

## Mindfulness and the Mind of Christ

### A. Introduction: The Issue

Eastern religious practices from Hinduism and Buddhism are becoming integrated into society in areas of health and education, under the guise of “psychology” or “physical fitness” or “wellness” or “stress management”. Nowadays we hear of practices such as “mindfulness”, “meditation”, “yoga” being encouraged as something that is beneficial to learn and practice, as something that can enhance one's health, fitness, and ability to mentally focus and function. Some believe that these techniques are “neutral”, that the religious and spiritual components in them have either been removed, or that they are compatible with Christian faith and practice. Is this true? That is the question we will explore tonight.

### B. Basic Philosophy of Eastern Religions Contrasted with Christianity

Hinduism and Buddhism both developed in India. While there are differences between the two religions, as well as variations within them, there are also significant similarities in basic philosophy and practices. Hinduism grew out of the earlier religion of Brahmanism, which worshipped the “Supreme Being” of “Brahman”, and his expression in many other deities. It was also out of this culture and religion that Buddhism arose, although Buddha focused more on a non-theistic approach and the interconnection of all things. In general the view of “God” in these religions is pantheistic. While many “deities” are acknowledged, the idea of “God” is that of a “Universal Principle” or “Ultimate Reality”, or “creative principle which lies realized in the whole world” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahman>), which is both the cause of and the reality of everything that exists. In other words, this is the impersonal “Force” that flows through all things, that is all things, positive and negative, light and dark. According to this view then, everything and everyone is “god”. You are god. I am god. The tree is god. The grass is god. The animals are god. All that exists is divine.

According to this belief system, the problem is that we do not realize that we are divine and that everything else around us is divine and therefore that all are connected and one. Therefore we experience all sorts of problems in this world. The conclusion drawn then is that the goal that humans need to reach is to fully realize and become aware that we ARE God, that we are ONE with everything in the universe. Until we realize this, we remain ignorant of our true selves, and we keep going around and around in an endless cycle of birth and life with all its suffering and death, only to be reborn again, reincarnated in another body, to repeat this same cycle over and over again, until we finally find a way to break free of it.

The way to break free, these teachings say, is through a process of meditative practices by which we become aware, awake and enlightened, to eventually realize our true selves, which is that all of the things we perceive in this life as being separate and distinct are only illusion, and that in reality we are not distinct at all, but rather one and the same and totally connected with all. Then we will be able to transcend the suffering and even the pleasures of this world and experience “oneness with the universe”, thus reaching “Nirvana”. This is not another word for “heaven”, in the sense that we think of it in Christianity. Wikipedia summarizes it this way: “Nirvana – literally means 'blown out', like a candle... In the Buddhist context, *nirvana* refers to the imperturbable stillness of mind after the fires of desire, aversion, and delusion have been finally extinguished. In Hindu philosophy, it is the union with Brahman, the divine ground of existence, and the experience of blissful egolessness.” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana>) Thus, Nirvana refers to a state of so-called peace, which is defined as complete emptiness and non-distinction, complete unity in merging with the universal force that pervades everything.

We see this philosophy promoted in various places in our society today. Take, for example, Star Wars. As the story goes, young Luke Skywalker must be trained by Yoda in the ways of the Jedi, in order to face and overcome the evil Darth Vader. In this training time, Yoda explains “the Force” to Luke in this way: “My ally is the Force, and a powerful ally it is. Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. (Yoda pokes Luke's shoulder.) You must feel the Force around you, here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere, yes, even between land and ship.” (And then Yoda closes his eyes, and in a calm, meditative manner, reaches out his hand, and levitates Luke's ship out of swamp it has sunk into, demonstrating the use of the Force.) (From Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back.) Yes, it is fantasy, and yes, it is an exciting story as it connects with universal concepts of hero versus villain, battle between good and evil, and so on. But the idea of “the Force” is woven throughout these stories, teaching the worldview of Eastern religion in a way that seems palatable to the western mind.

