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TEACHING BIBLICAL MEDITATION AT MOUNT
WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH
IN CINCINNATI, OHIO

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APPROVAL SHEET

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WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH
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I dedicate this project to the members of Mount Washington Baptist Church, who loyally invested themselves in the process of spiritual transformation through the practice of meditation. I dedicate this also to my wife, who shared with me the belief that this endeavor was necessary for our own spiritual enrichment.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AOT	Apollos Old Testament
BDB	Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew Lexicon
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BTC	Brazos Theological Commentary
EGGNTC	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
KEL	Kregel Exegetical Library
MT	Masoretic Text, Hebrew Bible
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	The New Century Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary of the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary of the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NTL	New Testament Library
OTL	Old Testament Library
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

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PREFACE

When I began my research in the field of biblical spirituality at Southern Seminary, I realized how unknowledgeable I was in the study of spiritual disciplines, and how vital this field of research is for the spiritual fruitfulness of the church. The experiences, fellowship, and studies I enjoyed has grown my family and me, as well as our church. I am thankful for my supervisor, Dr. Matthew Haste, and his wife, Cheyenne, for the blessings my family has received through them; I was graced with a unique experience in regard to the knowledge, patience, and attentiveness I received from my supervisor. Through this project I have experienced personal growth and received training in how I can lead others—most importantly, in the conviction to better lead my family in their spiritual lives. I am grateful for the support and graceful submission of my wife, and for her countless sacrifices through the span of my education. If it were not for Emily, I would not have had the opportunity or motivation to lead as I have. We were blessed to welcome our second daughter in the midst of this project, and I thank the Lord for his providence that such excitement could add greater blessing to our church and family life as I began implementing this ministry project. I give thanks to God for a church that desired such a ministry project and encouraged me throughout the endeavor, and I praise God for his providence in this opportunity. To him be the glory, and may his grace be shown in the increasing faith of his saints at Mount Washington Baptist Church.

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Cincinnati, Ohio

December 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A maturing faith requires the practice of spiritual disciplines. Churches will see great decline in biblical literacy, discipleship, evangelism, and worship attendance if members lack motivation and empowerment to put spiritual disciplines into practice. For this reason, it is necessary to teach spiritual disciplines in a way that fosters both Bible reading and prayer in the membership of a local church. Biblical meditation is the vehicle to a thriving worship practice, not only on Sunday mornings, but throughout the participants' daily life. A ministry project fostering the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation will positively affect the faith and worship of members at Mount Washington Baptist Church, specifically impacting the spiritual health of the congregation for the greater glory of Christ.

Context

This project will be set in the context of Mount Washington Baptist Church (MWBC), a congregation located in the Mount Washington suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio. Historical documents and annual reports from the last sixty years—those records that detail congregational life and ministry—reveal little to no effort in implementing spiritual disciplines in an organized fashion. While prayer groups and evangelistic efforts have appeared and disappeared, evidence shows a lack of education regarding spiritual disciplines and, particularly, biblical meditation.

Congregational practice of certain other disciplines, like prayer, have flourished in the past, but the present members seem to have no experience with nor awareness of the practice of biblical meditation. The current generation is hindered in the

cultivation of their faith by this apathy toward the discipline. Had a rigorous program of personal spiritual disciplines been advocated alongside the early evangelistic movements of MWBC, then the church may have continued to thrive rather than to plateau and eventually decline over the last two decades. Through the formal teaching of biblical meditation, the church will grow in its dependence upon Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

The Current Practice of Spiritual Disciplines at MWBC

A church can only function evangelistically as far as the membership is growing in biblical spiritual formation. The present generation of MWBC is the result of the evangelism and social action of the previous generation. The charter members were deeply motivated by the power of the gospel as it relates to social responsibility, but not necessarily the spiritual disciplines. Thus, the present membership, while greatly interested in orthodox doctrine and expository preaching, shows signs of systemic ignorance about personal spiritual disciplines. If MWBC continues to struggle in its practice of biblical spirituality, then it will fail to deliver on its call as an evangelistic faith-community.

