

More Than My Necessary Food

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The secret to spiritual growth, power, and permanence is hiding God's Word in our heart through daily meditation and prayer.

Scripture: Psalm 40:10, Psalm 119:11, Psalm 119:165, Ephesians 6:17

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Faithfulness"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches about the importance of abiding in Christ and the secret to spiritual permanence through faithfulness in the outward and inner life, emphasizing the need for obedience, prayer, and purity. He highlights the significance of hiding God's Word in our hearts for spiritual peace, prayer, purity, power, perception, progress, and permanence, stressing the necessity of daily, direct, and definite meditation on the Bible for spiritual growth and vitality.

Transcript

In the course of a conversation during a Keswick Convention a friend said, "Now, suppose someone yields himself to God and receives a blessing at one of these meetings, how is it possible for him to avoid relapsing into his former spiritual condition? Will it not be necessary for him to be propped up in some way?" I did not quite like the phrase "propped up," because it implied help from outside, rather than from within, but I replied: "There will, of course, be the danger of relapse; but together with the blessing comes the call to abide and to fulfill the conditions of abiding." My friend said: "What are these?" I answered: "Speaking after the manner of the body, they are three - pure air, good food, and constant exercise - the atmosphere of prayer, the food of the Word, and the exercise of obedience. When the act of surrender is thus transmuted into an attitude, the attitude will become a habit, and from the habit will come character."

Is not this the spiritual position and the spiritual need of very many Christians? They are conscious of having entered into a true spiritual relation to Christ; His grace is a reality, His presence is a joy, His peace is a comfort. But they are sadly afraid that these experiences will not last, that they will lose their present happiness and descend to a lower stage of spiritual life. What they need, therefore, and what they desire above all things, is to know the secret of remaining where and as they are; or, rather, the secret of both of not going back and also of going forward, the secret of abiding and abounding. They read in Scripture of "abiding in Christ" (John 15:4), of "abiding in His love" (John 15:10), of "continuing in prayer" (Col. 4:2), of "always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58), of "going from strength to strength" (Psa. 84:7). And very naturally and rightly they desire to know the secret of it all.

What, then, is the secret of abiding? The answer is, faithfulness; and when we connect together two passages of Holy Scripture, we may learn the secret of abiding in Christ.

"I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart" (Psa. 40:10).

"Thy Word have I hid in mine heart" (Psa. 119:11).

1. The Life Faithful To God

From the former of these two texts we must note very briefly the first secret of abiding, looked at from the outside. It is faithfulness in the outward life. "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart." To use a New Testament phrase, this means the open confession of Christ as Lord. We know that from the moment of conversion, confession is our bounden duty - it is an absolute necessity to confess Christ as our Lord. Not only should we sanctify Him as Lord in our hearts, but confess Him as Lord by lip and life. This is the first requirement of every true life - the confession of God in Christ by word and by deed. Very often it will mean a confession, literally by the lip, of what Christ has been to us, of what God has done for our soul.

But in particular, and always, it will be the confession of Christ in our life, that people may be able to see that Christianity does really make a difference, and that our life genuinely belongs to God. "I have not hid Thy righteousness within my heart."

And yet there will be the constant temptation to hide God's righteousness, and to avoid the confession of Christ by word and deed. This will, no doubt, be due in some cases to fear of man; we shall not have the courage of our convictions. We find it easy to confess Christ when we are among Christians; we may have found it delightful to trust Him in gatherings of His people, to send up our testimony and bear witness for Him.

But it is possible, not to say probable, that we find it difficult to make the same confession when we are in our homes, and in our ordinary surroundings. The fear of man always brings a snare; it brings a snare to young converts, and indeed all through the Christian life to those who are tempted to avoid a confession of Christ. This is the devil's own snare - the trouble and difficulty of the spiritual duty of confession. And yet if it is not dealt with at once, there can be nothing but spiritual defeat in our lives.

There is another reason, allied to this, that sometimes prevents us from confessing Christ, and tends to keep His righteousness within our heart. It is the fear lest in our home we should be convicted of inconsistency between what we say and what we are.