In other areas in our society, seemingly innocent references are made to various concepts and practices derived from and connected with Eastern religion. Sometimes this is done very subtly, or is presented in ways that seem positive, at least on the surface. For example, although it is no secret that yoga comes from Hindu and Buddhist religious practice, it is presented in our western society as exercise only, for at least some types. Some people then rationalize that they're just doing the exercise part, not getting involved in the spirituality of it, or perhaps trying to integrate their own spirituality into the practices, with the hope that such is compatible. Mindfulness also is presented as a psychologically sound and spiritually neutral practice, even though those who promote such openly state that these techniques are derived from Buddhism. We can easily be drawn into these practices and perspectives without realizing the direction they are really taking us, unless we discern clearly what is and is not of God. We need to know what the truth really is about God, ourselves, the problem in this world, and the solution, if we are to be able to understand how to respond to these influences.

As Christians, we understand God to be both transcendent and immanent. This means that He is above and beyond and separate from this world, yet He also interacts personally and closely with it. He has created the universe and all that is in it; He holds it together, but God is NOT this universe. God is not impersonal. God is not the “Universal Principle”. God is not “the Force”. God is a Person, the Creator of all, with whom we can relate, as He created us for relationship with Him. God's creation declares His glory, but creation is not God and is not to be worshipped as if it were God. Only God Himself is to be worshipped.

(Romans 1:20-25)

For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools,

and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

From the Christian perspective, we understand also that we are not God. We as human beings are made in the image of God, but that does not make us God. We also in our “true nature” are not merely “one with the universe” or meant to know ourselves as indistinct from it. When God created humans, He did something different than He did for all the rest of creation. He did not merely speak man into existence, but formed him from the dust of the earth. Then God breathed into man the breath of life and man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7). This means that God's Spirit breathed into man and created a new being, unique and distinct from the rest of creation, a being created in the image of God.

According to the Bible, our problem is NOT that we are ignorant of our true nature as divine. In fact, that was Satan's temptation to Eve, to believe that there was something more that she could gain through the knowledge of good and evil that God had not given her, that IF she ate that fruit, she would become “like God”. The serpent said, “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:5) Adam and Eve believed that lie, gave into that temptation and ate that fruit. This was where our problem began, with a separation from fellowship with God because of sin, with the result of sin being corruption and death in our world.

The solution to this problem has already been provided. His name is Jesus Christ. He died to take away our sins, thus ending the separation between us and God that our sin caused. Jesus is the Way through which we can come to God (John 14:6) and when we receive HIM, we are restored to relationship with God (John 1:12). The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that we do not need to try to attain our salvation or “enlightenment” through our own efforts. Jesus Christ has already attained that for us.

(Ephesians 2:8-10)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And, as we submit ourselves to God, the Spirit of God, who is already in us from the moment we received Christ, transforms our lives to be more like Christ.

(Romans 12:1-2)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Romans 8:29-30)

For whom He foreknew, He also **predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover whom **He predestined**, these **He also called**; whom He called, these **He also justified**; and whom He justified, these **He also glorified**.

God does the work of transforming us. Our job is to cooperate with Him as He does this.

(2 Corinthians 3:18)

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

So we see here that there are some very distinct differences between the worldviews of Eastern religions and Christianity.

Different view of God (everything is god and god is everything vs God is the Creator of the universe)  
Different view of Man (everyone is god – true nature is divine vs made in the image of God, sinners in need of redemption)

Different view of Our Problem (ignorance of our true nature vs sin we need to be freed from)

Different view of the Solution (enlightenment/union with god/everything vs salvation from sin through Jesus Christ)

So what do these differences mean for us as we respond to practices derived from Eastern religion, such as yoga, mindfulness and meditation? Should we refuse to be involved in any aspect of such as they are completely incompatible with our Christian faith? Are there any aspects of these techniques that are indeed neutral, which we could participate in with a clear conscience before God? To answer these questions, we need to explore what is actually involved in these activities.

