

Challenging the popular belief that meditation is not central to Christianity, K. D. Weaver examines the biblical foundation of meditation and its necessity in the Christian faith. This transformative work offers the reader biblically based meditative exercises to foster healthy relationships, inner peace and greater intimacy with God as well as to counter stress, fatigue and fatalism. Sleeping with God reveals new insights into Christian meditation and spiritual growth.

Sleeping With God: A Biblical Guide to Christian Meditation

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Sleeping with God

A Biblical Guide
to Christian Meditation

K.D. Weaver

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Chapter 1

Missing Rib Meditation

Genesis 2:15-25

Any discussion of the creation story found in Genesis can lead one into a polarized debate. Are you a creationist or an evolutionist? Do you believe the world was created in six days or millions of years? Do you read the Bible literally or allegorically? Are you on the side of religion or science? What do you think about intelligent design theory? Should it be taught in school? To even mention the creation story of Genesis automatically leads many into thoughts, theories, opinions and speculations about the origin of the world.

Discussion concerning the beginning of the universe can be very stimulating when done in a respectful and loving way. However, to limit the creation story of Genesis to a discussion about the origin of the world does a grave injustice to Christians and non-Christians who read the Bible. The creation story involves so much more than cosmology. It highlights aspects of stewardship. It carries certain dietary implications for us. It comments on the struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, and order and chaos. In addition, the creation story also offers insight about meditation. Particularly, it informs us about a type of meditation that impacts our relationships.

If we could find a word that pulled together the essence of our faith, one word we could use is relationships. If we were to examine our faith tradition, we would find that most of the issues deal with relationships. For example, if we were to look at the Ten Commandments, we would find that at the heart of

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them are commandments about relationships. “Honor your father and mother” refers to the relationship that you should have towards your parents. “You shall not commit adultery,” or put positively, “be faithful to your spouse,” refers to the relationship that you should have with your partner. “You shall not lie against your neighbor,” and “you shall not covet your neighbor’s possessions,” refer to the relationship that you should have with the people in your community.

When Jesus was asked to reveal the greatest command, he replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”¹ Jesus was saying to the Pharisees that the greatest command was to be in a proper relationship with God. Throughout the Bible we find that divine judgment is always preceded by people entering into improper relationships with other people or things. One could even say sin is the result of improper relationships.

The Goal

When we turn to the creation story of the Bible, the issue of relationships is also present. God tells Adam that “it is not good (*tob*)”² for him to be without companionship. The Hebrew word *tob* suggests a notion of completeness.³ Hence the phrase “it is good” (or it is complete) is used following God’s acts of creation. To say that “it is not good” for Adam to be alone indicates Adam is not whole if he is alone. Once the incompleteness of Adam is identified, then the resolution is provided. God promises to create a companion for Adam. With this promise, the goal of Missing Rib Meditation emerges: to cultivate relationships that are conducive to your wholeness.

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People often think of meditation as an activity that propels them to separate from others in a quiet place so they can draw closer to God or have more inner peace. This is the case for some types of meditation. Yet with this form of meditation, the goal is to draw closer to others by allowing God's Spirit to be the "match maker."

If some are able to avoid the theological pitfall that reduces the creation story simply to a cosmological occurrence, then they often fall into a second pitfall. Many would like to reduce the creation story (particularly the parts referring to Adam and Eve) to a discussion over the relationship between the sexes. Similar to those who have a cosmological predisposition, those who identify the primary issue in the creation story as one concerning heterosexuality, miss the texture of the Scriptures.

Adam can be understood as mankind or humanity. If we understand man (*adam*) to mean humanity in Genesis 2:18, then the text becomes a commentary on the social nature of human beings. From this perspective the text tells us that humans are social beings and are not made to be outside of community.

What if we took man (*adam*) in Genesis 2:18 to mean husband? When most people think of the word husband, they think of a male. The origins of the word are associated with the position of a manager or master of a household.⁴ The essence of this word is still intact today. A husband is not a male, a husband is a position that a male assumes. In Genesis, Adam held the position of the manager of God's garden. If we understand man (*adam*) to mean husband in Genesis 2:18, then the text becomes a commentary on the need all have for assistance. We are all capable of managing something, but God teaches us that we can accomplish more and with greater

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excellence when we work with others. We are able to go further when we help others and others help us.