How often Christian people ask clergymen, evangelists, and other Christian workers to speak to their boys or girls, and when they are asked whether they have spoken themselves, the answer is, "No". It is probably because they are afraid that the boy or girl has seen something in the life of father or mother or friend which has not been true to Christ, and this inconsistency has been a hindrance. So there is the temptation, through our own inconsistency, to hide God's righteousness in our hearts.

The secret of abiding is obedience. If we would abide, we must obey; obey to the full measure of our light whatever God Himself says, and in this faithfulness will be the guarantee of a life that will go from strength to strength, from glory to glory.

2. The Word Hidden in the Heart

But the prime secret of abiding is faithfulness in the inner life. The second text, "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart," is the cause, of which the former is the effect. It is probable that some reader has been thinking as he reads of the call to faithful obedience; "Yes, but obedience, faithfulness, loyalty to the light - these things are difficult, almost insuperably difficult!" Difficult, they often are, mainly because we do not set about them in the right way. But they are not really difficult, certainly not insuperable if we understand the meaning of faithfulness in the inner life, which comes from our being devoted to the Word of God. "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart." Let us endeavour to find out first what will be the effect of hiding God's Word in our heart. Then we will seek to learn definitely what it means to hide God's Word in our heart, and how to do it.

The first result of hiding God's Word in our heart is spiritual peace. "Great peace have they which love Thy law, and nothing shall cause them to stumble" (Psa. 119:165, Hebrew). It is one of the most familiar facts of Christian experience that our inner peace is in exact proportion to our meditation on God's Word, the hiding of God's Word in our heart, and it is natural that this should be so, for the obvious reason that it is through the Word that we know God. In proportion as we come to know Him, we come to understand His will, and, with this, more and more of the fullness of His revelation in Christ Jesus. The outcome of this is peace. If, as we look back upon the last year, we are conscious that there has been an absence, to any extent, of this peace in our life, we may almost certainly put it down to the fact that we have not been too familiar with God through His Word, that we have not been often enough face to face with Him through His Word. "They that know their God shall be strong," and we can only know God through His Word. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." And peace, too, cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

"So to the heart that knows Thy love, O Purest!

There is a temple, sacred evermore,

And all the babel of life's angry voices

Dies in hushed stillness at its peaceful door.

Far, far away the roar of passion dieth,

And loving thoughts rise calm and peacefully;

And no rude storm, how fierce soe'er it flieth,

Disturbs the soul that dwells, O Lord, in Thee!"

Hiding God's Word in the heart is also the secret of prayer. There is a necessary and intimate connection between the Word of God and prayer. In the Bible God is speaking to us, while prayer is our speaking to God. In the Apostolic Church they said: "We will give ourselves to the ministry of the Word and to prayer." In two consecutive verses in Ephesians vi. the Spirit of God is associated with the Word and with prayer. The Word of God is called "the sword of the Spirit," and then we are told to "pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" - the Spirit of God through the Word; the Spirit of God through prayer.

George Muller once asked the question whether a Christian, in his daily morning devotions, should commence with prayer, or with the Bible; and he suggested that after a brief prayer for light and guidance, he should commence with the Bible, and not with prayer. This is a useful bit of advice from a master in the

spiritual life, for the simple reason that God's Word is the fuel of our prayer. As we open the page in the morning, the promises prompt us to prayer, the examples incite us to prayer, the warnings urge us to prayer, the hopes of glory stir us to prayer - everything in the portion taken for our meditation can be turned into prayer.

Let us try it, if we have never done so; let us start with the Word, and then turn to prayer. And I suggest that at night we reverse the process, start with prayer, and finish the day as we began, with the Word of God. Depend upon it, hiding God's Word in the heart is the secret of prayer, and the reason why our prayer life is so weak and barren is that we do not know God through His Word. We do not lay hold of Him through this means. The Word is unfamiliar, and God is therefore afar off; and for this one reason our prayer is weak and unavailing.