### C. Yoga

Yoga is an exercise that involves engaging in a combination of physical postures, breathing exercises and meditation. It is considered to be a key aspect in the spiritual practice of Hinduism and Buddhism. The word “yoga” means “to yoke”, meaning through this practice, to become yoked, or joined as one with the divine. This is the intent and goal of all yoga practice, regardless of which type is practiced.

There are many types of yoga that are practiced, as different people develop a variety of ways to practice it. However, there are six main “paths” of yoga that are commonly practiced. These include Hatha yoga (yoga of activity or yoga of balance), Karma yoga (path of service), Bhakti yoga (path of devotion), Jnana yoga (path of wisdom), Tantra yoga (path of ritual, including sexual ritual), and Raja yoga (the “royal” path, which emphasizes meditation and following the “8 limbs of yoga”).

The most commonly known form of yoga practiced in the west is Hatha yoga. The yoga journal states that “the word “hatha” can be translated two ways: as “willful” or “forceful,” or the yoga of activity, and as “sun” (ha) and “moon” (tha), the yoga of balance. Hatha practices are designed to align and calm your body, mind, and spirit in preparation for meditation.”

*(<http://www.yogajournal.com/category/yoga-101/types-of-yoga/hatha/>)*

Because of its emphasis on physical activity and fitness, many think that this is really all it is about, and that therefore, it is a safe and pure practice for Christians to engage in, separate from the spirituality of its roots. However, given that this practice is infused with the philosophy of “oneness” as understood in Eastern religion, such a division would be inconceivable. The spirituality of yoga is “one” with any practice of yoga, and yoga itself is meant to be a lifestyle, worked out in all aspects of life for its practitioners. Although one does not need to begin with believing the philosophy behind these practices, these practices embody and express such philosophies, promoting and proclaiming them as the practitioners of yoga participate in these exercises.

Hatha yoga may be the beginning of yoga practice, but it is considered to be the first step along the “royal road” of yoga, towards Raja yoga. Progressively practicing the “8 limbs of yoga”, which are stages of spiritual growth as understood in Eastern philosophy, is something that is encouraged in Hatha yoga practice. These 8 stages are as follows: ethical standards, self-discipline and spiritual

observance, postures, breathing control, withdrawal and detachment from the senses, concentrating to decrease mental activity (focused on a single point, such as a sound, energetic place in the body, deity), meditation (maintaining a quiet and still mind, with few, if any thoughts), and then the final stage of enlightenment, when one “transcends Self”, coming to the realization of “oneness with the divine”, with a sense of complete interconnection with all living things. Notice here that this process is certainly NOT separate from the spirituality of Eastern religion. And this is what is encouraged to grow and increase in one's life, through ongoing practice of Hatha yoga.

The yoga journal also states that “One aim of a hatha yoga practice is to awaken kundalini energy.” (<http://www.yogajournal.com/article/advanced/full-bloom/>) Kundalini is the rising of “serpent power”, which is said to rise from the base of the spine up to the top of the head, when it is released to do so through certain meditative and yogic practices. It is said also that one of the most common yoga positions, the Lotus, helps in reaching that goal. There is much caution given regarding the potential dangers of opening up to Kundalini powers, even among those who practice yoga. There are spiritual forces at work in this which are certainly nothing to be taken lightly. As Christians, we know that the “serpent” is no friend of ours.

But, one may say, I don't do all that. I just do the physical exercises, the asanas or positions of yoga, and the breathing. But are those positions and that breathing really neutral?

Yoga positions are called asanas, which means “seat”. They are intended to be the “seat” or place in which to sit and align one's mind, body and spirit with the life force of the universe, so that there can be free flow of such in one's self, to move one further towards the point of enlightenment and full self-realization. Also, each of these asanas are actually worship to Hindu deities, and the positions themselves are said to embody these deities. Many of them are named after the deities that they represent. For example, Surya Namaskara, the “Sun Salutation” is worship of the sun, as the yoga practitioner goes through a series of asanas, with each of the positions giving veneration to some aspect of the sun and its benefits to us and the earth.

