

Introduction

I begin with a question. What's on your mind? If you're awake, something is. There's a meme that the average person has 70,000 thoughts a day. That's 50 a minute, which seems high to me. Psychologist and Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman claims in contrast that the so-called "**psychological present**" is a window of about 3 seconds. If that's true, then you – and I – can have up to 20 thoughts a minute, which is more realistic. Anyway, whatever the number is, the larger point is that we have lots of thoughts every day.

The crucial question is, "**What are they?**" Or to ask it another way, what's on our mind when it isn't necessarily occupied? Our text reveals something that routinely should be – and that must be if we're going to have success. Turn to Joshua 1:6-9 and let's learn what that is.

Success

The Israelites had arrived at the border of the Promised Land and were about to fulfill their God-given destiny. That destiny was to form a nation there that so thrived spiritually, culturally, and economically that it blessed other nations so they thrived as well (Genesis 12:3). That was their destiny and in verses 7-8, God disclosed to their leader Joshua the conditions they had to meet to fulfill it. Notice the word He used in verses 7 and 8 to designate them fulfilling it, "**success.**"

That's what success was for the Israelites as a nation but what is it for you and me? The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it as "**the fact of getting or achieving wealth, respect, or fame.**" But Strayer University's "**Success Project Survey**" found something different. 67% of the survey's respondents associated success with achieving personal goals, 66% with having good relationships with family and friends, and 60% with loving what you do for a living. Only 20% associated it with accumulating wealth. That survey shows how people define success. Our text implies how God defines it. We thrive personally as Israel did

nationally, naturally blessing others as we do so they thrive too.

Various New Testament texts explain what it means to thrive personally. Love, joy, and peace of Jesus prevail in our inner persons and thus our outer lives as well. What we are and do, as a natural result, encourages, enlightens, and enriches those in the world around us, which is what Jesus meant when he said we're the salt of the earth and the light of the world. That's success.

And all of us can have it – if we meet God's conditions for having it in verses 7-8. Those conditions have to do with what verses 7-8 call **"the law."** I don't have time to explain why, but the law is synonymous with what we call the Bible. We must do two things with regard to the Bible in order to have success, both of which I'm going to explain.

Obeying

The first is found in verse 7. Negatively, we don't **"turn from it to the right or to the left."** Positively, we're **"careful to do according to all"** of it. We purposefully obey it in other words.

We are able to do that – in and through the Holy Spirit. When we apprentice ourselves to Jesus, the Holy Spirit immediately regenerates us and then increasingly sanctifies us. He gives us the desire and the increasing ability to do what God says in the Bible.

So, we just do it! I'd quickly note that doing some of what the Bible says requires training. Desiring and pursuing the good of those who sue us or receiving criticism with gratitude and joy not defensiveness and anger are examples of what I mean. But doing most of what the Bible says only requires trying. Having been regenerated and being increasingly sanctified, it's primarily a matter of intent. We firmly make and devotedly carry out the decision to do all it says in all the day-to-day matters that are before us.

Proverbs 23:21, for instance, condemns gluttony. A Christian was thoughtlessly helping himself to a second serving of a casserole that contains the three essential food groups: fat, salt, and cholesterol. His

son, who had heard him say he wanted to shed 40 pounds, spoke up and said, **“Dad, I don’t think you want to do that.”** **“You’re right,”** he replied and put down the spoon. Reflecting back on his experience, he commented about it: **“A skirmish with gluttony was simply and quietly defeated – without drama or heroic will power.”**

That’s an insightful comment. If we’re apprentices of Jesus, we can do most of what the Bible says without drama or heroic will power. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we simply make and carry out the decision to do what it says in the matter before us. We purposefully obey it.

What a powerful thing it is when we do. Purposeful obedience is actually a spiritual discipline. It’s one of the ways that we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His ministry and work in us. Each act of purposeful obedience places us before Him in a such way that He’s able to touch and transform us, making us bit more sanctified, a bit more like Jesus, than we were before.

Meditating and Murmuring

There’s a second thing we must do to have success. The first is to obey the Bible, verse 7. The second is to **“meditate on it,”** verse 8.

I’ve said it many times before. Our mind is the place of our widest and most basic freedom. We aren’t totally free in that respect but our freedom is greatest there. We have the power to select what we allow or require our mind to dwell on, which explains the Hebrew word translated **“meditate.”** We require our mind to dwell on the Bible. We purposefully bring it to mind. We place our thoughts on its verses and texts.

Verse 8 states when we should do this. It’s **“day and night.”** Practically, that means we bring it to mind as much as we can in all the day-to-day matters that are before us. We make it part of how we think about everything we experience and do.