But the man who knows God through His Word becomes mighty in prayer every day. Hiding God's Word in our heart is always the secret of purity. "Now ye are clean through the Word." In proportion as we come face to face with this Word will our inner and outer life be pure. There is nothing to compare with Scripture to purify motives. We may seem to have very beautiful motives when we are going about during the day; but when we get on our knees with the Bible, we are searched, and everything doubtful has to go.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." There is nothing like the Word of God for purifying the thoughts, the motives, the desires. The whole of the inner life of the believer becomes, and is kept pure, just in proportion as God's Word is hidden in our hearts. There is an incident which illustrates this truth in one of those inimitable sermons to children by Dr. Richard Newton. It is the story of an old woman who had in her hand what seemed like a square sieve, with something in it, and she was holding the sieve in a stream, and allowing the water to pass through it.

As she did this, a clergyman came along, and stopped to see what the old woman was doing. She turned round and looked at him, and the moment she saw him she said: "Oh, sir, I am very glad to see you." He replied: "I do not know how you can be; I am a stranger in these parts, and I was not aware that I was known." "Well," said she, "I heard you preach a sermon many years ago which was blessed to my soul, and I have been a different woman ever since." "I am thankful to hear it," replied he, "what was the text?"

"I don't remember the text," she added. "But," said he, "it is very curious that a sermon should have been blessed to your soul, and yet that you cannot remember the text." "Well," she replied, "you see, I have got some wool in this sieve, and my mind is very much like the sieve, which is full of holes. The water runs through the sieve, but as it runs through it cleanses the wool. Now that text of God's Word went through my mind, and though it did not stop there long enough for me to remember it, yet as it went through it cleansed me, and I have been a different woman ever since."

We cannot remember the fifty-two or the one hundred and four sermons we hear every year; but each time we hear the Word, it can go into and through our soul and cleanse it. Though we may not remember this or that sermon, yet if the sermon is based on the Word of God, it will have done its work in cleansing and purifying heart and soul. And so also, in our private devotions, it is impossible to keep in memory everything that God tells us from day to day; but each message as it comes does its work, and every day we need further cleansing.

Hiding God's Word in the heart is the secret of purity. It is also the secret of power. The Word of God is the prime secret of power in the Christian life - power to resist temptation, power to overcome sin, power to do God's work whatever it may be, power proportioned to the work we have to do. And that grace of God

which comes through hiding His Word in our hearts is always sufficient for all things, that we may abound unto every good work. The reason of our powerlessness in Christian service, against temptation, in the midst of evil, and in the face of all the problems of today, is that we are not enough alone with God through His Word.

Hiding God's Word in our heart is the secret of spiritual perception. The man who knows God through His Word sees and understands God's will as no one else does. It seems to be a mark of a growing, maturing Christian that he is able to understand. The last Epistle of St. Peter lays great stress on "knowledge"; the first Epistle of St. John has as its keynote the word know. There are three grades or stages of the Christian life in that Epistle: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven.

I write unto you, young men, because you are strong. I write unto you, fathers, because you know." But when the Apostle repeats these appeals he adds something different about the children, and about the young men, but nothing about the fathers. He just repeats exactly what he had said about them, because there is nothing else to say. "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning." If we read the Epistles of St. Paul to the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians, and note down the various references to knowledge, we shall find that full or mature knowledge is the keynote of those writings; as though St.

Paul would suggest to us that knowledge, spiritual understanding, perception, is the mark of a ripening and growing Christian. This perception can only come from abiding closely with God in His Word, and hiding that Word in our heart. The man who gives himself to daily thought and prayerful meditation on God's Word possesses a degree of spiritual perception out of all proportion to his intellectual capacity or attainment, judged from the standpoint of things natural. Dr. James Hamilton says in one of his sermons that "a Christian on his knees sees farther than a philosopher on his tiptoes."

