

# Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation



# Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation

A Treatise Proving the Duty and Demonstrating  
the Necessity, Excellency, Usefulness, Nature,  
Kinds, and Requisites of Divine Meditation

Nathanael Ranew



Soli Deo Gloria Publications  
*. . . for instruction in righteousness . . .*

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TO THE  
RIGHT HONOURABLE AND MOST PIOUS LADY,  
MARY COUNTESS OF WARWICK.

MADAM,

THIS ensuing discourse, first making its humble address in private, and having so favourable a reception, craves leave in the publication to make this second application.

The first occasion of this undertaking was from observation made of your exemplary and eminent practice of, and experienced sweetness felt in the breathings of your soul up this hill of holy meditation ; it being so frequently, and with such complacency discoursed by you.

After a review made of the whole, I have both altered and added several things, which I most earnestly pray may (together with those

helps of many better hands) issue in your Honour's and others' proving still higher artists, and richer proficient, in this rare way of heavenly self-entertainment.

I am ever,  
Madam, your Honour's  
most humble and most obliged servant,

NATH. RANEW.

## TO THE CHRISTIAN READER.

PURPOSING some Improvement of Solitude in the late mournful year, when death was so largely commissioned to destroy by that dreadful pestilence, I made choice of this excellent subject of Divine Meditation. The best way of thinking and mind employing is this meditation. The right art and skill of it is a rare attainment. The due practice of it is a most noble self-entertainment.

A pious heart hath three happy ways of self-entertainment in solitary; three rare ways of being least alone, when most alone.

The first way of self-entertainment, is the ordinance of reading and searching the Holy Scriptures, the pure, perfect, and infallible word and will of Christ concerning us. There Christ hath prepared his rich feast of fat things full of marrow, and his royal banquet of heavenly truths. There he sets forth the great varieties of sure directions, precious promises, high examples, rare experiences, and the help of all his holy ordinances, to feed and satiate the hungry and thirsty spirit.

The second way of self-entertainment, is divine meditation, by either pondering of spiritual things, for improving knowledge, and exciting practice; or

by a weighing all other things whatever, for reducing them to a spiritual end and use.

The third way of self-entertainment, is private praying, such as is both founded on and bounded by Christ's will in his word; such as is both prepared and assisted, made wise and warm by serious meditation.

Meditation stands between the two ordinances of reading and praying, as the grand improver of the former, and the high quickener of the latter, to furnish the mind with choice materials for prayer, and to fill the heart with holy fervency in it.

Natural philosophers observe, that to uphold and accommodate bodily life, there are divers sorts of faculties communicated, and these among the rest.

1. An attractive faculty, to assume and draw in the food.

2. A retentive faculty, to keep it, being taken in.

3. An assimilating faculty, to concoct the nourishment.

4. An augmenting faculty, for drawing to perfection.

1. Meditation is as the attractive faculty, to help to assume and take in spiritual food. This it doth by helping to act judgment, wisdom, and faith, to ponder, discern, and credit the things which reading and hearing supply and furnish.

2. It is like the retaining faculty, by assisting and corroborating the memory, helping to lock up the jewels of Divine truths sure in that treasury. Meditation makes a rational memory of things, which is the surest. There is in man a sensitive memory, in which he participates with sensitive natures, such as



beasts; they have a kind of memory. There is also an intellectual or rational memory, wherein man partakes of the like nature with angels; they have their faculty of memory. Meditation superadds to the sensitive memory, the help also of a rational memory, whereby spiritual things are secured as under double lock: what we rationally remember, is best remembered.

3. It is like the assimilating or digesting power, by helping to concoct spiritual food, and turn it into spiritual nourishment. This it helps to effect, by being instrumental to work things more powerfully on the will, in a free choice, firm purpose, and ready obedience of the excellent truths of Christ; and likewise by working on and into the affections of love, joy, and the rest, to cleave unto and be inflamed towards the things of Christ. A spiritual digestion is not by head work, but heart work, when the will deliberately and resolvedly chooses, and the affections earnestly embrace heavenly things. Meditation highly conduces to this spiritual digestion by its pondering, proposing, and edging efficaciously, such reasons and incentives as work the heart into compliance and obedience.

It is like, lastly, the augmenting and growing faculty, to help the good heart to grow better, and shoot up higher heavenward. The true Christian must grow all his lifetime. Natural things grow by new assumed nourishment, acted upon by the inward growing power. The real godly man hath an inward growing power, implanted by the new life given to him: but this, as by other means, so by frequent meditation, is much assisted and carried on. Meditation waters and cherishes the plants of heavenly

graces. It helps them to root deeper, shoot higher, and grow stronger. Such Christians as meditate most will grow most, be growing to the end.

