

You're as cuddly as a cactus and as charming as an eel. You're a bad banana with a greasy black peel. You're a monster, Mr. Grinch. This time of year you hear a lot about Dr. Seuss's Mr. Grinch. On the outside he looked quite ready for Christmas. He wore a Santa hat. He had his little dog dressed up like a reindeer. And he loved presents enough to steal them from all the *whos* down in *Who*-ville. But of course the Grinch wasn't ready for Christmas. Do you remember the next line of the song? "Your heart's an empty hole." His problem was that his heart was two sizes too small. So the rest of the story is about how his heart was changed just in time for Christmas.

Dr. Seuss was onto something. Even if everything around you is beginning to look a lot like Christmas, the most important part of our preparations is what's going on in our heart. Today we'll look at an ancient way God's word prepares our hearts, meditation. It's not sitting cross legged on a prayer mat. It's not trying to get in touch with your inner self through deep breathing. Meditation is the topic of Psalm 119, and Psalm 119 is actually a form of meditation. It's the longest chapter in the Bible and to most people it seems very repetitive. That's because it's meditation, and nowadays we don't do much meditating. But God can use meditation to do more than make your heart grow three sizes like the Grinch's did. God can get your heart ready for Christmas.

Today we'll answer three questions from Psalm 119. 1) What is meditation? 2) Why would we want to meditate? 3) How can we use it to get ready for Christmas?

First, what is it? Meditation is like reading your Bible, but it's more than that. If I show two sentences of God's word you could read it in a few seconds. But you could meditate on it for a half hour. That's because meditation is more than reading. It has 4 parts.

Part one: hear God's word. Psalm 119 put it this way: "**I seek you with all my heart.**" When my mind is swirling with ideas about how the world works and ideas about who I am and ideas about other people, mediating on God's word means I push pause on my thoughts and I hear from outside of my brain what God thinks about all of this. The only way I can find out what God thinks is to hear his word. I need that outside influence because left to my own thoughts, I would never come up with things like the commandments, forgiveness, Jesus! I need God's like a person with a stopped heart needs a defibrillator. Our hearts and mind stopped working properly thousands of years ago. My heart is daily in need of a reset, so I seek God with all my heart. I need to hear God's word.

Part two: implant God's word. Psalm 119 says, "**I have hidden your word in my heart.**" If Hearing God's word gets it into your ears and into your head, Implanting God's word means getting it to stick in your heart. It means memorizing passages so that they are always with you even if you can't pull out your Bible app. If somebody's heart doesn't just need to be reset once with an AED, if they have abnormal heart rhythms all the time, doctors can implant a pace maker which stays with them always ready to reset their heart when things go wrong. Memorizing scripture does the same thing. It puts God's word with you always so that your heart and mind can be reset at a moment's notice no matter where you are.

Marj knew that. When I met Marge I was 24 and she was 86. I lived in a sloppy bachelor apartment with more post it notes on the wall than picture frames and she lived in a condo with antiques worth more than my car. But we both lived alone, on opposite ends of happy marriages. So one day after church she invited me over for tea. We looked at fancy old pictures, fancy vases, fancy artwork. She served me fancy tea. Everything was fancy except an old King James Bible on her coffee table. So being a Bible nerd, I said "tell me about your Bible!" You know the first thing she told me? She said, "I read a little bit every day, and I memorize one verse." I did some quick math. One verse per day over 86 years, "Marj you must have the whole Bible memorized!" "Oh no, she said. I forget most of them. But my favorites stay with me." Turns out Marj had Bible verses memorized, beautiful passages, that I never even remember hearing. Because she took two minutes to implant those verses in her heart.

Step three: Delight in it. Psalm 119 says, **“I delight in your decrees.”** To delight in something is to find joy in it. So you hear God’s word, and you implant it in your heart but it doesn’t do much if you don’t see why it gives joy to the world. The author of psalm 119 lived before Jesus, but he was delighted to hear all the words of God. Every law brought with it the promise that the Messiah would someday keep every law. Every failure, as frustrating as it was, pointed him to an unnamed savior who would never fail. But we can take extra delight in God’s words because we know the Savior’s name. We know he’s came on Christmas. We know he died and rose again. Every single word of the Old Testament is setting the stage for Jesus. Every word of the New Testament is telling us more about how Jesus kept every one of those promises. Meditating means isn’t just reading God’s word. It’s taking the time to see Jesus in it, and it’s delightful.

The last step of meditation is a little unexpected: Echo. If you shout in a cave you’ll hear it repeat, repeat, repeat. Psalm 119 says **“With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.”** After God has shouted the joyful promises of Jesus, we repeat them- first maybe just mumbling to ourselves. Then we repeat them, maybe sharing the good news with others. And before you know it you’ll find these promises showing up all over your life. Every bad day is colored with the hope of Jesus. Every good day ends with thanks to Jesus. Every December day is an opportunity to prepare for Jesus. Meditation is hearing God’s word, implanting it in your heart, delighting to find Jesus in it, and it echoes from your lips and in your lives. Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy!

And that is meditation. Hear, Implant, Delight, Echo. HIDE. And it’s exactly what psalm 119 says we can do with God’s word. **“I have hidden your word in my heart That I might not sin against you.”** HIDE.

That’s what meditation is, but why would we want to meditate? Honestly, you really don’t have a choice. We are all meditating every day whether we like it not. We meditate on whatever is hiding in our heart. What is so ingrained in your heart that you hear it echoing through your life? What gives you so much delight that you talk about it all the time? If you’re like me, what’s rolling around in your mind is a list of things you need to get done, or things you haven’t gotten done. We love to meditate on our failures and challenges. And we often feel like the Grinch, his heart’s an empty-hole.

If your heart is feeling a little bit vacant, you’re in a good spot. Haven’t you heard? “Let every heart prepare him room.” What would happen if you let Jesus move into that room? What if God filled the empty hole by hiding his word in your heart. That’s what he wants to do through meditation. What if instead of your heart being filled with a to-do list, it was ingrained with Jesus cry from the cross “It is finished!” That’s why we meditate. So God can fill us up and get our hearts ready for Christmas.

So how do you meditate? Here’s one way. It’s not the only way, but it’s super simple and you can do it tonight. First, take one paragraph of God’s word. It would take you 20 seconds to read it. But we’ll take 5 minutes to meditate on it. First you hear it. Let’s read this out loud.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Then ask yourself, “In my words, what does this verse say?”

Read it again to yourself.

Now ask yourself, “What in this verse shows me God’s love?”

Read it again to yourself.

Now ask, “What does this tell me to do that I’ve failed at. Or what does it tell me not to do, that I’ve done? For what do I owe God an apology?”

One last time, read it to yourself.

Now ask yourself, “With all this in mind, what can I ask God to give me? How can I ask God to help me?”

If you already have a great plan to prepare your heart for Christmas by meditating of God's word, then keep it up! But I think it would be fun if we all did some meditating together. I've prepared a list of meditations for the rest of the week. There is a stack of them, on every table in the atrium and the first meditation starts tonight. Grab a sheet on your way out the door and let's all hide God's word in our hearts tonight!

Do you remember what happens to the Grinch in the end?

Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!

"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store.

"Maybe Christmas... perhaps... means a little bit more. "

And what happened then...? Well... in *Who-ville* they say

That the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day.

My friends the word of God is much more powerful than the spirit of Christmas. In fact, the peace of God transcends all understanding. It will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.