The prayerful Christian, however illiterate he may be, according to the world's idea, can often teach the educated man profound lessons. And this has a very definite application to certain modern tendencies. If people kept more closely than they do to the Word of God, they would not be in danger of going aside to any of the various theories and "isms" of the present day. Thus, if a man abides in God's Word in daily prayerful meditation, he will never be deceived by Christian Science, which, as we know, is neither Christian nor scientific.

In the same way the man who keeps close to God's Word will never be deceived by the speciousness of Spiritualism. So it is also with other aspects of error which we rightly regard as dangerous. In every case where a man who was once a professing Christian, and a Christian worker, has taken up Christian Science - if we found out everything that could be found out about him, we should discover that his change of opinion was due to his neglect of this Book. So for the power of spiritual perception let us keep close to the Scriptures, and then we shall not go wrong.

Hiding God's Word in our heart is the secret of spiritual progress. "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed." The man who grows in grace is the man who grows in knowledge, and the man who grows in knowledge is the man who keeps close to God through His Word. For spiritual progress this is the secret: "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart." Whenever a Christian is growing in grace, experiencing more joy in Christ, more rest of soul, more peace of heart, more knowledge of truth, more blessing in service, more hope in trial, more endurance in suffering, the explanation is as clear as it is simple.

He is spending more time with his Bible. There is no need for spiritual declension, no necessity for backsliding, no warrant for anything but ever-joyous progress as we go from strength to strength through the year. But this will only be through hiding God's Word in our heart. Hiding of God's Word in our heart is the secret of spiritual permanence. Daniel was taken as a boy of fourteen years old to Babylon, and he lived there until he was ninety-one; apparently he never went home to Jerusalem, but was in Babylon all those years, and we are told that Daniel continued.

This may well be applied to moral and spiritual continuance, for we know how true this was of him. In the same way we may say that there is a Daniel in the New Testament, St. Paul. "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day." Our Lord said, "Continue ye in My love." "If ye continue in My Word." The secret of continuance and permanence in the Christian life is hiding God's Word in our heart. Let us then take this Word for our daily meditation, and we shall soon see in it the secret of everything in the Christian life.

"And the daily load grows lighter,

The daily cares grow sweet,

For the Master is near, the Master is here,

I have only to sit at His feet."

3. The Methods of Meditation Now comes the question, How is this to be done? Let me in the very simplest and most old-fashioned way try to show how this may be. Our hiding of God's Word must be a daily practice. At the time of my ordination in 1885, we were being addressed by Dr. Hessey, then Archdeacon of Middlesex, and he said to us: "Whatever is true of you and your ministry, you ought to know your Greek Testament; and if you will read, in the original, the second lesson selected for that purpose in the Church of England service, you will find that it will cover almost the whole of the New Testament in a year; and so every year of your ministry you will be able to read through your Greek Testament."

Some of us took that simple and, as it seemed, very obvious hint, and no one can tell the joy and blessing it has been to use the lesson as a daily portion for morning meditation. If we do not meditate upon God's Word daily, we shall suffer in our spiritual life. In proportion as we neglect it, there will be weakness in our souls. Whether in the Greek Testament or not, there should be systematic daily meditation. Some of us may belong to the Bible Prayer Union, the members of which read right through the Bible in three and one-quarter years.

Many follow that course, and find it a great delight. Others prefer the Scripture Union, while still others have their own methods. But whatever method it may be, it ought to be used systematically and daily. Our use of God's Word should be direct; and by direct use I mean firsthand meditation. Thank God for all helps! But let us remember that the greatest of all helps is a firsthand study of, and meditation on, the Word itself, as we now have it, and not as other people have provided it for us in Daily Light, or in any other way.

Whatever we do in regard to helps, they must be secondary, and not primary. It has often been curious to me to note how many people there are with names commencing with "M," who have given us delightful books of meditation - Moule, Macgregor, Morgan, Mantle, Murray, Moore, Meyer. Their books have been

a blessing to very many. But I know another "M" which is far more important and therefore better than all these. It is found in the 104th Psalm - "My meditation of Him shall be sweet" (see verse 34).