The church has begun to see slow and steady revitalization under the present leadership, but many in the congregation are more concerned with budget lines than organizing or attending prayer meetings. During this transition of rising up from decline, the church is in a perfect place to address its weaknesses while implementing fresh change. New members have come recently and show signs of eagerness for growth but have little knowledge of spiritual disciplines as a structure for life transformation. These new members inevitably adapt to the apathetic culture of their congregational peers.

Biblical meditation is a phrase that brought confusion to the church leadership when I proposed my project to the various boards. This is a church that remains unaware of the teachings of our Puritan forefathers, of several aspects of Baptist catechism, and of many other spiritual disciplines outside of prayer, Bible reading, and fasting. Piety is too

often neglected, but serious revitalization requires members to properly understand what piety meant for Puritans and what it continues to mean for our Baptist congregations in the twenty-first century. Education in biblical meditation is necessary for bringing this piety back into the ranks of our brothers and sisters.

Evidence for Future Success

MWBC is the type of congregation that desires to excel at whatever project is presented to them. Though it has increased numerically, the congregation has not yet learned devotional practices that cultivate faith. The congregation is ignorant when it comes to structured spiritual disciplines, but the members are intelligent and can be motivated when a vision is cast with concrete goals in place. There is little doubt that the congregation would see immense growth, increased stewardship, and enhanced efforts for personal evangelism if they were instructed in how to practice spiritual disciplines. MWBC is ready for God's blessing to come through devotion to his Word.

Rationale

Biblical meditation is a means by which MWBC can grow and develop a system for spiritual transformation. This congregation is starting from scratch in its journey of organized disciplines; the task at hand was to prepare the participants of this project for the lifelong journey of cultivating faith. Recognizing the limited timeline of this project, my intention was to educate members of the congregation and provide a means to implement this knowledge in their personal life. The immersive nature of meditation causes those who participate in such a project to be exposed to Scripture reading and to meaningful prayer. Meditation, practiced according to these standards, fosters evangelical faith by orienting believers to Scripture as the sole foundation for transformation.

Through biblical meditation, especially according to Puritan principles, the congregation was educated in how Scripture becomes applicable in their personal lives.

Studying the Bible with the intention of allowing it to saturate the whole person is the way God intended his Word to work in the lives of his people. Biblical meditation is the art of applying Scripture to daily life in a way that serves as a foundation for being a new creation in Christ, the living Word. Through this project MWBC members invested themselves in the Word and were instructed in a means to examine how they apply the Bible to their lives. Members participated in reflective discussions during the season of personal practice following the educational portion of the project.

This project worked to implement a biblically-grounded prayer practice into the life of MWBC while also addressing the theological concerns of meditation. I taught the scriptural framework of meditation and then argued what makes this pattern the only theologically sound practice. The form of meditation taught and regarded throughout the project was based in Puritan expressions. Additionally, I incorporated principles derived from Donald S. Whitney's *Praying the Bible*, as well as his *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.¹ Utilizing these Scripture-based structures ensured that MWBC focused on God's Word above all else while instructed in the biblical spiritual disciplines. The practice of meditation was taught to garner the centrality and importance of Scripture to the pilgrim's life.

Those members who voluntarily participated in this project began to foster more authentic worship. Members who practiced meditation regularly demonstrated the outpourings of the practice in their worship to those in attendance during Sunday service. Worship practiced with sincerity is contagious. Therefore, one expected result was that the project would increase authentic worship in MWBC.

At the very least, this project gave the church an instrument to assess its practice of organized spiritual disciplines for the first time. God, in his sovereignty and grace, has given the means to immerse ourselves in his presence and walk daily in this

¹Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014).

way. Cultivating faith and producing fruit cannot be separated from the Spirit's work through the divinely inspired Word. Through this project, MWBC has learned that biblical meditation is one of the means by which they can participate in a biblically revealed path to a deeper relationship with God.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to educate members of Mount Washington Baptist Church in how to practice biblical meditation so that they would grow in their faith.