- Tadasana (Mountain Pose) = Mountains are “the abode of the gods” in Hinduism, and the Himalayan Mountains are themselves considered a god, giving life to the area through the rivers that come from it.
- Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute) = “sending your greeting to the sun”
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend) = “connecting down into the earth”
- Low Lunge (Anjaneyasana) = refers to the mother of the monkey god Hanuman, whose name was Anjani. In legends told about her, she was a “monkey princess” who was also a female spirit of clouds and water.
- Plank Pose = also called Phalakasana, is a transitional position between asanas. Phalak is an Indian name that means “heaven” or “sky”.
- Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff Pose) = transitional, also is about central strength. Chaturanga can also refer to “army”, because of the 4 army divisions mentioned in an ancient Indian epic, of elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry. Self as foundational, worship of self. Also, sometimes the “Eight Limbed” or “Caterpillar” Pose is done at this point. This position is a prostration in worship to Hindu deities.
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward-Facing Dog Pose) = receiving light. Sometimes “Cobra” pose is done at this point, which is associated with many gods, opening up to kundalini power.
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose) = dogs associated with many deities in Hinduism – devotion to dogs is seen as worship to Shiva.

Then the yogi goes back to Lunge, Standing Forward Bend, Upward Salute, Mountain Pose, moving through a total of 12 poses, all focused on devotion and worship of light/sun, both outer and inner. *(The order of asanas is adapted from <http://www.yogajournal.com/article/practice-section/here-comes-the-sun/>, plus other research on the meaning of asanas.)*

These are just a few examples of how yoga positions express worship to Hindu gods. Yoga practitioners will sometimes refer to the body as a “temple” which is cared for through the use of these positions. However, as Christians, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are to glorify God in our bodies, not other gods.

(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Breathing technique in yoga is called “pranayama”, or “control of breath”, from “prana” meaning breath, or vital energy, or life force, and “ayama”, meaning control. Breathing in and of itself is certainly neutral, a bodily function necessary for life for all living creatures. Learning how to breathe deeply and in various ways is a skill that is important, in various aspects of life. For example, singers learn to “breathe from the diaphragm” in order to sing well. Swimmers learn to alternate taking breaths, holding breath, and blowing out breath, in a coordinated manner while swimming. Athletes learn to breathe properly to enhance their performance while exerting themselves. Women know that breathing in certain ways during labour can help with childbirth. But these variations in breathing techniques are not all that is being referred to when it comes to breath control in yoga. Breathing in yoga goes beyond mere deep breathing and becoming aware of air going in and out of one's lungs, to focusing on noticing “life force” going in and out and through oneself. Yoga practitioners may actually slow their breath to the point of being almost imperceptible, as part of the process of disconnecting from sensation, on the road to enlightenment.

While breathing in and out, those practicing yoga are sometimes encouraged to express mantras, which are single syllable sounds or repeated words, phrases, chants or utterances, which are meant to focus one mentally and spiritually and facilitate connection with the divine. Often these mantras or chants are actually expressions of worship to Hindu deities. Even some of those who believe there can be such a thing as “Christian yoga” state concerns about this. Fr Tom Ryan, addressing this issue on his website (<http://www.christianspracticingyoga.com/chanting/>) writes, “The problem for Christians (as well as for Jews and Muslims) is that the saguna forms are venerated as such, i.e., as real gods who, when propitiated, grant specific requests or bestow certain graces. It is the act of worship that is problematic. The veneration of the deity forms runs counter to the first commandment in the Decalogue: “I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2).”

While this man suggests something that is common among those who attempt to Christianize yoga, that one simply chant the name of the God that you yourself worship, instead of those other deities, a problem remains unsolved with this proposed solution. The asanas themselves are often acknowledgement and embodiment of specific Hindu deities. The positioning of oneself into a particular asana, combined with breathing techniques, along with mantras, all together express worship to these deities through yoga, joining the practitioner to the spiritual entities involved. The entire process is connected. So how can it be spiritually pure to chant the name of God or Jesus, while placing your body into a position that expresses worship to another god and that joins you with another spirit?

