, as if he were nearer at hand.

- Owen Feltham

An unschooled man who knows how to meditate upon the Lord has learned far more than the man with the highest education who does not know how to meditate.

- Charles Stanley

I'm convinced that the man who has learned to meditate upon the Lord will be able to run on his feet and walk in his spirit. Although he may be hurried by his vocation, that's not the issue. The issue is how fast his spirit is going. To slow it down

wn takes a period of time.

- Charles Stanley

The amount of time we spend with Jesus - meditating on His Word and His majesty, seeking His face - establishes our fruitfulness in the kingdom.

- Charles Stanley

In place of our exhaustion and spiritual fatigue, God will give us rest. All He asks is that we come to Him...that we spend a while thinking about Him, meditating on Him, talking to Him, listening in silence, occupying ourselves with Him - totally and thoroughly lost in the hiding place of His presence.

- Charles Swindoll

Take this as the secret of Christ's life in you: His Spirit dwells in your innermost spirit. Meditate on it, believe in it, and remember it until this glorious truth produces within you a holy fear and wonderment that the Holy Spirit indeed abides in you!

- Watchman Nee

The sweet spices of divine works must be beaten to powder by meditation, and then laid up in the cabinet of our memories.

- Abraham Wright

I will conclude with that excellent saying of Bernard: "Lord, I will never come away from Thee without Thee." Let this be a Christian's resolution, not to leave off his meditations of God till he find something of God in him.

- Thomas Watson

Meditate on what you read (Psm. 199:15). The Hebrew word for "meditate" means to be intense in the mind. Meditation without reading is wrong and bound to err; reading without meditation is barren and fruitless.

- Thomas Watson

The reason we come away so cold from reading the word is, because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation

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- Thomas Watson

The most intelligent hearers are those who enjoy most heartily the simplest preaching. It is not they who clamor for superlatively intellectual or aesthetic sermons. Daniel Webster used to complain of some of the preaching to which he listened. "In the house of God" he wanted to meditate "upon the simple varieties, and the undoubted facts of religion;" not upon mysteries and abstractions.

- Austin Phelps

Re: The Ever-Growing Mountain of Word (Want of Meditation) - Tim Challies - posted by turn, on: 2013/2/22 9:50

IMHO, this is a good post and rich in helpful content. Thank you.