Goals

Three goals ensured an observable pattern of spiritual transformation in the congregation of MWBC. These goals were progressive in nature:

1. The first goal was to assess knowledge and practice of certain spiritual disciplines, with emphasis on biblical meditation, among a select group of at least 15 MWBC members.
2. The second goal was to develop a multi-week curriculum for biblical meditation as well as a multi-week self-guided devotional.
3. The third goal was to increase the knowledge and enhance the practice of biblical meditation among the select members of MWBC through curriculum and devotional practices.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess knowledge and practice of certain spiritual disciplines, with emphasis on biblical meditation, among a select small group of MWBC members. This small group consisted of about twenty adult members, the first to voluntarily respond to an open invitation. This goal was measured by the completion of a pre-survey.² The pre-survey was distributed in paper form at the start of the first teaching

²See appendix 1 for Biblical Meditation Inventory.

session. Respondents' pre-surveys remained anonymous by way of using a PIN that consisted of their birthdate (year/month/day). A ministry assistant collected the pre-surveys for filing. This goal was considered successful when the scores of the pre-survey were analyzed and encoded into a spreadsheet, yielding a clearer picture of knowledge and practice of participants.

The second goal of this project was to develop a curriculum and a guidebook for personal practice of biblical meditation.³ This goal was measured by a panel of two expert reviewers using a rubric. The reviewers consisted of an author of a book on spiritual disciplines and a doctor in the field of biblical spirituality. The specific criteria for success of the rubric included theological competency, historical competency, practical application methods, and the overall clarity and ease of use of the guidebook. If one or more of the curriculum and guidebook elements did not meet the criteria for success, then the curriculum and guidebook were to be reworked in order to meet the reviewers' approval. This goal was considered successfully met when the curriculum and guidebook were approved by the panel according to the evaluation rubric.⁴

The third goal was to increase the knowledge and enhance the practice of biblical meditation among the selected members of MWBC through the curriculum and guidebook. The curriculum was taught on the church campus for four-consecutive weeks. These four one-hour sessions took the place of a Wednesday evening Bible study. Participants were expected to attend all four sessions. Participants who missed more than one of these sessions were excluded from the post-survey. If a participant were to miss a single teaching session, resources were made available to supplement the absence. At the end of the second teaching session, participants were given the guidebook to use independently for the subsequent four weeks. Participants met for two additional one-

³See appendix 2 for Biblical Meditation Curriculum and Guide.

⁴See appendix 3 for Curriculum Evaluation Rubric.

hour meetings after the four teaching sessions and during these four weeks of guidebook use. These meetings took place on-campus on Wednesday evenings and consisted of lecture review and question/answer time as well as discussions over the participants' experiences. The first of these two meetings was canceled due to fourth of July celebrations. The last meeting was held at the end of the four weeks of guidebook utilization; the last of the total six weeks, included the aforementioned review and discussions as well as distribution of the post-survey. The third goal was measured by the administration of the post-survey and follow-up interviews.⁵ Participants were asked to confirm if they had attended at least three teaching sessions and record a percentage of their guidebook usage, failure to meet these requirements resulted in exclusion from the post-survey. The post-survey was collected by a ministry assistant and was encoded into a spreadsheet. This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test of dependent samples, supplemented with an interview protocol, showed a positive significant change in the knowledge and practice of participants.⁶

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Meditation. As used in this project, this term describes the reading and pondering of God's Word, works, and attributes for the intentional transformation of the

⁵See appendix 4 for Biblical Meditation Inventory Post-Survey. This survey is identical to the pre-survey, but includes a clause indicating that expectations are required of those completing the survey to have participated fully in the teaching and devotional guide-book.