At the end of a yoga session, or sometimes as a greeting, yoga practitioners often say “Namaste”. Often this is taken as someone simply saying “I honour you”. However, the meaning of “namaste” goes deeper than that. Namaste comes from the word “nama”, which means “bow”, and “te” which means “you”, so the person is basically saying “I bow to you”. This expression comes directly from the idea that each “self” is “divine”, so in other words, “namaste” means “I bow to the god in you”. No, I am not God, and neither are you. I will honour you, but not as divine. I will honour you as the fearfully and wonderfully made human being that God has created you to be.

#### D. Mindfulness

“Mindfulness” is defined by the dictionary as “the state or quality of being mindful or aware of something”. By this definition, mindfulness can be understood simply to be the practice of paying close attention to something and remaining aware and attentive. It can also refer to remembering important things. This is quite important and encouraged in Scripture. Just do a search to see how many times the Bible speaks of remembering, bringing to mind or being alert or aware of something.

However, the term “mindfulness”, when used to refer to the practice of “mindfulness” or “mindfulness meditation” has a wider meaning than simply being aware or “mindful” of one's circumstances and surroundings. It actually refers to the Buddhist practice of “sati”, which is step 7 of the “Eightfold Path” or “Middle Way” which Buddha taught was the way to attain “enlightenment”, and is also the first of the “Seven Factors of Enlightenment”. In other words, this sort of mindfulness is all about learning and practicing Buddhist teaching.

Beginning approximately 35 years ago, Jon Kabat-Zinn introduced the concept of mindfulness as a derivative from the Buddhist understanding of such, within the context of psychological training and treatment of stress. As a result, what was previously understood as mindfulness took on different meaning in our society. Prior to this, in western society, mindfulness generally meant remembering and actively keeping something in mind, in order to take action that was directed by rational and reasonable thought, study, attentiveness and conscious reasoning. When the Buddhist concept of “sati” was introduced and translated as “mindfulness”, the only similarity that remained between the former concept and the understanding of mindfulness that is now popular, was the idea of being aware and of training the mind in some way. Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness is as follows:

'Mindfulness is awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a sustained and particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. It is one of many forms of meditation, if you think of meditation as any way in which we engage in (1) systematically regulating our attention and energy (2) thereby influencing and possibly transforming the quality of our experience (3) in the service of realizing the full range of our humanity and of (4) our relationships to others and the world.’  
(Jon Kabat-Zinn, Mindfulness for Beginners, Introduction.)

So what exactly does someone pay attention to and become aware of, as they practice this? As we can see here, the concept of mindfulness has now taken on aspects of Eastern style of meditation, involving stilling and quieting the mind, more of a non-thinking and non-doing sort of discipline, than of taking action directed by one's thought processes. The key word in this mindfulness definition is “non-judgmental”. Those who begin a practice of mindfulness are encouraged to sit quietly and simply become aware of their own thoughts, feelings, emotions, body, whatever is happening around them, and just observe it, let it flow by and through and around them, without attempting to stop or change or judge anything about it, but to simply accept it as it is.

While mindfulness training does speak of self-regulation, this is more about disciplining oneself to remain detached from thoughts and sensations, through meditative non-judgment and acceptance, than about taking action towards change. The “transformation of the quality of our experience” refers to gaining a deeper understanding of self and the world, as viewed through a Buddhist worldview. “Realizing the full range of our humanity and of our relationships to others and the world” refers again to the idea of understanding ourselves to be one with everything, and then fully experiencing that sameness and connection and non-distinction, through meditative practices. The practice of yoga is included within mindfulness practices, as a way to assist in developing this sort of awareness.