Foremost, we should put aside the notion of sexuality when we read Genesis 2:18 based on Christological considerations. Galatians 3:28 states, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁵ What would happen if we read the creation story as if there is neither male nor female but all being the same through Christ? I am not suggesting that we give no consideration to understanding man and woman in the creation story as biologically compatible beings. I do propose that to focus exclusively on the biological aspect causes us to miss the many insights that the creation story can offer us about relationships. Now that we have acknowledged the dynamic nature of relationships, which the creation story reveals, let us examine how the story exposes our need for relationships and how to enter into them properly.

Premeditation

Before God promised Adam a companion, we cannot overlook one important fact: Adam was fulfilling a God-given purpose. God placed Adam in the garden so that he could cater to it, then God told Adam to not eat from a specific tree. Adam was aware of his divine task and he fulfilled his task in the boundaries God established. We will see throughout this book that alignment with one's God-given purpose is an essential component to Christian meditation.

To find the person or persons God has for you without first some awareness of the person God desires you to be is difficult. Part of who God desires you to be involves what tasks God has for you. Those who are unaware of the role God

desires for them or who refuse to live out their role within the boundaries God sets will experience a substantial obstacle in the practice of Missing Rib Meditation.

The verses following God's promise to make a companion for Adam can seem strange at first glance. God presented animals before Adam as possible companions! After all the animals are offered to Adam, verse 20 reads, "But for Adam no suitable helper was found."⁶ The more you begin to think about this passage, the less odd it will appear. Who is considered man's best friend? It is not a spouse or a next door neighbor, but a canine.

I had a neighbor who called me numerous times in one day and left several messages. When I finally got home and received her messages, I immediately called her back, assuming that she was in a dire state. Well, she was in a horrible state. Her bird had died and she was too emotional to take it out of the cage herself. Anyone who has ever had a pet knows that deep bonds of companionship can be formed with animals (that sometimes even surpass ones we have with humans). Companionship with animals seems less odd when we remember that both humans and animals fall under the umbrella of God's creation. We are all God's creatures. God's presentation did not only provide Adam with options for companionship; it also provided vital lessons about companionship.

Three groups of animals were presented to Adam: livestock, birds of the air, and beasts of the field. Each group possessed certain characterizations among the Hebrew people and their descendants.

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Livestock

The livestock or herds were used for labor and as meat for offerings. Livestock and herds were also measures of one's wealth. There was tangible, pragmatic value in having livestock. When God offered Adam the option of having livestock as companions, God wanted to see if Adam would choose a relationship based on material gain.

Many people enter into relationships because of the financial security and stability that can be obtained from them. These people measure and analyze all the benefits that can be captured by being with someone: a nice house, a safe neighborhood, a large bank account, connections to an influential family, or status. God presented Adam with a relationship of leisure and comfort.

Birds of the Air

The birds of the air had a peculiar place among the biblical writers. Objects of the sky were a potential threat to the religion of Yahweh because they were sometimes worshipped (maybe for their proximity to the heavens). Deuteronomy 4:19 warns the Israelites, "And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven."⁷ Many Israelite kings were noted as turning away from God and worshipping the celestial bodies.

The space directly above the Earth did not lose its hazardous aspects in the New Testament. Satan is depicted as "ruler of the kingdom of air."⁸ The realm above the Earth and those objects that filled it always held the potential to sway people away from God. When God presented the birds of the

air to Adam, God was placing relationships in front of him that could distract him from his sole commitment to God. Some may have experienced this type of relationship. The person is so dynamic, so beautiful, so smart, so appealing, or so whatever that makes you stop in your tracks, that you become in awe of him or her. A relationship based on veneration is easier to fall into than many of us realize. There is nothing wrong with loving a person and being excited about being with him or her. Yet sometimes our involvement with a person can become a distraction to our ONE and only God. Adam was offered a relationship that could rival his relationship with God.