⁶A t-test of dependent samples records a single group studied under two conditions. The test compares the means from the groups scoring and "focuses on the differences between the scores." For more on t-tests of dependent samples, see Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People That (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016), 189, 191.

heart and mind for the glorification of the triune God.⁷ Meditation in practice is, as Whitney defines it, “deep thinking on the truths and spiritualities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”⁸

Piety/Spirituality. The term piety was used in this project as the expression of holiness and righteousness that results from a Christian progressively conforming to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Piety is the practice that comes out of a heart and mind transformed by God’s Word.⁹ While some modern authors use the terms piety and spirituality as synonyms, for the purpose of this project each term has a different nuance. Christian spirituality is the expression of sanctification taking place in the Christian through faith. Sinclair Ferguson explains the link between spirituality and sanctification as the way the whole of a Christian’s life is transformed by union with Christ who we trust for the resources of this work.¹⁰ It is in this union with Christ that “he causes our understanding to know Him and our affections to love Him and our will to embrace Him.”¹¹ Because the Spirit enlightens us we are then capable of perceiving the glory of

⁷For a specific and thorough concept of the practice of meditation, see John Ball’s definition: “Meditation is a serious, earnest, and purposed musing upon some point of Christian instruction, tending to lead us forward toward the Kingdom of Heaven, and serving for our daily strengthening against the flesh, the world, and the Devil. Or it is a steadfast and earnest bending of the mind upon some spiritual and heavenly matter, discoursing thereof with ourselves, till we bring the same to some profitable issue, both for the settling of our judgments and bettering of our hearts and lives.” John Ball, *A Treatise of Divine Meditation* (London: H. Matlock, 1660), 3-4.

⁸Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 46-47.

⁹J. Stephen Yuille, “Blessedness in the Piety of William Perkins: Objective Reality or Subjective Experience?” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 1, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 164.

¹⁰Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 51.

¹¹J. Stephen Yuille, *The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 41.

God. Spirituality is the process by which Christians perceive the glory of God and piety is the demonstration, or outward expression, of that spiritual process.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project was implemented using only a select small group and not the entire membership of the church. Second, the project was confined to a timeframe of twenty-six weeks. This gave adequate time to prepare and teach the four-week curriculum, prepare and implement the four-week guidebook, and conduct the post-survey, interview protocol, and analyze the results of the t-test for dependent samples.

Conclusion

Mount Washington Baptist Church desires the spiritual formation of its members. Though spiritual formation is vital, many members of MWBC lack formal training in the practice of spiritual discipline, especially biblical meditation. This project played a role in educating church members so that they can experience the blessing of spiritual growth. God's Word does not return void. God's people will be affected by time spent in the Bible, contemplating the wonders of the Lord. Genuine spirituality begins and ends with the inspired text, and it is in that very place that we find clear parameters to meditate for the cultivation of faith.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR BIBLICAL MEDITATION

Biblical meditation is an integral practice of genuine spirituality and Christian formation. Scripture gives the foundation for the mandate to meditate and the methodology for the proper practice of meditation. Through this chapter, exegesis of the following passages is provided in order to evidence the scriptural grounding for meditation: Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1; 8:3-4; 77; 119; Proverbs 6:6-8; Luke 12:24-28; Philippians 4:7-9; and Colossians 3:1-17. Though this exegesis is not exhaustive, it is important to recognize that every single statement in Scripture is inspired revelation from God and is useful for teaching and training in righteousness so “that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). Christians must keep this perspective in mind when looking to the passages that teach the significance of biblical meditation.

The exegesis of the abovementioned passages is presented in three sections. The first section demonstrates how meditation is used for the purpose of sustained obedience through four Old Testament passages (Josh 1:8; Ps 1; Ps 77; Ps 119). The second section demonstrates how meditation is used to cultivate holiness through two New Testament passages (Phil 4:7-9 and Col 3:1-17). The third section demonstrates that both Scripture, as well as God’s creation, are prescribed objects for use in biblical

meditation through select Old and New Testament passages (Ps 8:3-4; Prov 6:6-8; Luke 12:24-28).

