



HOW² MEDITATE

by DAVID GLENN TAYLOR

A while back, I was helping my kids get through bath time without causing too much water damage. My middle son Noah, 6 years old at the time, was having his turn and he asked for some privacy, which is cool. After a while I poked my head in to check and found him floating on his back, eyes closed, ears submerged, breathing slowly. "You okay kiddo?" I asked. There was a pause. Then he said, "I'm deaditating." With a nod and a "got it" I ducked out. I didn't want to get in the way of that awesomeness.

Some context: Noah is a deep kid. He dwells on the important questions. He wants to know God. I mean, he really wants to know what God is made of, what God thinks about, how to hang out with God. One night as I'm tucking him in, he says, "Dad, praying is talking to God."

"Yes," I replied.

He propped up on his elbow. "How do you listen to God?" he asked.

My response was matter of fact. "You know how you talk to me?" I said. He nodded. "Well," I continued, "if all you did was talk and talk and talk, then you and I wouldn't get along very well. In fact, it's more important that you know how to listen to me because I have things to teach you. When we talk to God, we call it prayer. Listening to God is called 'meditation.'"

I proceeded to teach him a very simple way to meditate. And that was what I found him doing in the bath that evening, though I hadn't said anything about doing it in the water. He just found that it was a great spot to "deaditate." (It made sense to him that you could float like a deadman and "deaditate." I love kids.)

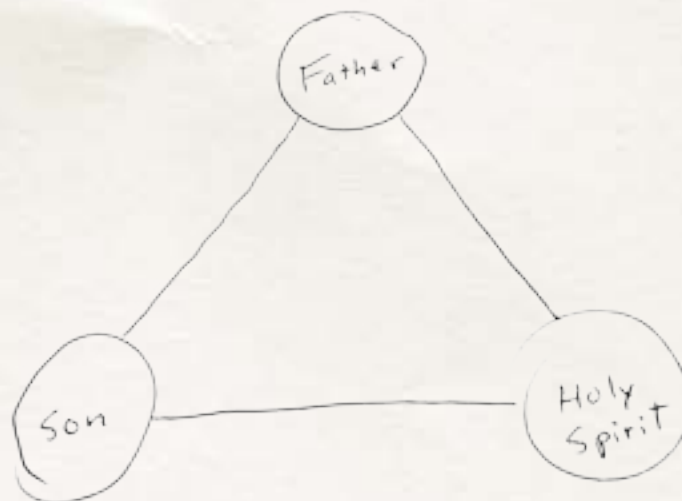
I want to teach you a simple and helpful meditation but before I do, let's get some stuff out of the way. In our global society, we are exposed to a plethora of definitions of every word. Modern Christianity has a sordid relationship with the word "meditation," almost to the point that the word is poison for Christians. When we think of meditation, we tend to see in our minds an image of a Zen master, legs crossed (the hard way, not the easy way), thumb and middle fingers gently connected, eyes closed. And that image carries with it problems. That guy doesn't believe what we believe about God, Jesus, Heaven. And so we don't want to do what he's doing because we fear that we will lose

our “correct” beliefs. We hear modern pastors warning of demons and Satan getting in when we do deep breathing and open ourselves up. I heard one pastor say that Zen meditation is an open invitation for demons to take over our bodies, though he didn’t cite any examples. Another said that yoga is Satanic for the same reasons.

Let’s be clear: in the long history of Christianity, meditation (even of the eastern sort) has been commonly practiced. Believers across the spectrum have spent hours and hours in silent contemplation, focused inward on the words of scripture or listening to the Holy Spirit, and yes, even breathing deeply. In Luke 17, Jesus says to those around him that the Kingdom of God is not a place you say, “There it is!” but it is a place “within.” Some interpretations say the Kingdom of God is “all around.” Either way, the practice of meditation is simply about dwelling in that space, silently, your spirit communing with the Holy Spirit. This is real and undeniably good for you. Jesus meant for us to do this.

The first time I taught a meditation to a group of Christians, I didn’t know what to expect. A few years ago a pastor friend of mine called and asked if I could speak to his college men’s group about the “Image of God.” I agreed and spent the week in prayer and meditation on what to teach.