Illustration: Food Colouring Bowls – Water and Bleach. (Two clear bowls, one half filled with water, one half filled with bleach; food colouring; yellow sponge. Drop generous amount of food colouring in bowl with water, while listing positive and negative aspects of life experience, then soak sponge in water, to illustrate what happens when one lets everything flow in and around and through, as mindfulness teaches. State that no matter how much one fully becomes one with all of this, or what one allows to just fall away to the side, this can never clear away the “colour”, that one remains the same “colour” as the world one has soaked in. Then move sponge to bowl with bleach. Discuss how we can pour out our hearts to God, how Jesus has carried everything and cleanses us, how our lives and minds become clear as we spend time in the Presence of God. Show clear sponge, with no colour in it, colour is all taken away. Put sponge back in the food colouring water bowl. Show that we can get effected again by sin and the problems in the world. Put sponge back on bleach, to show that as we take this to Jesus, He cleanses us again. Squeeze sponge with bleach into the food colouring water bowl, while explaining that, as we spend time in God's Presence, we are able to influence our world and bring light into it.

E. Meditation and Stress Management Compatible with Christian faith and practice.

How do we respond to all of this as Christians? One thing to note is that these practices are becoming more and more prominent in our society, with thousands of people in the western world practicing some form of yoga and/or mindfulness. We WILL meet these people. They may be our neighbours, our friends, our family members. They may be health care professionals we come in contact with, teachers or coaches. They may even be members of our churches. Some here may have been involved in these practices, with or without knowing what it was all about.

It is not enough to simply point out the problems with these philosophies and practices. Those who engage in these practices are people, and ultimately, we need to find ways to extend the love and grace of Jesus to all people. These people are seekers of spiritual reality, and sometimes, spiritual reality has not been found in the Sunday School teaching, Bible studies, sermons, or church activities that we so readily engage in as Christians. Yet the truths of the Bible, the practices of Christianity, the experience of loving relationships within the Body of Christ, and especially the experience of intimacy with God through Jesus Christ has so much to offer to all who seek, so much more beyond anything that Eastern meditative practices could offer. Will we ourselves grow into such a deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ, that our interactions with all who seek reveal HIM to them and invite them to experience Him as well?

We have talked tonight about a lot of practices that are not in line with Biblical truth and Christian practice. But what about practices that ARE in line with God and His ways? Eastern religion certainly does not have the monopoly on meditation, or on techniques that are helpful for health and wellness, physically, emotionally or spiritually. The Bible has much to say about these things as well.

Meditation God's way is not about focusing in on oneself, to know oneself, or to realize one's divinity. It is not about chanting some sound or words repeatedly to lessen the activity in the mind. Rather, meditation is an active engagement of one's heart and mind in knowing and focusing on God and His Word.

Joshua 1:8 “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Psalm 1:2 But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night

Psalm 4:4 Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah

Psalm 46:10 God says,  
Be still, and know that I *am* God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

Meditation God's way is not about passively letting everything go past, through and in you non-judgmentally. It is actively engaging in listening to God and following Him. It is about hearing God's voice and learning to discern the difference between the voice of God and other voices, between the Spirit of God and other spirits. It is not about extinguishing the senses, but rather about learning how to use the senses God has given you to discern good from evil.

John 10:27

Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

1 Peter 5:6-11

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*.

To Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 5:14

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

So how do we do this? We submit ourselves to God. We spend time getting in His Word. We get to know God as we get quiet before Him, we pray, we ask God to reveal truth to us. And we listen to what He has to say, which will always be in line with His Word and His ways. We actively resist and say NO to anything else that does not line up with that.

Meditation God's way is about setting our hearts and minds on God and the things of God, letting Him change and sustain us. It is about knowing His Presence in our day to day life, and letting Him transform us to be like Christ. It is not about us “realizing” ourselves to be “god”.

Psalms 26:2 Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose* mind *is* stayed *on* You, Because he trusts in You.

Romans 8:5-7

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.

Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

The focus of all Christian meditation is to for us to know the mind of Christ, which we have received when we accepted Jesus, but we need to grow in knowing and living from the mind of Christ.

Philippians 3:12-21

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore **let** us, as many as are mature, have this **mind**; and if in anything you **think** otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same **mind**.