The following references from the Bible contain phrases identifying Scripture as a book, word, or law; these terms refer to an actual physical standard, a concrete and objective revelation that is precisely intended for the purposes of saving knowledge and progressive sanctification. What is to be meditated upon is not esoteric; the theology and doctrines to be ruminated, even outside of the written Word (as in the works and wonders of God through his creation and creation's redemption), are held accountable to the objectively revealed text. The exegetical work begins with the book of Joshua wherein the covenant refers to God's written book, the historical work of God.¹

An Exegesis of Select Old Testament Passages

Select passages from the Old Testament demonstrate that meditation on God's Word and works sustains ongoing obedience. This section includes Joshua 1:8 and Psalms 1, 77, and 119. These verses detail how God ordains meditation as the means for experiencing his sustaining power. Disciplines such as reading God's word and remembering God's works provide a means for growing in righteousness and worship.

Joshua 1:8

The story of Israel's entrance into the promised land begins with the commissioning sermon of Joshua 1. Joshua, in the likeness of his predecessor Moses, receives from the Lord a pronouncement to give to the people of Israel. Joshua's pronouncement includes a commission to read and ponder the Word of the Lord with regularity. God initiates a method of spiritual discipline for the people to whom he has

¹Moises Silva, *God, Language, and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 36.

given a covenant. When God promises faithfulness to his people he gives the corollary that his people recognize his faithful presence through a process defined as meditation.² God commands obedience to his word, while simultaneously instructing the people to dwell on his words. Richard Hess sees Joshua as the microcosm of the people: “Unless Joshua makes meditation upon, and obedience to, God’s law his first priority, his leadership will fail. Joshua will not succeed because he obeys God’s instruction; he will succeed because God is with him to enable him to obey his instruction.”³

God desires his people to thrive and, fully aware of human depravity, gifts his people with the capability of utilizing his presence and power in order to thrive. God’s faithfulness in the practice of meditation is witnessed in Joshua 1:8 with the giving of a book that will serve as an objective instrument for prescribed meditation. This term found in the MT is *sepher*, determined to be any type of scroll or codex; a physical, written document.⁴ *Sepher*, or book, consists of what is known today as Torah or Law.⁵ Joshua 1:8 calls for a form of meditation that utilizes Scripture as an instrument for sustaining the hope of the covenant and the acknowledgement of the presence of God among his elect.

Joshua possesses the recording wherein God initiates a faithful relationship with his people and imparts wisdom and instruction for his people to maintain covenant relationship. God desires obedience regarding this covenant and instructs them that obedience will flow from those who meditate on the words of the covenant. Because this

²Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 90.

³Richard S. Hess, *Joshua*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 80.

⁴Robert Boling and G. Ernest Wright, *Joshua: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 125.

⁵Pekka Pitkanen, *Joshua*, Apollos Old Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 117.

covenant is the basis for the preservation of the whole community, the people are commanded to approach and come to know the document with zeal and fervor. John Walton is right in asserting the leader is to know the covenant “as well and as completely as possible” for the sake of shepherding the faith family.⁶ The weaker party learns alongside the stronger party the attributes of the covenant Giver, receiving assurance of preservation.

The covenant is to produce welfare among the people entering the promised land. The people find their welfare either through observance of the law, producing prosperity as a conditional covenant, or through the consequence of desire and expectation wrought from observing the covenant.⁷ The conundrum, presented by Antony Campbell and Mark O’Brien, over “condition or consequence” is remedied by understanding how meditation fits into the observance of the Law. Joshua is likened to the prototypical happy person depicted in Psalm 1; success, or happiness, is regulated by an adherence to the purpose of the Law in experiencing God’s covenant faithfulness.⁸ Marten Woudstra notes, “Daily meditation on the Book, and a strict observance of its gracious provisions for a life in covenant fellowship with the Lord, will mean a happy achievement of life’s goal and prosperity.”⁹ The concept of a covenant carries with it the notion that God actually intended for his people to thrive and know true happiness that can only come from him. The explicit statement in Joshua 1:8 explains the flourishing experience of covenant fulfillment is connected consequentially with practiced

⁶John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 16.