What in all Christianity is there that meditation is not a furtherance to ?

That saying is excellent, worthy of duest weighing, "The meditating mind is the beginner of all goodness." On a sinner's part, it is the rise of his initial returning to God, of his first converting. In the saints and persons converted, it is their way to progressive converting and renewed repentance, Ezek. xviii. 28. "I considered my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies," Psa. cxix. 59. The more consideration, the more conversion. The great inlet of man's first apostacy, (besides infidelity and pride,) was his incogitancy. Our first parents lost all for want of due thinking; not for the want of acting imagination, or any thinking, that could not be; but for want of that consideration which should have been. They did not consider all things to be considered.

The overflowings of impiety, aggravated by impenitency, and men's rushings into sin so eagerly and boldly, have been greatly from want of consideration. "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done ? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle," Jer. viii. 6. Their not returnings were from neglect of self-reflectings. In any nation, when God intends to work great returnings, he stirs up that people to self-bethinkings: "If they shall bethink themselves," 1 Kings viii. 47. He reminds them of considering, to bring them to returning. So a particular person, when he first comes in to God, he comes first to himself, and that is by con-

sideration and self-bethinking, as the prodigal, Luke xv. 17.

In natures rational, the first mover is the mind by consideration : in grace, the first mover is the mind by holy meditation. The Christian that would set all the wheels of the soul going and improve, that would do great things, and have great attainments, great things effected on the heart and in the life, much light and wisdom, much warmth and fervour, high resolution and courage, large proficiency in godliness, must be much in meditation.

The greatest scholars of the world have not been only great readers, but great students in musing and pondering. The most eminent saints in all ages have been this way excellent ; as Job, David, Solomon, and others in the Scriptures ; as Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine, and other saints in succeeding ages.

Upon these, and sundry other considerations, this ensuing treatise was taken in hand.

My purpose at first was only a private piece, for the service of an honourable personage, very exemplary in this pious practice. This occasioned also my taking the greater liberty in the manner of expressions. My intendment once accomplished, I entertained no thoughts of a publication, till some intimate friends, having the sight of the copy, importuned me to let it come forth for the general use ; upon which, a review of the whole being made, with divers alterations and additions, to reduce it more to the help of all, I resolved to let it come abroad, though imperfect enough. In the first framing, because I could not make use of my study usual helps, sentences and quotations (the ordinary trimmings) were wanting. And being not

willing to further trouble myself, make the treatise swell, and the price rise, I thought it best to let it pass as it is now presented to thy view.

The present age is full of books: there be books too many, and yet too few. Knowledge and wisdom will never in this world be perfect; yet we must ever tend to perfection, and press hard to the mark. And when so many still write after so many excellent treatises on the same subject, this ensuing may the better pass in the crowd. Though there be the greater lights of heaven, the sun, and moon, and stars of the first magnitude, yet the least appearing star is some lustre to the heaven, and light to the earth. Though some pieces of gold coin are current, being fair and down weight, yet those more worn and light may pass in greater payments.

Shall this ensuing treatise issue in persuading or provoking thee to the due practice of holy meditation, to make thee a true and real meditator, or a better and a higher meditator, to teach thee to take a turn often in the garden of God, and take the fresh air of paradise, to be mentally in serious musings, often mounting up to heaven, and return more enlarged and inflamed, more wise and warm at the heart,—let me only request this of thee, to improve some of that acquired warmth in thy way of fervent praying for him that is ever thy servant in the things of Jesus,

NATHANAEL RANEW.

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# SOLITUDE IMPROVED, &c.

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## PART I.

### CHAP. I.—*Of Divine Meditation in general.*

ON that noble subject, and necessary duty, Divine Meditation, I have now chosen, by Christ's assistance, to speak to you.

Of meditation in general, according to Scripture latitude, in the various kinds and considerations of it there expressed. My text, therefore, must not be one single scripture, for the total foundation of what I shall tender, but the universal vote, and passages dispersed through the Bible: some of which are the following.

“Meditate upon these things,” 1 Tim. iv. 15. Here on Timothy, and, by way of proportion, on every person, is commanded meditation. “In his law doth he meditate day and night,” Psal. i. 2. If the blessed man doth so meditate, then all who would be blessed must do the like.

“I will meditate on all thy work,” Psal. lxxvii. 12. Both the word and works of God must be the godly man's meditation.