A long-established Christian talked too much and dominated conversations. She then learned what the Bible about that says in 1 Corinthians 13:4 and James 1:19. Love listens more than it talks. So she

memorized those verses and purposefully brings them to mind whenever she's about to converse with others.

Or I look up into a beautiful star lit sky and bring two verses I memorized to mind as I do, Psalm 147:4 and Isaiah 40:26. They teach that God knows every detail of every star I see, which implies this. In so great a universe, our smallest affairs aren't too minute for Him to notice.

You get the idea. We bring the Bible to mind as much as we can in all the day-to-day matters that are before us. We make it part of how we think about everything we experience and do. That's what it means to "**meditate**" on it day and night.

But it isn't just our mind that's involved here. It's our mouth as well. God declares in verse 8 that the Bible shouldn't "**depart**" from our mouth. He's saying we need it as much in our mouth as we do in our mind. We speak it or more precisely "**mutter**" it as we think it. To mutter means to say something softly, usually to ourselves. That's what we do. We recite verses or texts softly to ourselves.

I've had drivers honk at me or give me the bad finger many times over the years. I bring verses like Luke 6:27-28 and Romans 12:20 to mind when they do. But I also mutter them. I say them to myself: "**But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you**" and "**Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.**" I know it by experience. Muttering enhances the effects of meditating. It does. Muttering enhances the effects of meditating.

The Effects of Meditating and Muttering

And how profound those effects are. Let's discuss just two of those – two effects of meditating that muttering enhances.

If we were to ask 1000 Christians, "**What is the single most important practice of the spiritual life,**" most would answer, "**a daily quiet time**" and for good reason. It's in our quiet times, or devotional times as we also call them, that we experience God's renewing presence.

But in my opinion, meditating on the Bible day and night is more impacting than quiet times are. We need both but meditating is more affecting, and here's why. God never leaves His words alone. He is always present with them. Consequently, bringing them to mind has the same effect that quiet times do. We experience God's renewing presence. By meditating though, we don't have just one or two quiet times a day. We have many. Working, playing, driving, shopping, visiting doctors, watching television, conversing, and so on become quiet times. De facto quiet times take over the entirety of our life.

Meditating on the Bible has another effect. It evokes constructive feelings. We all know the place feelings occupy in our life. They frame our world and motivate our actions. That's why it's vital that we don't let them just happen. In that regard, thoughts evoke feelings. We can control our feelings to some degree, therefore, by directing our thoughts, which is what meditating on the Bible does. It directs our thoughts so they evoke constructive feelings, which in turn prompt positive actions. That implies how much trouble people can stay out of and how much good they can do by constantly bringing the Bible to mind.

I once counseled a Christian whose intermittent outbursts of anger were sabotaging his relationship with his wife and children. So, I explained to him what the Bible says about anger in Proverbs 14:17, Proverbs 16:32, Matthew 5:21-22, Ephesians 4:26, and James 1:19. I also advised him to meditate on and mutter those verses whenever he felt even the slightest tinge of anger for any reason, which, surprisingly, he faithfully did. And it worked. His wife told me six months later that anger was no longer a problem in their marriage, at all. Recognize what happened. Meditating on and muttering the Bible directed his thoughts so that they replaced destructive feelings with constructive ones, which prompted positive actions.

Those then are two effects of meditating on the Bible, which muttering enhances. It engenders God's renewing presence as quiet times do and it evokes constructive feelings. So, meditate and mutter!

As our text makes clear, we can have success (thrive personally) if we do. We can't if we don't. It's as simple as that.

Memorizing

At this point, there's something that's obvious to us all I'm sure – what meditating and muttering require. It's memorizing. We can't bring verses and texts to mind in the day to day matters before us unless we know them. And we can't know them unless we memorize them.

The implication is clear. Bible memorization isn't optional. It's essential. We must memorize to thrive. Dallas Willard claims this in fact: **“Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to – of course I don't have to – choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life and take only one, I would choose Bible memorization because Bible memorization is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what they need.”**

That's a dramatic claim. Bible memorization is the most important of all the disciplines of the spiritual life. Whether that's true or not, this clearly is. It's as important as the most important of those disciplines.

So, let's devote ourselves to memorizing the Bible. Let's make and carry out the decision to memorize verses and texts that the Holy Spirit can use to reproduce the love, joy, and peace of Jesus in us.

We'd like to assist you in carrying out your decision. Next week, we're going to institute a congregational Bible Memorization Plan. In it, we will, together, memorize foundational verses and texts. We can then, as individuals, meditate on them and mutter them day and night.

Conclusion

I began with a question and I close with it. What's on your mind? What are your thoughts most upon when your mind isn't necessarily occupied? Make it the Bible. You'll have success if you do.