⁷Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O’Brien, *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 108.

⁸Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 62.

⁹Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 63.

meditation of the Scripture breathed by God.

The term for meditation in this verse is the Hebrew word *hagah*, a spiritual practice that utilizes objective materials given by God. The word is understood to be an onomatopoeia for a groaning noise issuing from a person so wrapped up in concentration on a particular thought that they begin muttering to themselves or, at times, even singing to themselves.¹⁰ To be a follower of Torah in Joshua's terms is to have the words of the covenant so continuously mulled over in one's mind as to be muttering day and night.¹¹ Deduced from this understanding of the Torah's usage among the people, Trent Butler extrapolates the Law, and its meditation, "was not confined to the priests."¹² All who heard the Law were instructed to "mouth" it as a united community, desiring after prosperity and preservation, growing in awareness of God and the work of salvation that his covenant represents. As welfare and the sustaining grace of God is intended for the entire faith community, so too meditation is intended for all God's people.

Meditation on the Scripture is a divine imperative in Joshua's text. Butler reads this passage as an elicitation not an intimidation of God.¹³ Meditation, intended for leadership as well as whole community, brings the person actively practicing the discipline to determine the means of success and prosperity. Terms of welfare allude to a goal intended for those who are strong and courageous; strong enough to sustain obedience and courageous enough to acknowledge God as in control of the conquest. This "route," Mark Ziese explains, "means following a well-defined road to a true

¹⁰John W. Kleinig, "The Attentive Heart: Meditation in the Old Testament," *The Reformed Theological Review* 51 (1992): 56-57.

¹¹Pitkanen, *Joshua*, 117. The type of person that perpetually mutters the words of God is to be a regulative principle, but not necessarily the norm of Christian practice. What is seen in Scripture is the desired goal, illustrating the necessity of progressive sanctification.

¹²Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 7 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 12.

¹³Butler, *Joshua*, 9.

understanding, one that appreciates the rightful place of God’s grace and man’s duty in life. On the other hand, the choice of a ‘weak and fearful’ route is connected to innovation, deviation, and ultimately misunderstanding.”¹⁴ The only way of combating such desires of man is to rely upon the Word of God. Both remembrance of failure and remembrance of God’s sovereignty light the path of the covenant outcome. Ziese asks, will Israel be “careful or lax; meditative or forgetful?”¹⁵ According to Joshua 1, the determinant for success, for flourishing in the promised land, and for sustained obedience is continued meditation on the words and work of God among his covenant people.

Exegesis of Joshua 1:8 shows that sustained obedience is a consequence of adhering to God’s gifted Word. God commands obedience, while simultaneously giving means for obedience. God instructs, through his word, to meditate on his word for the purpose of welfare among the people. All who are called by God are commissioned in the practice of meditation—it is not instructed only for certain people. The flourishing peace and prosperity of God’s covenant is connected to observance of God’s holy word among all God’s chosen. Joshua 1:8 instructs that God’s people are to meditate on God’s word and works for sustained obedience observed by the flourishing of the faith community.

Psalm 1

Psalm 1 serves as a preface to the whole Psalter; what it instructs in a few short verses directs the whole book as a worshipful instrument for meditation.¹⁶ The reader ingests the words and works of God and applies them to the glory and worship of God

¹⁴Mark S. Ziese, *Joshua*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2008), 70.

¹⁵Ziese, *Joshua*, 71.