“And meditate on thee in the night watches,” *Psa.* lxiii. 6. And, “My meditation of him shall be sweet,” *Psa.* civ. 34. God must be meditated on, and that meditation should be sweet.

From these and the like passages scattered over the Bible, the observation or conclusion is this: Pious meditation is the duty of every Christian; or, It is the high institution of Christ, and greatly incumbent duty of Christians, to exercise themselves much in holy meditation.

A rare and soul-enriching way: none know the sweetness and blessings of it, but such as exercise themselves in it.

Philosophers tell us, there would be no life or motion in the lower world, if the sun and celestial bodies stood still. Physicians say, if the heart did not continually beat in the body, there would be no life and motion in the little world, man. And experience proves, if there were no springs or weights in watches and artificial engines, they could perform nothing. What the sun, moon, and stars are to life and motion here below, what the heart is to the body's life and moving, and what the springs and weights are to motions artificial, that in a high degree is meditation to spiritual life and motion.

Of the various things tendered to us for truths, this is the great trier, the percolation and refiner, the melioration and improver. Such things that come to us crude and raw, become mellow and concocted by meditation. It is the golden scale to give divine things their due weight. The soul's rare alembic, to effect the highest operations, to extract the richest spirits for heart use.

Meditation is of that happy influence, it makes the mind wise, the affections warm, the soul fat

and flourishing, and the conversation greatly fruitful.

Who can fail to practise it, continue it, contend to larger improvements in this heavenly art, that hath once experienced and fed upon the surpassing sweetness and refreshments, the unspeakable solaces and delights, both had and heightened in it !

To speak of it adequately I cannot ; it is such an attainment that none know the all of it. Nothing but progress in the daily practice, can help to comprehend it. There is still a going and a knowing further.

I shall speak to four things only concerning meditation.

1. The precedents upon the file of Scripture, or some rare examples of the practice, and but briefly.

2. The nature, ingredients, qualifications, and the several sorts of meditation : and here I must be something large.

3. The grounds, and supporting reasons of it, to manifest it.

4. The diverse improvements of it to divers sorts of persons.

1. The precedents on the sacred file, recorded instances in Scripture.

There are, among others, four instances, which I shall single out, four famous, holy, and eminent ones.

The first is that of the godly patriarch Isaac, Gen. xxiv. 63, “ Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide.” God is a most free Agent, as in all other actings, so in conferring his Scripture honours. He honours whom he pleaseth, and when and how he pleaseth. He is bound to give no account of his matters. And oft we see him in his goings and doings, but cannot by searching find him out, Job xi.

7. Divine sovereignty and wisdom is pleased, in the Scripture records, to fix the first honour of this practice of meditation on holy Isaac.

Doubtless, his excellent father, holy Abraham, did use to beat this path to heaven, who walked so much with God. Doubtless, those other patriarchs and saints, living before Abraham, travelled much in this heavenly road. Enoch, for his walking with God, so highly honoured, was no stranger to this way. Questionless, it was one of his walks. He certainly used to go to heaven mentally, before he was translated personally. He used to ascend up by meditation, before his happy translation. But Isaac is he who first is mentioned, for acting this holy meditating. It may be he exceeded and excelled in this heavenly art and practice; and because it was a duty performed privately, and that was not known, God would reward and honour him openly, by making it known, and that some hundreds of years after, by Moses' holy pen.

It is probable there was something more than ordinary in it, which occasioned this first record of meditation. However, this was the holy pleasure of God so to fix it; to place it first on the file of godly meditators. Isaac is the first mentioned meditator in Scripture records.

The second instance, which is the fullest to all intents and respects, is that high and noble precedent of holy David, that man after God's own heart: among other reasons, I believe, for his beating so much this path to heaven; for the frequencies of his visits made this way.

He soon became a man of great troubles and disquiets; yet then in them he would resolutely cut out his way, and keep his course of holy meditation: wit-

ness those many psalms penned in and on occasions of his troubles, and styled his meditations. He, after Saul's death, is crowned king of Judah, had his great multitudes of high employments, was a mighty warrior, and so must be exposed to highest hazards ; yet nothing, at any time whatever, should check or retard his course. Though he had his head full of thoughts, his heart full of troubles, his hands full of work, nothing should hinder him in this high exercise of his so experienced sweet meditation.

In Psa. i. 2, he makes meditation the character of a blessed man, to meditate in God's law day and night. And what he makes a rule for others, he makes good in his own example.

Psa. cxix. 97, " Oh how love I thy law ! it is my meditation all the day : " there is the practice of the first time, the day ; and a full example, and practice, all the day.