The group was 40 or 50 college kids and a handful of invitees. I started by having one of them read the scripture from Genesis in which God agrees with himself to create man in “our image.” Then I quizzed the group: “So God is talking in plural here... what parts of God do we believe the scripture is referring to?” They answered “The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit,” the classic but much debated’ Doctrine of the Trinity, which I simultaneously sketched onto a whiteboard with three circles at the points of the triangle, like so:



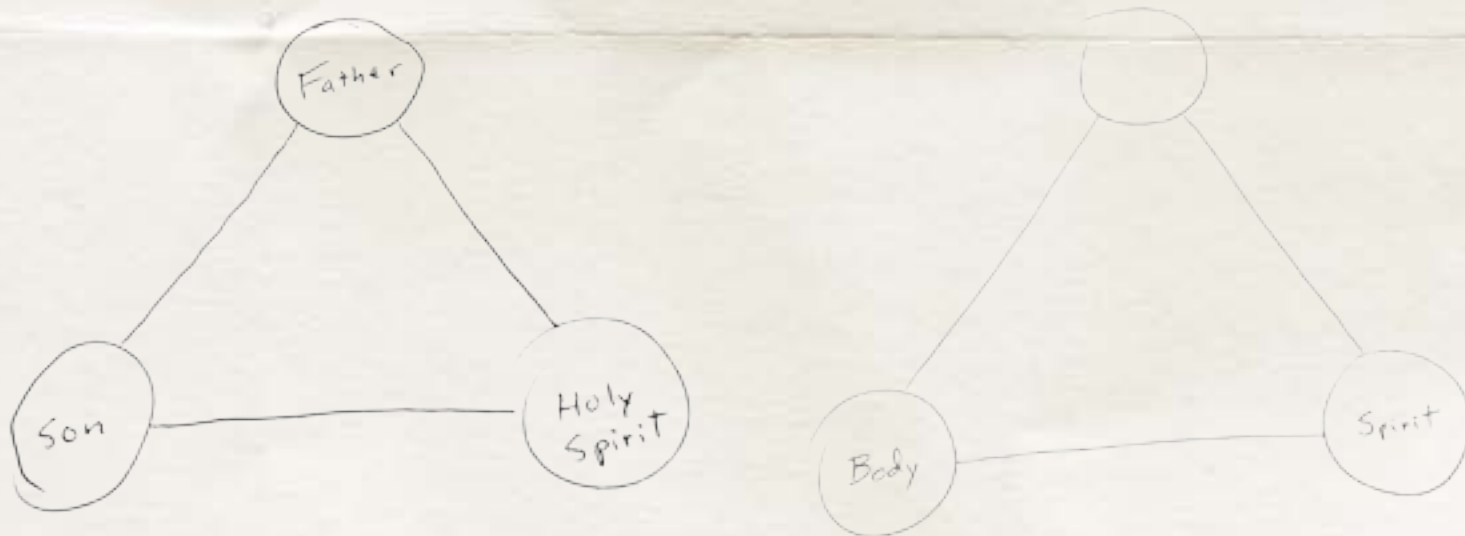
There were heads nodding in agreement. They understood this.

Then I referred to the accepted idea that we were made in God’s image. “If we are made in God’s image, and we all agree, at least doctrinally, that God is a Trinity, then doesn’t that mean that we are a Trinity also?”