¹⁶Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 119.

through sustained obedience: righteousness. Psalm 1:4 introduces the idea of meditation by applying the discipline to the Law of God. Bruce Waltke notes that the regenerate will love God's law and use it for the life-giving power that it holds; conversely, the unregenerate will curse the law and refuse to put thought to its teachings.¹⁷

The particular psalm serves as a primer for meditation. The poet gives an explanation as to why and how believers are to utilize the hymnbook for the purpose of worship and sustained obedience. Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) writes concerning the connection:

Furthermore, because we need not only teaching but also encouragement, God's servant will find the Law useful in that, by frequently meditating on it, he will be stirred to obey God, to persevere in obedience and to turn away from his faults. In this way the saints must earnestly press on, since however ready they are to strive to do good, they are always held back by the indolence and heaviness of the flesh, with the result that they never fully do their duty.¹⁸

The Psalter is a means for sustaining obedience allegorized by way of a tree growing near streams of water. The regenerate believer who meditates on God's word will live a distinctive life of obedience by the presence of God—a life sustained by a power outside of himself.

Believers, through meditation, learn of the holy nature of Scripture and its ability to bring delight of God into daily life. In a similar way to Christ opening the eyes of his disciples in Luke 24:45 so that they may understand the Scriptures, it is a work of the Spirit to enhance a believer's reading of the text through meditation. Again, Calvin writes, "How usefully the Lord instructs his servants by the teaching of the law, when he

¹⁷Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 130, 136.

¹⁸John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1541 ed., trans. Robert White (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2017), 176.

inwardly inspires their hearts to follow it.”¹⁹ The happiness of God’s people is revealed not in the lack of performing wicked deeds, but in delight of constantly considering God’s interaction with creation, gaining this delight progressively in the work of God’s revelation as faith produces fruit.²⁰

The psalms that speak of meditation express a calling to mind of the word of God or a desire to have God’s word placed upon the heart. Psalm 1 depicts a righteous man who is typified by ruminating on the Scriptures. What is shown by this righteous type, Allen Ross writes, is his “meditation begins with the memorization of divine instruction so that along the way by day, or on the bed at night, one could recall it and think about it. This hiding of God’s word in the heart also requires gaining a full understanding of it,” producing an ability to turn the considerations of the word into the desires of prayer.²¹ Scripture is not memorized in a way to gain pride or egoism. The type of memorization instructed in Deuteronomy 6:6-9 comes with a propensity to ponder God’s providential rule and will. Meditation proves to be the work, not of passive obedience, but of active and cheerfully performed obedience; a testimony to the living out of faith.²² Artur Weiser writes of this testimonial life of sustained obedience:

The meaning of the advice to meditate on the Law day and night is not so much that of asking men to become versed in the law by acquiring knowledge of it in a more formal manner, as is still being done today by the orthodox Jew, but rather that of a warning challenging man to yield constantly to the will of God and let that will

¹⁹Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 176.

²⁰Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, rev. ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 60.

²¹Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 1:189.

²²Thomas Manton, *Psalm 119* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1985), 1:202.

always pervade his whole being until it becomes his second nature and fills his whole life as the only meaning of that life.²³

If Psalm 1 is read with the sovereignty of God in mind, then believers may come to realize God has claim over the whole of man, both thought and conduct. It is necessary to remain in thought of God and his works in order to cultivate a lifestyle that coincides with God's righteousness. If humanity desires to thrive and flourish, it can only do so under the sustaining and preserving power of the creator. Scripture is an instrument whereby God enlightens his creatures by the power of his Spirit. Man cannot come to a proper knowledge of God's word by his own deduction, but only by the sovereign will of God.²⁴ To meditate on God's word is to gain wisdom, by the work of God, in how to more obediently live to his glory, flourishing as a tree planted by streams of living water.

Exegesis of Psalm 1 shows how sustained obedience is understood in terms of righteousness; the psalmist practices meditation and is consequentially deemed righteous. This distinctive life of obedience comes through the power of the sovereign God who inspires his peoples' hearts by the testimony of his word, as water nourishes the powerless tree. Meditation sustains obedience by cultivating righteousness in the practitioner through knowledge of God's sovereign grace.

