



# A Bone to Pick with God

## Christian Meditation

by *Tim Rippstein*

### Suggestions before you begin.

1. Read the article “A Bone to Pick With God” by Tim Rippstein, available at [www.youthsource.com](http://www.youthsource.com).
2. Take the group out for BBQ ribs or gather together and BBQ them yourselves. Eating them on the bone will help remember the concept of meditation from the Old Testament.

### Objectives:

- Participants will see how meditation in the Old Testament was regularly practiced.
- Participants will learn what Christian mediation is and what it isn't.
- Participants will practice a meditation exercise.
- Participants will explore ways in which Christian meditation can be practiced personally and in a group.

### I. Read the following quotation from Mark Yaconelli together and discuss it.

“We minister among people who enjoy the greatest accumulation of material wealth in the history of humankind, and yet often carry the most emaciated and anemic of souls. As Mother Teresa once said, ‘You in the West have the spiritually poorest of the poor... it is easy to give a plate of rice to a hungry person, to furnish a bed to a person who has no bed, but to console or to remove the bitterness, anger, and loneliness that comes from being spiritually deprived, that takes a long time.’

“The most difficult aspects of our ministry among the spiritually poor is that the problem is so easily hidden. Has there ever been another society that has produced so many spiritual books, workshops, retreat centers, worship experiences, churches, and sacred fashion accessories? The culture in which we minister seems ignorant to the fact that the plethora of Christian experiences, consumer products, and activities only belies our spiritual deprivation and disconnection from God. Why do we create so many clanging Christian gongs when ‘God alone’ is all that’s needed?...

“As youth ministers we seek to help young people develop strong and healthy souls. We seek to tend lives that are rooted in the rich soul of God’s love. We seek to cultivate within young people enough trust and faith in God that they might resist the powers and principalities that diminish them.”

### Discuss:

1. What do you think Mother Teresa is observing?
2. Have you observed similar displays of “spiritual deprivation and disconnection from God”? If so, where have you observed or experienced some of these?
3. Can it be as simple as “God alone is all that’s needed”? What do you think Mark Yaconelli means?
4. How can you and your brothers and sisters around you continue to stay focused on “God alone” when such “Christian experiences, consumer products, and activities” cause distractions?

### II. Read Psalm 1:1-3

Notes; “man” means “person”. Most new translations will have a footnote pointing this out.

“Law” often in the Old Testament is more like “instruction” today.

### **Discuss:**

1. What is this blessed person's "delight"?
2. How does he or she interact with or do with this?

### **III. Read Isaiah 31:4.**

It might be fun to read multiple translations to see how the translators describe this lion with its food.

The Message paraphrase says, "Like a lion, king of the beasts, that gnaws and chews and worries its prey."

The word used to describe the 'lion' and its meal is translated 'meditate' in Psalm 1:2. This is one of those picture words the Bible writers like to use. Imagine a dog gnawing intently over a rib bone, not paying attention to anything going on around it but lost in its delicious prize. That is meditation! *Hagah*, the Hebrew word, is used for the person who is lost in his religion.

### **IV. The Christian intent on meditation will focus his or her appetite on three "bones".**

- Psalm 63:5-6 –
- Psalm 1:2 (see also Psalm 119:15, 23, 99, 48) –
- Psalm 145:5 (see also Psalm 77:12, 143:5) –

Is it possible to focus such intensity in the wrong direction or on the wrong "bones"? If so, what might the wrong directions or danger zones be? What do these texts reveal?

- Psalm 38:12 –
- James 4:2 –

Can you think of others?

### **V. To meditate on the Lord, His Word, and works is a good guideline.**

But more specifically how does the faithful Christian meditate? Here is a suggested practice to get started along with some ideas for further practice.

Please note that these ideas are only starters for you and your group to build upon, explore, and enjoy the very ancient practice of meditation and grow into that "tree planted by streams of water" healthy and producing fruit no matter what is going on around you.

1. Read the familiar story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 out loud several times slowly to the students. Tell them to imagine walking in the "sandals" of the Pharisees. As you read it the first time, using little inflection, ask them to reflect upon what they see in the setting, what do they smell, hear, feel as a Pharisee?

How do they feel towards the woman?

Towards Jesus?

Read it a second time, only this time the students are to imagine they are the woman caught in adultery.

What are they feeling? Write these down.

What questions do they want to ask Jesus? Write them down.

Now ask them to write what they imagine Jesus' own response would be to them.

Next (optional if time) read it a third time and ask students to imagine they are the bystanders observing the interactions between the Pharisees, woman, and Jesus. What questions come up? What feelings?

This is a powerful practice of imagining one in the biblical setting and experiencing a familiar story in new and personal ways.

2. Share your Pharisee insights as each is comfortable.

Share your woman caught in adultery questions and Jesus' responses as comfortable.

Close with a long, silent time of personal prayer. Then slowly say the Lord's Prayer together.

3. Other ways to practice Christian meditation might be...

- The evening before worship read the gospel lesson to yourself. These can be found in the front of the LSB pages xiv-xxiii (your pastor may be helpful in identifying the current lectionary series). If it works, imagine yourself in the setting as was done above. Read through the gospel (or any of the appointed lessons) 2 or 3 times slowly to yourself out loud, taking note of any ideas, words, or phrases which catch your attention. Raise them up to the Lord in prayer and see what He may do with them.
- Before or after worship read the words to the sermon hymn. What does this say about the Lord, His Word, and work? Bring these before the Lord in prayer.
- As a group commit to regular meditation for a season...Lent, Advent, the days before a mission trip, etc.

Don't worry about getting it 'right', the maturing strength is in the practice, in the journey with the Lord.