This is the meditation that must ever come first, my own, what I get direct from God. Let us look again at this text, made as clear as possible for our guidance. "MY meditation" - my own, not someone else's. Shall we then despise the others? God forbid! We shall appropriate and enjoy all they can teach us, but it will be because we have come face to face with God ourselves, first of all. For our devotional reading and meditation we should use unmarked Bibles. I know it is customary to have marked Bibles, full of suggestions, so that the moment we open a page we are directed to certain passages and lines of thought.

But in meditating upon these we are almost inevitably feeding upon the old manna; and unless our mind is particularly independent, we shall pretty certainly get the same food again and again. What we need is to be able to open to a passage like the 23rd Psalm, and get from it something absolutely fresh. For this purpose we must have an unmarked Bible, and then afterwards we can put into our marked Bible all the discoveries or "finds" we have made during meditation. So for devotional purposes let our Bible be unmarked.

In this connection, is it not true that the greatest danger in the life of a minister or other Christian worker is that of reading the Bible for other people? When we open our Bible and God shows us something, we say: "That will do for my sermon next Sunday, or for my Bible class." But for the time being, never mind sermon or Bible class; let us ask ourselves: "What does this portion say to me?" Our reading of God's Word must be definite. "What does it say to me?" This is the difference between study and meditation.

A good definition of meditation is "attention with intention". Study is attention, but meditation is attention and also intention. What are the stages or elements of true meditation? They are five in number:- 1. The careful reading of the particular passage or subject, thinking over its real and original meaning. 2. A resolute application of it to my own life's needs, to conscience, heart, mind, imagination, will; finding out what it has to say to me. 3. A hearty turning of it into prayer for mercy and grace, that its teaching may become part of my life. 4.

A sincere transfusion of it into a resolution that my life shall reproduce it. 5. A wholehearted surrender to, and trust in God for power to practice it forthwith, and constantly throughout the day. Meditation is, thus, first of all, thought; then it means application to myself; then prayer for grace; then the yielding of the heart to God; and then rising up to obey Him. This is the real meaning and purpose of definite hiding of God's Word in our heart. This is what it meant to Daniel.

When he had had the Divine vision (in chapter 8) he said: "Afterward I rose up, and did the king's business." After the vision of God in His Word, we have to rise up and do the King's business. This is what is meant by hiding God's Word in our heart; it must be daily, direct, and definite. As a practical outcome let the following suggestions be offered for the devotional use of the Bible:- 1. Open all such occasions with prayer for the Holy Spirit's light (Psa. 119:18). 2. Ask to be guided to some definite thought for yourself. 3.

Dwell prayerfully on this thought thus given - Is it a counsel? A precept? A warning? A promise? An experience? A command? 4. When its meaning is clear, use it as the basis of a prayer for grace to realize it in experience. 5. Yield the whole soul in full surrender to its truth and power. 6. Link it on to truths already known, and thereby strengthen the chain of experience. 7. Trust God to reproduce it in your life that day. Nothing in this world can ever be substituted for daily, direct, definite hiding of God's Word in our

heart.

We cannot make up for failure in our devotional life by redoubled energy in service for Christ. Our work will never rise higher than our devotional life. As water never rises above its level, so what we do never rises above what we are. And in our preaching we shall never take people one hair's breadth beyond our own spiritual attainment. We may point to higher things; we may "allure to brighter worlds"; but when we "lead the way," we shall only take them just as far as we ourselves have gone.

Our personal contact with the Word of God will thus be an exact test of our discipleship and our character. Christianity is largely a matter of condition of soul; stress is laid on character, and character is power. But character requires solitude for growth; solitude is "the mother country of the strong." And yet solitude without the Bible tends to develop morbidity, while with the Bible it guarantees vitality and power. So let us remember that all the activity in the world, all the reading of other books, all our public worship can never take the place of this daily, definite, direct hiding of God's Word in our heart.