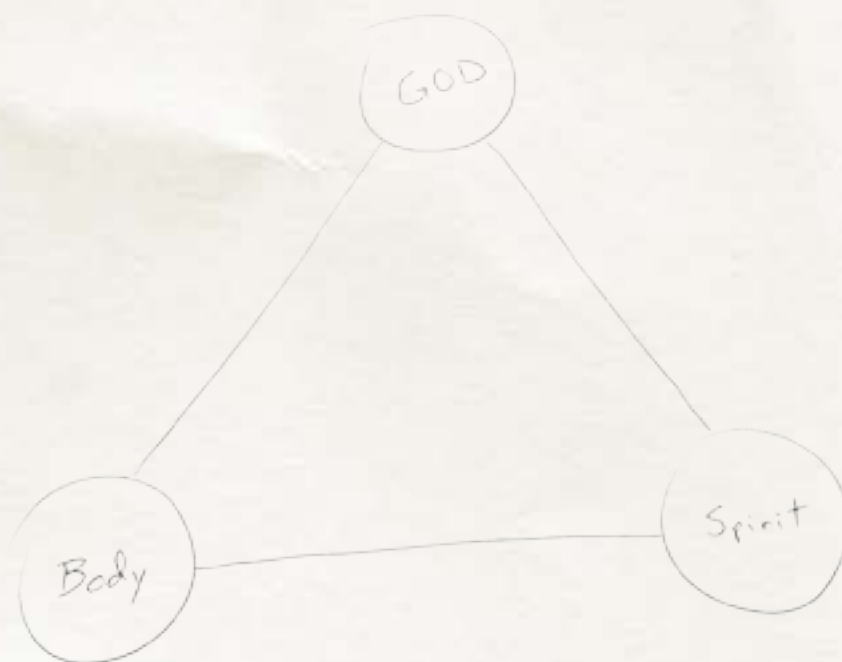
I let them sit with the thought for a moment. Then I asked, "How many people here believe you have a body?" Predictably, everyone raised a hand.

Then I asked, "How many of you believe you have a spirit?" Nearly everyone raised a hand.

I then sketched this next to our Holy Trinity sketch:



Pointing to the empty space at the top of the personal-trinity, I asked, "If the top of the Holy Trinity has God the Father in it, then what is at the top of our personal-trinity?" There were quizzical looks, a few tentative guesses. Someone said, "God the Father." I said, "Yes!" and proceeded to complete the sketch:



"I'd like us to entertain an idea," I continued. "I'd like to propose that without God inside of us, as a part of us, as intricate to us as our DNA, we cannot live. That what keeps us moving, breathing, along with our anatomy and physiology, along with our spiritual being, is God. That our very life-force is dependent on God. That He is that close." The room was quiet at this point. And at this point, I introduced what I think is an important exercise.

I asked a young man in the front row named Mike to stand up and face the group. I said, "Mike, do you believe you have a body?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Mike," I said, "show me your body."

He then proceeded to flail his arms about, point to his head, etc. "Good, good... Mike has a body everyone," I proclaimed.

I then asked, "Mike, do you have a spirit?" His reply was affirmative.

"Mike, show me your spirit," I asked.

Mike looked at me confused. He then tentatively pointed at the center of his chest.

"It's in your chest Mike?" I asked.

He looked confused. "I think so. I don't know for sure."

I turned to the group. "Isn't it strange that we all say we have this thing called a spirit and we don't really know where it is? Or what to do with it? Or even what it's for?" There were comments at random from the group about what it is and what it's for but general agreement that it was a mystery.

Here I want to note why I was doing this simplistic teaching. Nearly all Christians, when confronted, admit to the existence of mystery or the unknown when it comes to God. Each person has their own comfort level of how much can or can't be understood. Some cling desperately to narrow interpretations of scripture to stave off the fear of the unknown but there is a strong consensus that God can't be fully comprehended (thanks in large part to many of the characters in the Bible and their own admissions of the great mystery of God).

Our response to the existence of mystery is usually one of three ways: we either A) ignore the mystery and the implications of it and take a firm grip of things we feel we can understand, purposely deflecting questions about unknown variables and deep things, or B) we embrace the mystery fully, allowing our faith to remain open to the unknown, keeping us more humble and quiet than we might otherwise be. The third options is one that many of us take... C) we subconsciously compartmentalize our lives, placing all that is spiritual and deep in a category that is akin to fantasy. We believe we have a spirit but we never seek to understand what that means. In fact, we ignore the question all together. Our faith, then, becomes an academic exercise in box-checking and morality quiz-taking, living solely in the mind. And we do all of this unintentionally until we one day realize that God is hyperbole.

This is what we've done with the word "spirit." To most of us, it is meaningless. But we cling to the belief in it because Jesus and the Apostle Paul seemed to consider it worth talking about. Any real application has faded away.

* * *

Back to the story:

I turned to Mike and said, "Mike, do you want to see your spirit?"

"Sure."

"Okay... close your eyes."