Beasts of the Field

The last category of God's creation that was presented before Adam was the beasts of the field. The field was often associated with a place that was isolated and believed to be outside the view of others. Cain took his brother Abel to the field to kill him because he thought no one was looking (not even God).⁹ Joseph's brothers plotted to slay Joseph in the field where no one would know what happened.¹⁰ Jesse's youngest son, David, was out in the fields tending to the flock while his brothers were being considered for the kingship of Israel.¹¹ Jesse allowed David to stay in the fields because he never thought his youngest son would be considered by the prophet Samuel. After Judas had realized the gravity of his act, he went out into the field to take his own life.¹² The field was often the place where people believed no one could see or cared what was happening.

When God presented the beasts of the field to Adam, he was presenting relationships to him that would lead him to

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commit and hide ungodly acts. Many of us, at one time or another in our lives, have had companionships that made us feel “free” from righteous conduct. In the contexts of these relationships, we say to ourselves, “Nobody will know.” “They don’t know my church friends.” “They don’t know my family.” “They don’t know the people that I work with.” “They don’t know my neighbors.” “They won’t tell anyone.” “I can let loose around them and do what I want around them, because they don’t know all my associates and contacts.” Being authentic around a group of people is fine, but using a group of people or a person as a blanket to engage in ungodly behavior is unacceptable. Adam chose not to enter into relationships that would make him feel outside the view of God’s expectations and judgment.

Through God’s display of these various creatures to Adam, Adam was tested with inappropriate companionships and had the insight to acknowledge that they were incompatible. If you are receptive you can learn great lessons about who you are compatible with from people with whom you are incompatible and from relationships that did not go well. You will have greater difficulty embracing the benefits of Missing Rib Meditation if you are in the midst of unhealthy relationships and unable to recognize their harmfulness.

You must let go of your former conceptions of relationships to become ready to receive a type of relationship beyond your imagination, which brings wholeness and greater intimacy with God. You must even let go of some your conceptions of good relationships before God can show you what a good (*tob*) relationship is.

Meditation

God put Adam to sleep while Adam was reflecting upon who would be a suitable companion for him. While Adam was in this state, God took a part from Adam's side (traditionally portrayed as Adam's rib) and then sealed his body. God put Adam to sleep so that he could remove something from him and used the piece from Adam to create a companion for him. Adam experienced a loss that would lead to true companionship and wholeness. What Adam lost led to his completion. *Missing Rib Meditation involves reflection on what you should be releasing to others so that life can emerge.* Missing Rib Meditation seeks what you should surrender because by releasing it, life can be sustained and created.

I discovered the power of Missing Rib Meditation when I became a kidney donor to my father. After my father had spent several years recovering from a massive stroke and rehabilitating his body, he faced a new challenge. The years of hypertension had damaged his kidney and forced him to begin dialysis, a bi-weekly procedure to cleanse the toxins from his blood. The doctors placed my father on a donor list and family members started to get screened to become kidney donors. As soon as the members of my family began their medical evaluations, I felt that I was going to be the one to donate the kidney. A steady, soft sentiment lingered with me that I was the one. When I eventually did get tested for compatibility, the doctors found I was an almost perfect match with my father (a 4 out of 5 match to be exact). I experienced a turbulent surgery and rocky recovery, but my father sailed through the procedure beautifully and his health soared afterwards.

That experience (both before and after the surgery) led me to a simple revelation. What is taken from you can be used to

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produce life. What was taken from me enabled my father to have a new life and better quality of life. But what was taken from me also enabled me to have a new life. After the surgery I was able to have a new relationship with my father. We shared a trying, unforgettable experience. In a literal sense, we had become one. So much life came out of the kidney I lost.

Relationship Between Loss and Gain

One of the most paradoxical messages that Jesus reiterated throughout his ministry was this relationship between loss and gain. Jesus proclaimed, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."¹³ Jesus spoke these words to his disciples to explain the necessity of his death. The disciples and Peter specifically could not grasp why Jesus had to suffer, be rejected and die. They did not understand how anything good could come from the loss of his reputation, body, ministry, and life. When Peter scolded Jesus for even the thought of such a devastating loss, Jesus responded, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."¹⁴ To treat loss as something that must be avoided at all costs is a worldly mindset incompatible with the kingdom of God that Jesus brings forth.