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ:

whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is* their belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame—who set their **mind** on earthly things.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

### Christian Meditation

Is about getting to know God as God, and His Word as our directions for life.

Is active, not passive.

Is about listening and discerning. It is about hearing and knowing the voice of God, and discerning the difference between His Spirit who guides us into all truth, and other spirits and voices that lead us away from God and into error.

Is about practicing the Presence of God, as in knowing His Presence in our day to day life.

### Eastern Meditation

Is about focusing on Self, becoming more aware of self and one's experience.

Is passive, not active.

Is about being non-judgmental and accepting of all.

Is about eventually attaining Enlightenment, realization of one's "true self" as one with the universe.

Eastern meditation practice promises peace and the ability to decrease stressful, negative and harmful reactions that want to reign in our lives. Yet the process to attain such requires many lives of attentiveness to eliminating everything that might hinder “enlightenment”, only to eventually merge into non-distinct oneness with the life force that pervades everything. It quite literally promises an outcome of nothingness.

By contrast, God's Word gives direction on how to address the issues that cause us trouble, on how to experience “the peace of God which passes all understanding”, and provides us with the power to do it. We will look at three passages tonight that speak to specific issues that we may need to resolve in practical areas of our lives, and see the strategies that God's Word gives us to address such issues.

### Dealing with poor behaviour and anger.

Ephesians 4:17-24

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

### The Process

1. Hear and learn the truth from Jesus, in relationship with Him.
2. Put off the old man, former corrupt actions that were based on lies and lust.
3. Be renewed in your mind.
4. Put on the new man, created in line with God, truly righteous, truly holy.
  1. Lying replaced with truth telling.
  2. Ongoing anger replaced with facing and resolving things quickly.
  3. No place for the devil – only place for Jesus
  4. Stealing replaced with honest labour and giving to others
  5. Corrupt words replaced with words that build others up.
  6. No grieving the Holy Spirit – living in intimacy with God
  7. Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, malice replaced with kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness, forgiving as Christ forgave you.

## Dealing with anxiety and disturbing thoughts.

Philippians 4:6-9

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

### The Process

1. Turn anxiety into prayer.
2. Ask God for what you want.
3. Thank Him.
4. God's peace which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds.

How to maintain that inner peace:

1. Think, focus on, continue to keep in mind, fill your mind and meditate on things that are:
  1. true
  2. noble
  3. just
  4. pure
  5. lovely
  6. good report
  7. virtuous
  8. praiseworthy

(Note here, that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, as a psychological approach to addressing emotional and behavioural issues, says the same thing, in terms of encouraging replacing negative with positive, or irrational thoughts with rational thoughts, or as we say it, replacing lies with truth. But God's Word said it first.)

2. Follow godly example that you have already learned, received, heard, seen.
3. God of peace will be with you.

## In Conclusion

### Colossians 3

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (verses 1-3)

Putting off the old man, putting on the new man is the outcome of “setting your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (verse 2)

1. Seek those things which are above – focus on Christ.
2. Put to death sinful things. (Because you have put off the old man and have put on the renewed new man.)
3. Put on righteous attitudes/actions.
  1. Tender mercies
  2. Kindness
  3. Humility
  4. Meekness
  5. Longsuffering
  6. Bearing with one another
  7. Forgiving one another as Christ forgave you
  8. Love above all
4. Let the peace of God rule in your heart.
5. Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom – teach, admonish each other with singing to the Lord
6. Do all you do in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God

Meditation techniques as presented in our society today may suggest that they are needed to help calm down upset and agitated and anxious children, teens, or adults. They may suggest that getting your children trained in doing these skills will help in their day to day focus and self regulation of their emotions. But as we can see, God's Word offers solutions for all of these issues. Learn and grow yourselves in spending time with God and listening to Him. Get to know His Word and His ways. Teach them to your children and model for them how to walk in this. Your life, your family dynamics and the way you handle difficulties that come your way WILL be transformed.

(Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

“You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Transcript of presentation given to Wingham Christian Home Educators meeting, May 16, 2016.

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