

What regular Christian disciplines you would encourage a new Christian to develop?

- Reading the Bible
- Praying
- Fellowship in a Bible believing church
- Witnessing

Most Bible believing churches would agree on these four.

The Puritans would add one more of equal or even greater importance than some—meditation

Last fall—series on meditation

Some missed it

Those meditation lessons are on the church website.

Contain many rich quotes from the Puritans

Meditation is comparable to digestion.

Intake, chew thoroughly, digest slowly, utilize it in output

Sheep example—“cud” bring back up and further chew on and digest—ruminating

(Healthy, mature sheep will chew their cud for several hours every day.)

The process between intake of food and output of bodily energy is digestion.

The process between intake of scripture and output in our soul is meditation.

We will not go over the “how to’s” in this lesson but will mention again some of the benefits:

Romans 12: 2—[Key scripture] “Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Meditation helps us break from conforming to the world (action/distraction)

We get strengthened in the inner man.

We are transformed into the likeness of Christ.

We learn what to put off and what to put on.

We abide in the vine and bear fruit through meditation.

Renewal of our mind.—As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. (Pro.23:7)

(You are not what you think you are; what you think, you are.)

We learn to think God’s thoughts after Him

We get wisdom and understanding

We learn to love and delight in His law

We become able to speak to the King in His own language

Leads to greater intimacy—heart to heart communion

(What your mind dwells on is what becomes lodged in your heart—Wm. Gurnall)

We have greater enjoyment of fellowship —like minded

We prove out what is God’s good, acceptable and complete will

We have increased peace and security

We experience joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Our witness to others is enhanced—What is that hope that lies within you?

We see that meditation has a lot to do with our intake of scripture and digesting it.

But meditation is also the missing link between Bible intake and prayer output.

Often we see them as separate and do not flow from one to the other easily.

Often we do not even do them together as if either was related to the other.

Listen to how important this was to the Puritans (1550-1700)

Matthew Henry (*Puritan pastor and Bible commentator*)—Based on Ps 19:14—“David’s prayers were not his words only, but his meditations; as meditation is the best preparation for prayer, so prayer is the best issue of meditation. Meditation and prayer go together.”

Richard Baxter (*Pastor/ wrote ‘The Reformed Pastor’*)—“Thus in our meditations, to intermix soliloquy and prayer; sometimes speaking to our own hearts, and sometimes to God, is, I apprehend, the highest step we can advance to in this heavenly work. Nor should we imagine it will be as well to take up with prayer alone, and lay aside meditation; for they are distinct duties, and must both of them be performed. We need the one as well as the other, and therefore we shall wrong ourselves by neglecting either. Besides, the mixture of them, like music, will be more engaging; as the one serves to put life into the other. And our speaking to ourselves in meditation, should go before our speaking to God in prayer.”

Thomas Manton (*Puritan preacher/writer*)—“Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the Word and prayer, and has respect to both. The Word feeds meditation, and meditation feeds prayer. These duties must always go hand in hand; meditation must follow hearing and precede prayer. To hear and not to meditate is unfruitful. We may hear and hear, but it is like putting a thing into a bag with holes...It is rashness to pray and not to meditate. What we take in by the Word we digest by meditation and let out by prayer. These three duties (reading, meditation, prayer) must be ordered that one may not jostle out the other. Men are barren, dry, and sapless in their prayers for lack of exercising themselves in holy thoughts.”

William Bates (*classic and cultured later Puritan preacher*)—“The great reason why our prayers are ineffectual, is because we do not meditate before them.”

William Bridge (*One of the best practical Puritan writers*)—“As it (meditation) is the sister of reading, so it is the mother of prayer. Though a man’s heart be much indisposed to prayer, yet, if he can but fall into a meditation of God, and the things of God, his heart will soon come off to prayer...Begin with reading or hearing. Go on with meditation; end in prayer...Reading without meditation is unfruitful; meditation without reading is hurtful; to meditate and to read without prayer upon both, is without blessing.”

Example of the power of meditation and prayer from the life of George Muller (1805-1898)

“One of the most God-anointed men of prayer ever seen by the world.”

“For 2/3’s of a century he operated an orphanage in Bristol, England, solely on faith and prayer.”

“Without advertising his need or entering into debt, he cared for as many as 2,000 orphans at a single time and also supported mission work throughout the world.”

“Millions of dollars came through his hands unsolicited, and his tens of thousands of recorded answers to prayer are legendary.”

Brief biographical sketch—Liar, thief, immoral as a boy and young man—very wild

The Lord began drawing him around the age of 15 and he became a believer at age 20.

George then enrolled in seminary.

As a divinity student he fell into the common error of reading books about the Bible but not reading the Bible itself. “I practically preferred for the first four years of my divine life the works of uninspired men...the consequence was that I remained a babe, both in knowledge and grace.”

(Age 24) During a ten day recovery period from a serious infirmity, George later stated, “God began to show me that His Word alone is our standard of judgment...”

From that time on, the Bible became the true source of his inspiration, and the one book to which he was solely devoted.

“The Lord enabled me to put it to the test of experience, by laying aside commentaries, and almost every other book, and simply reading the Word of God and studying it. The result was that the first evening I shut myself into my room to give myself to prayer and meditation over the scriptures, I learned more in a few hours than I had done during a period of several months previously.” “But the particular difference was that I received real strength for my soul in doing so.” (Digested food—greater output)

In the Spring of 1841 (age 36), George Muller made a discovery regarding the relationship between meditation and prayer that transformed his spiritual life:

“Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer after having dressed in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing was to give myself to the reading of God’s Word, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.

I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words of the Lord’s blessing upon His precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God, searching as it were into every verse to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.

The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less to prayer. When thus I have been for a while making confession or intercession or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my soul is the object of my meditation. The result of this is that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my

inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart. The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: formerly, when I rose, I began to pray s soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably be an with prayer...But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half and hour, or even an hour on my knees before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or quarter of an hour, or even half and hour, I only then really began to pray.

I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word. It often astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point...And yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is to obtain food for his inner man.

Now what is food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water passes through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it and applying it to our hearts.

When we pray we speak to God. Now prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season therefore when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the Word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us. We may therefore profitably meditate with God's blessing though we are ever so weak spiritually; nay, the weaker we are, the more we need meditation for the strengthening of our inner man. Thus there is far less to be feared from wandering of mind than if we give ourselves t prayer without having had time previously for meditation.

I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow believers to ponder this matter. By the blessing of God, I ascribe to tis mode the help and strength which I have had from God to pass in peace through deeper trials, in various ways, than I have ever had before; and having now for several years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it."

Back to our original question:

"What regular Christian disciplines would you encourage a new Christian to develop?"

The four we mentioned plus the fifth are good but let us consider putting them together in a different format.

One discipline:---Bible reading with meditation leading to prayer

Will that allow time to ever get through the whole Bible?

[Near the end of his life at age 93, George Muller affirmed that he had read the Bible through approximately two hundred times, one hundred of which were on his knees.]

Two fruits:—Fellowship and witnessing

Fellowship out of the life that comes from Bible reading with meditation and prayer.

Brethren getting together and feeding each other words of life.

Strengthening one another's souls instead of just folly like the world does.

Witnessing out of freedom from conformity to the world and an abundant delight in God.

Ex. Moses—face shone from being in close communion with God.

Read Psalm 1 as an encouragement of how to be blessed and who will be blessed.