

Martin Luther, from “Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther’s German Writings” quoted in Doing Theology in Today’s World, ed. Woodbridge, p. 25-27.

I want to point out to you the correct way of studying theology, for I have had practice in that....This is the way taught by holy King David...in the one hundred nineteenth Psalm. There you will find three rules, amply presented throughout the whole Psalm. They are *Oratio* (prayer), *Meditatio* (spiritual reflection), *Tentatio* (spiritual conflict: *Anfechtung*).

Firstly, you should know that the Holy Scriptures constitute a book that turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness....Therefore you should straightway despair of you own reason and understanding...kneel down in your little room (Matt. 6:6) and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, that he through his dear Son may give you his Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding.

Thus you see how David keeps praying in the above-mentioned Psalm, “Teach me, Lord, instruct me, lead me, show me,” and many more words like these. Although he well knew and daily heard and read the text of Moses and other books besides, still he wants to lay hold of the real teacher of the Scriptures himself....

Secondly, you should meditate, that is, not only in your heart, but also externally, by actually repeating and comparing...the words of the book, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so that you may see what the Holy Spirit means by them. And take care that you do not grow weary or think that you have done enough when you have read, heard, and spoken them once or twice, and that you then have complete understanding....

Thus you see in this same Psalm how David constantly boasts that he will talk, meditate, speak, sing, hear, read, by day and night and always, of nothing except God’s Word and commandments. God will not give you his Spirit without the external Word; so take your cue from that....

Thirdly, there is *tentatio, Anfechtung*. This is the touchstone that teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God’s Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom.

Thus you see how David, in the Psalm mentioned, complains so often about all kinds of enemies, arrogant princes or tyrants, false spirits and factions, whom he must tolerate because he meditates, that is, because he is occupied with God” Word....For as soon as God’s Word takes root and grows in you, the devil will harry you, and will make a real doctor of you, and by his assaults (*Anfechtungen*) will teach you to seek and love God’s Word. I myself...am deeply indebted to the papists that through the devil’s raging they have beaten, oppressed, and distressed me so much...they have made a fairly good theologian of me, which I would not have become otherwise....

There now, with that you have David’s rules. If you study hard in accord with his example, then you will also sing and boast with him in the Psalm, “The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (Ps. 119:72)....And it will be your experience that...the longer you write and teach, the less you will be pleased with yourself. When you have reached that point, then do not be afraid to hope that you have begun to become a real theologian....

If, however, you feel and are inclined to think you have made it, flattering yourself with your own little books, teaching, or writing...if you perhaps look for praise, and would sulk or quit what you are doing if you did not get it- if you are of that stripe, dear friend, then take yourself by the ears, and if you do think in the right way you will find a beautiful pair of big, long, shaggy donkey ears....