Jesus' Notion of Completion

In loss there is life, gain and even abundance. This message is not only evident in the lessons and sermons that Jesus proclaimed, but also in his interactions with those both inside and on the outskirts of the Jewish faith. Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler in the gospels is a prime example of the message of loss and gain. The gospel of Matthew depicts

the young ruler as someone who had not only knowledge of the Law, but lived in compliance with it. He was a religious, good and moral person by most peoples' standards. Yet this man felt that something was missing in his life. He felt that there was still a void present in the midst of all his accomplishments, status and righteousness. The young man uttered, "What do I still lack?"¹⁵ Jesus response was simple, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."¹⁶ The Greek word *teleios* for perfect does not mean without flaw but implies a notion of completion or fulfillment. Jesus told the young ruler if he wanted to fill his void, then he must give up his possessions. One of the first steps to fulfillment for Jesus was to let something go.

This message seems so counter intuitive to us because we are told the exact opposite almost every second of our lives. We turn on the television and see commercials that offer products that will make us more beautiful, healthy, happy, smart, popular or more complete if only we buy them. Fulfillment is offered to us every second of every day by the world. It always comes in the form of a new car, house, gadget, relationship, book, movie, pair of shoes, suit or some other type of acquisition.

Loss is crucial to the notion of completion that Jesus brought because loss allows us to have greater access to Christ. Notice that Jesus told the young ruler to release his possessions and then he could follow him. The release had to occur before the following. Jesus said that, "Small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."¹⁷ When you are walking through a small gate you cannot get through the gate with a lot of stuff. You must put the stuff down in order to

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enter. If you have built an identity around your stuff, then to put down your possession is like letting go of who you are, which is frightening for most. This young ruler's possession had become a part of his identity. So when Jesus asked him to surrender his possession, the man could have felt as if he was losing himself. But the loss of himself is exactly what he needed to experience to find himself in Christ.

The relationship between loss and gain is also seen in Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. His profession was to collect things and his reputation was that he collected over and beyond what he was entitled. Zacchaeus was, in a literal sense, living a life that was the antithesis to Jesus' new message of completion. After Jesus invited himself to be a guest at Zacchaeus' house and Zacchaeus vowed to give at least fifty percent of his possessions to the needy, Jesus proclaimed, "Today salvation has come to his house."¹⁸ Salvation comes after Zacchaeus pledges to let go of something.

Jesus offers us a more accurate understanding of completion than we could ever find in our modern world. We experience so much self-induced sadness, pain and suffering because we have the wrong notion in mind. We believe that the way we become complete is by obtaining more. We believe that if we just had more insight, more schooling, more money, more contacts, more power, more status, more stuff, then we could be complete. But completion comes from loss, not gain. Wholeness comes from sacrifice, not accumulation.

We go in the opposite direction from being complete and having healthy relationships when we fear losing something that we possess (either material or immaterial). Completion comes through the releasing of yourself. Missing Rib

Meditation is not simply focusing on what you need to surrender, it is also releasing those things. You are practicing Missing Rib Meditation when you let go without hesitation and almost unconsciously of those things that will prevent holistic and God-centered connections with others.

Missing Rib Meditation Distinctiveness

A few aspects of Adam's sleep are drastically different from the common notion of meditation. Foremost, God caused the sleep to occur. Kosuke Koyama, in his article, "Adam in Deep Sleep", believes that whether or not one acknowledges God as the initiator of Adam's sleep has a profound impact on one's worldview. He writes,

There are two major living outlooks current in our world today. One looks at the universe remembering that Adam was asleep at one critical moment in the story of creation, and that signifies that he cannot establish his own self-identity and his place in the cosmos unless he makes important reference to the One who put him into the "deep sleep."...The other viewpoint looks at the universe with the understanding that Adam has no such "transcendental sleep." He is therefore the center of all things and he named all things. If Adam did sleep, it was caused by himself, not by God.¹⁹

For Koyama to acknowledge God as the cause of Adam's sleep is to acknowledge that humanity cannot know the world or even know himself or herself without the Divine. Yet to disregard that Adam's sleep was initiated by God, reflects a viewpoint of human independence and self power. One's acknowledgment of God as the cause of Adam's sleep also has monumental implications for one's conception of meditation.

