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# The Empty Promise of Meditation

Thursday, November 20, 2008

Should Christians practice meditation? An increasing number of Christians are trying or using Eastern meditation techniques in an effort to direct their spiritual lives. It is no longer shocking to see churches offering yoga and meditation classes, nor to hear some Christians talking about their walks in a labyrinth, time spent in meditation, or experiments with the latest borrowing from the East.

Now, the [Gannett News Service](#) offers a report on the issue:

*Like many churchgoers in the Bible Belt, Kristy Robinson teaches Sunday school with her husband and helps prepare communion at their Episcopal church in Franklin, Tenn.*

*She rounds out her church- and prayer-filled life with another spiritual practice that's not quite as familiar: meditation.*

*"I'll see a difference in my day if I don't," says Robinson, who opens each day with 20 minutes of absolute silence.*

The Bible does speak positively about meditation. In the Psalms, David sings of meditating on the Law of God day and night. The biblical concept of meditation is not without reference to thought and content. To the contrary, it is about thinking that is directed by the Word of God — scripturally saturated thought.

This is almost the exact opposite of Eastern meditation, which sets the emptying of the mind as its goal. The Eastern concept of emptying the mind is just not anything close to the biblical vision of filling the mind with the Word of God.

More from the article:

*"All the chanting and incense and — yikes — even meditation altars may seem too New Age and mystical for some, but meditation has gone mainstream and been embraced by suburban moms and busy people.*

*Younger generations get an introduction in yoga classes, careerists escape on meditation retreats and boomers seek tranquility in meditation gardens. Meditation, it seems, is no longer associated as a counterculture activity made hip by The Beatles and favored by flower children.*

*Some approach meditation through Buddhism or other Eastern religions; more and more Christians meditate through the ancient ritual of centering prayer; while others develop their own style, whether it's patterned after the breathing techniques of popular guru Deepak Chopra or not.*

*Most sit still, usually focusing on a mantra or on their breathing, but you can even clear your mind while walking around, tending a garden or through movement-based activities, such as tai chi."*

The biblical concept of meditation on the Word of God does involve an emptying, of course. We must empty our



minds of ungodly and unbiblical thoughts, of desires for sin and resistance to the reign of God in our lives. But that emptying never involves an empty mind. Instead, it involves a mind in which unbiblical thoughts are replaced by the truth of Scripture — not a blank slate of meditation that revolves around the self.

In Psalm 119, David writes, “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.” [Psalm 119:97] David’s meditation did not revolve around David, nor did it involve David trying to empty his mind into silence. He desperately wanted to hear from God, and he knew he would hear directly from God in the law. He studied the Scriptures in order to cleanse his mind of wrong thoughts and have them replaced with right thoughts and patterns of thinking.

The article included a good assessment from Professor Don Whitney of Southern Seminary:

*“The idea of emptying the mind is not biblically based,” says Don Whitney, associate professor of biblical spirituality at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. “There can be a danger.”*

*Referring to meditation’s long association with Hinduism, Buddhism and other Eastern religions, Whitney says, “Some of the yoga stuff, where you’re given a mantra, that is rooted in false religions.” He sees no problem with stretching, but once you start chanting, you’re treading on treacherous ground, he says.*

*His beef is that some people are seeking tools to help them live and de-stress. “That’s very selfish,” he says. “Our lives should be lived to the glory of God.”*

This is a really helpful analysis of the issue. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be rid of stress that is rooted in worldliness and the cares of this world. But getting rid of this worry is not a matter of self-therapy, but of having our minds reordered by the Word of God — reordered by the Creator.

We live in a world so shaped by therapeutic concerns that most people never stop to wonder if God is dealing with them in their stress, their distress, their haunting thoughts, their cluttered minds. An attempt to empty the mind might well be an effort to listen to the self when we should seek to hear from God.

Beyond this, we should question the entire idea that the mind can ever be empty. Instead, it is far more likely that when we attempt to “empty” the mind in this way, we are just closing ourselves to anything but the concerns of the sovereign self.

For Christians, this kind of meditation is a danger, not a means to spiritual growth. Should we meditate? Without question, we should meditate upon the Word of God. This should be a part of our regular and constant spiritual discipline. But, this kind of meditation does not lead to an empty mind, nor to the sense of an empty mind, but to a mind constantly more directed by Scripture.

Any other form of meditation is a dangerous distraction and an empty promise.