I instructed Mike to hold his hands out in front of him, palms upwards and turn his attention to his fingertips.

"Mike, take 3 deep breaths, concentrate your attention on the fingertips of your right hand." Mike began to breathe. I watched the audience as some of them were squirming.

"Can you feel your finger tips?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Are they tingling?" I asked.

"Yes."

I then instructed Mike to follow that sensation to the center of his palm and feel it there. He nodded, then I said, "Follow that sensation up your arm, past your elbow, up to your shoulder." He did, nodding.

I then instructed him to do the same thing on the other side, guiding him step by step, following the sensation up through the left arm as I had done with the right. I then asked, "Mike, can you feel both arms tingling?"

"Yes."

We then proceeded to do the same exercise with each leg, starting in the toes, following through the feet and up into the torso. Then the top of Mike's head, following through the face, down the neck, then to where all the sensations met in the center of Mike's chest.

The room was quiet. "Mike, can you feel your whole body tingling?"

"Yes... it's weird," he said. And then I asked, "Mike, keep your eyes closed and your attention on that sensation of your whole body. Then in your mind's eye, I want you to

take a big step back, out of that sensation. Then tell me what you see.” Mike did this and as he did, his face lifted.

“I can see myself. It’s like light.”

“Mike, that’s your spirit.”

I turned to the group. Some of them looked confused. Some looked shocked. One young man in the center of the room was sitting, eyes closed, absolutely still.

I turned back to Mike and said, “Now step back into your spirit.” And as he did, he wavered slightly. Opening his eyes, he looked at me blankly but said nothing.

Mike sat down and turning to the silent room, I said, “What did we think it was? Where did we think it was? Was it always something unreal? Or was it always something measurable? Usable? Seeable?”

“Gentlemen,” I said, “we have accepted a lie, that our spirit is not real, that faith is a matter of mind over matter and that in order to know God, we need to read the right books and go to the right church. But in truth, God is here with us, right now. Our spirits are the tools with which we reach out and know God. And our spirits are real. Always connected to God. He is that close.”

For the rest of evening, the stillness in the room was palpable. Was it because the Holy Spirit had come to rest on the room, found the praise acceptable and entered into each person there? No. It was because the people in that room had become fully aware of how connected we are to God and that the Holy Spirit had never left in the first place. We are Image Bearers, infused with the components of Spirit, Body and God’s own DNA.

I encourage you to try the simple meditation I described to those gentlemen. You can modify it however you wish, as long as you understand that God is not somewhere else, waiting to be called down by the right prayer or the right amount of humility or the right worship song. And it doesn’t matter what you’ve done or if you have sin weighing you down. God is with you, now, in you, around you and fully connected. The problem is not your connection to God... it’s your connection to yourself.

So, in summary, this meditation is very simple and has only a few steps, repeated in progression:

1. Find a place to sit comfortably. You can do this standing as well, but for the first time, sitting might be better.

2. Begin by breathing deeply. Close your eyes. Fill your lungs from top to bottom, exhaling all the air out, and then filling the lungs completely on the inhale.

3. Focus your awareness. Keeping your eyes closed, bring your mind's awareness to the body. Start with your fingers on one hand and then as you feel them "charged," or tingling, move your awareness to the palm and progressively down the arm, staying with the tingling. Do this with each limb, then your torso and head, bringing your awareness to the center of your chest.

4. Take your time. This meditation should take at least 10 minutes. There is no rush. There is nowhere else to be and nothing as important. Try not to judge yourself if your mind wanders. Just call your attention back to the the body.

5. See your spirit. Still with the eyes closed, once you have "charged" your whole body and you feel the intense presence of yourself, using your imagination, take a large step out of your body. Observe what you see. Then step back in to your spirit. Feel the connection to self. Then...

6. Hang out with the Holy Spirit. Once you are fully present, body and spirit, you will feel the potent presence of the Holy Spirit. Don't speak. Just be. Let yourself rest in the presence of the Creator.

7. Finally, end with a prayer of gratitude. I have always found it helpful to say thank you.

Remember... there is nowhere else more important to be. There is nothing more important that you need, other than to be there, in that space, completely still...

Connected.



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