And Psa. cxix. 148, " Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word : " there is the practice of the other time mentioned in the character in Psa. i. 2.

Not a watch set in the night, but he had his meditation. Oh most admirable frame of spirit ! A king and a daily meditator, and a night meditator also !

It was not family business, nor state affairs, not war's urgencies and difficulties, that so could crowd in and impose upon his thoughts, but he would have his spiritual retreats, his soul repasts, in meditation, mount up to heaven by it. Trace we him with the eye of due observation over the book of Psalms, (the Psalms, which are the choice and rare records of his exemplary this way actings,) we find most excellent patterns, of all sorts, as for this holy exercise. Singular

meditations sometimes of the great works of God, as Psa. viii., and Psa. xix., and Psa. civ., &c., wherein the fire kindles and flies up, in the highest strains. His heart, like the most rare and exquisite engine and instrument, produces such raised and sublimated things, that transcend sometimes all the strains of rhetoric and poetry in the world, as some very learned men observe.

Sometimes his meditations (and there they ply more, as of nearer concernment) are on the word of God, as Psa. xix., and Psa. cxix., &c. ; and what passages and praises hath he, most high, and sweet, and savoury, that what can be fuller and higher, for the nature and properties of it !

Sometimes the most blessed God himself is the high subject of his meditating ; and what transcendencies of thoughts, what raptures, what instances of highest soul transportings hath he this way recorded for us, purposely to put us upon pursuit of the like glimpses and tastes, by suitable first breathings and pantings after sweetest communion with him !

It is evident he was a grand master in this art of meditation, by the so exquisite pieces drawn to the life, and reserved for use and imitation in the book of Psalms.

The third pattern is that of the so wise Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, who gave his heart, as he saith, to seek, and search, and to know wisdom, Eccl. i. 13, 17 ; ii. 12. David's strain of meditation proceeds principally on matters in themselves spiritual, as God, his word, and ways, and sometimes on the works of God. Solomon's more upon things natural, and the ways and works of men, Eccl. i. 13, 14 ; but to demonstrate the insufficiency of all things in the world, and all the works of men, to make up true happiness,



without the true fear of God, and keeping his commandments, Eccl. xii. 13. This is the sum and scope chiefly of that his book, that book of most deep and great considerations, and excellently useful meditations, for all to obtain wisdom by.

It is (of all) the choicest piece of Scripture, in this kind; it sets us an accurate copy of regular and fruitful contemplation and meditation of all things under the sun, which we should strive to imitate and write after, chap. i. 14. It is left us thereby to learn from him, the so great experimenter and trier, the wisest and most exquisite weigher of all things, and the finder of their extreme insufficiency and vanity.

To teach every person, by this his so eminent and exemplary acting, his successful searching, to do in the like manner. To infuse his spirit, and lay it to steep strongly and deeply in this meditation of creature vanity, and the vanity of all men's labours under the sun.

Yea, to sink this down to the bottom of the soul, there to fix and root itself; thence, as by a most potent and predominant principle, to work and act up to more weanedness from the things of the world, and to more wariness of our being insnared by them.

The fourth rare instance is of the female sex, that of the blessed Virgin Mary. "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart," Luke ii. 19. This is the remarkable and special example of meditation mentioned (that I know of) in the New Testament: we have none so punctual and plain, which I can remember, as this. Some signal honour is hereby intended to this so blessed virgin, to be so noted, more than others, in the gospel records; and thereby held forth, as a pattern and provocation to all after-ages.

The Scripture's silence, as to other saints' practice in this duty, is not a negative or an exclusive of their doing it: because it is not said of every one, they pondered, or meditated, we must not thence infer they did it not.

David, in the first psalm and second verse, saith, the blessed man meditates in the law of God day and night. He therefore makes it a necessary duty and certain character of every godly person, in some sincere measure and constancy performing of it.

As the people of God are all taught wisdom to salvation, so this peculiar wisdom, this way of meditation, of the great concerns of God's kingdom, and their most precious immortal souls, to give things of the highest importance their due weight in the balance of a holy meditation.

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## CHAP. II.—*Of the Nature and Description of this solemn Meditation.*

MEDITATION, according to the usual notion and acceptation, is taken for any serious or earnest thinking of any matter whatsoever, for what end soever, whether it be good or evil. So meditating is used in the Scripture, not only in a good sense, but in an evil sense. But ordinarily it is taken in a good sense, for a holy mind exercise, or acting the thoughts in any seriousness upon any matter in a spiritual manner. There is a double kind of meditation.

1. That which is more set and solemn, when a man is serious in thinking of any thing for some spiritual