Granted this, failure in the Christian life is absolutely impossible. The Word in the heart is the secret of everything. If a man will spend a little time with God every day of his life, he will go on from strength to strength; his knowledge, his capacity, and power for good will ever increase and deepen, and his life will be one of widening blessing to others and of glory to God. In the course of a Bible reading some years ago, I ventured to make this assertion: I said that if there were five hundred people outside that church, and each one of them was a backslider, I would undertake to say, although they were all strangers to me, that everyone had become a backslider through neglect of the Bible.

After the meeting was over, a lady said to me: "I cannot understand how it is that every one of the five hundred should have become a backslider through neglect of the Bible." "Well, now," said I, "let us see. Have you got a looking glass in your bedroom?" She answered, "Yes." "Do you use it?" I asked. "Yes," she replied. "Suppose," I went on, "you did not use it for a week, would you be quite sure that your personal appearance would be such as you would like your friends to see?"

"No," said she. "Now, in the Epistle of St. James," I remarked, "the Bible is spoken of as a mirror in which we see ourselves; and if we do not open that Book, we cannot be sure of our spiritual appearance. 'In Thy light shall we see light.'" Then I said: "You have soap and water in your bedroom?" She began to smile, and said, "Yes." "Do you use it?" I asked. She smiled a little more, and I added: "Suppose you did not use it for a week, would you be quite sure of your personal appearance, especially if you lived in London?"

"No," she said. "Now," I pointed out, "in the Epistle to the Ephesians the Word is called 'water'; 'The washing of water by the Word.' As water is to the body, so is the Word of God to the soul. It cleanses. If we do not practice cleansing, we cannot be clean." Then I added, "When you go downstairs, I take it that you have your breakfast?" She said, "Yes." "Now suppose," said I, "you did not eat your breakfast, and went without food for a few days, you know what the result would be.

The reason why people are ill in body is because they are 'below par,' and they thereby become a prey to the microbes that come in their millions. If people are strong and vigorous, they may consume microbes by the thousand and suffer no harm. But if we are below our normal state of health, and the microbes enter and find something to attach themselves to in our body, the result is illness and disease. So it is in the spiritual life. God's Word is spoken of as food, milk and honey - food to eat, milk to drink, and honey for "dessert".

There is an entire meal in God's Word. If we eat God's Word we are strong, but if we do not, we become a prey to the microbes of temptation; they find us below spiritual 'par,' and the result is, we fail and become ill and diseased. But when we can say, with Jeremiah, 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart'; when we use the water and the food and the mirror found in God's Word, there can be no backsliding." She said, "I see it now!"

As long as we keep the mirror before us in which we see ourselves, at the same time "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," we become transformed. As long as we use the water of God's Word for the cleansing of our inner life, and the milk and honey of God's Word as the food of our souls, it will be absolutely impossible for us to backslide, while it will be blessedly possible for us to go on from grace to grace, and from strength to strength; and it shall be true of us as of the Psalmist: "The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide."

The law of God in the heart makes us as "the righteous man" who "shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." All that has been said may be summed up in the words of Job: "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food"; and of Jeremiah: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them"; and of the Psalmist: "How sweet are Thy words to my taste!" The Bible must be our daily food if we are to be strong and vigorous. Not quantity, but quality, determines the nutritive value of food.

What we must emphasize is capacity to receive, power to assimilate, and readiness to reproduce. As someone has well put it, the process is threefold - infusion, suffusion, transfusion. The Word thus becomes all-sufficient and all-powerful in our life - the mirror to reveal (James 1); the water to cleanse (Eph. 5); the milk to nourish (1 Peter 2); the strong meat to invigorate (Heb. 5); the honey to delight (Psa. 119); the fire to warm (Jer. 23); the hammer to break and fasten (Jer. 23) the sword to fight (Eph. 6); the seed to grow (Matt. 13); the lamp to guide (Psa. 119); the statute book to legislate (Psa. 119); and the gold to treasure in time and for eternity (Psa. 19). Three or four paragraphs of the above have been taken from the author's Methods of Bible Study.

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