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When most of us think of meditation, we think of a state that we can initiate and stop at our will. God initiating Adam's deep sleep shatters that notion. It puts God's grace and will inescapably in meditation.

One reason meditation has been shunned or ignored by so many Christians is because of the rigid individualism and autonomy associated with it. If *I* sit here long enough, if *I* focus hard enough and *I* am quiet enough, *I* can achieve inner peace. *I* can unite with the Divine. Many conceptions of meditation remind me of the story of the Tower of Babel. The people believed that they could reach heaven with or without God's consent. Any activity that does not need or desire God's grace and God's will should be troubling to us as people of faith. A biblically grounded conception of meditation is more similar to Jacob's Ladder. God provides the means for our ascension. He reaches down to us and allows us to come closer.

I am certainly not proposing that all meditation requires God's active intervention or that God must cause us to meditate. However, I would propose that certain depths of meditation cannot be experienced without God's consent and causation. Remember, Adam did not only sleep, but the text tells us that he was put into a deep sleep (*tardemah*).

Conclusion

The differences between the first Adam and the second Adam—Jesus—are often highlighted. The frequently-cited fifth chapter of Romans contrasts the trespass and death associated with Adam with the gift and life associated with Jesus. Adam could be perceived in some regards as the antithesis of Jesus. Although the differences between Adam and Jesus are vital to

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Christian theology, the similarities between the two are also worthy of attention.

Adam was a gardener in Eden. Mary mistook Jesus for a gardener when she went to mourn over his body. Adam had a rib taken from his side. Jesus was pierced in his side while on the cross. The rib that Adam lost led to his completion. The life that Jesus lost led to the restoration of humanity. I would propose that Jesus practiced Missing Rib Meditation because he reflected on how his loss would lead to life.²⁰ He released his life so that we could have life.

Prayer

Ever-sufficient God, may I become less so that you can use me more. Where selfishness and fear abide, cast them out. Allow all that I release to lead to my wholeness. In my sacrifice and lack, may life emerge. Amen.

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How to Sleep with God

Review

Goal: Cultivate relationships that lead to wholeness.

Premeditation: Gain the ability to identify an unhealthy relationship.

Meditation: Reflect on what you should release so life and wholeness can emerge.

Reflection

- 1) Can you remember an instance when letting go or giving up something made you feel better? What led you to do it?

- 2) Make a timeline which reflects your responsibilities, activities, leisure time, etc. for tomorrow.

- 3) Analyze the timeline above. What could you release, surrender or give away (material or immaterial) tomorrow that may lead to greater wholeness in your relationships, community or world?

Activity

Pick one thing that you will let go of tomorrow and then write it down on a sheet of paper. Sit down, close your eyes and imagine how you will let go of that thing tomorrow. After you have imagined your release, memorize the meditation verse below.

Repeat your verse throughout the next day. At the end of the day look at your paper and determine if you have released it. If not, keep it for tomorrow and repeat the same activity.

Meditation Verse

“Into your hands”¹

Post-Meditation Questions

- 1) Did you tend to release things that were material or immaterial?

- 2) Did you tend to focus on any particular relationships and avoid others? Why?

- 3) Did you notice any differences in your relationships?

- 4) Did you notice any differences in yourself while practicing this meditation?

Challenging the popular belief that meditation is not central to Christianity, K. D. Weaver examines the biblical foundation of meditation and its necessity in the Christian faith. This transformative work offers the reader biblically based meditative exercises to foster healthy relationships, inner peace and greater intimacy with God as well as to counter stress, fatigue and fatalism. Sleeping with God reveals new insights into Christian meditation and spiritual growth.

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