Psalm 77

Psalm 77 shows a poet lamenting the historical neglect of reading the Torah and the resulting lack of obedience in Israel. The psalmist searches and ponders God's

²³Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1962), 104.

²⁴John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Arthur Golding (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2017), 93.

wondrous “acts of old” as they serve for him an anchor of hope in God’s covenant faithfulness.²⁵ Meditation is frequent in the Psalms as a whole, but here devotion to God’s transcendent action in the universe is the medicine prescribed for depression, lethargy, lamentation, and suffering. The prescription is seen in two parts: first, the poet contemplates the attributes of God he desires (77:5–10); second, the poet searches and remembers the works of God exhibiting these desired attributes (77:11-20).

The psalmist uses cohortatives, a volitional mood, in 77:3 to paint a word picture of two separate but interconnected words reflecting a meditative voice.²⁶ The act of meditation and the act of remembering are not two exclusive ideas, but indicate a simultaneous desire on the part of the poet, a plea that holds expectation and affects response from the poet. This use of a volitional mood in the verse, according to Waltke, “expresses the will or strong desire of the speaker.”²⁷ The poem shows that the speaker yearns to experience only what is brought about, or revealed, by God. Ross rightly proves that the psalmist reacts and responds to God by the Spirit when he “remembers” and when he “meditates.” Both terms draw attention to “the idea of communing, reflecting, and even lamenting in prayer to God” with an earnestness to subordinate to the power of God through faith.²⁸

²⁵Weiser, *The Psalms*, 532.

²⁶Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:639.

²⁷Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 573.

²⁸Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:639.

Both the means of faith and its object are the Word of God, the account of God's acting in history. It is the psalmist's perspective that if God has acted to show his faithfulness at a singular time, then it would be outside of God's nature to not act in accordance with that faithfulness throughout time. If God promises steadfast love, and God is Sovereign over all of time, then witness of his steadfast love at a singular point in created time ensures his promise for all eternity. John Owen (1616–1683) cites Psalm 77 to show David's calling to mind and considering his experiences with God for the purpose of mortification of sin and perseverance of faith.²⁹ The reader sees that the poet resolves to trust God based on experience, even though his weeping has not ceased by the end of the psalm. The memory of events passed are the means to identify specific attributes of God and meditate upon his character, drawing his assured presence and preservation; the poet utilizes both meditation and communal memory.

Assurance of God's preservation of his chosen people is found through both the rewards and curses of the past. The basis for both rewards and curses is found in obedience and reliance upon God's Word. While there is no outright phrase that points to the psalmist's use of the Scripture, the reader can easily probe the text for instances and actions of God that coordinate with the historical accounts of Scripture.³⁰ God's people are to remember what God has done and this remembering is included within meditation. Eugene Merrill posits, "It is precisely in remembering that a basis for worship exists, for

²⁹John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6, *Temptation and Sin* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991), 45.

³⁰The psalmist, Asaph, references the flight of Israel from Pharaoh's army as God appeared in the whirlwind and the flame leading the people to safety by parting the Red Sea and then using the waters to drown the pursuing Egyptian army (Exod 14-15).

it is God and his works that must be brought to mind regularly and repeatedly as objects of contemplation and celebration.”³¹ The poet turns from lament to remembrance through the course of Psalm 77; such remembrance serves as a vehicle for faith. Not only does Asaph remember the details of Scripture, but he personalizes the account for his own application. Artur Weiser interprets this practice of remembering as a work of God whereby the poet moves “from the *deus absconditus* to the *deus revelatus*.” Movement is “not brought about by the poet himself, but *is* the effect of the self-revelation of God” as 77:14 indicates. The reader witnesses the distinction between a remote or absent God and the true God who reveals himself and condescends for the plight of the creature. Weiser emphasizes, “Faith subsists on the unequivocal revelation of God” and is not produced from ambiguous religious history.³²

Exegesis of Psalm 77 shows that sustained obedience is a product of faith, which grows through meditation. The psalmist in this example uses the act of remembrance to call to mind God’s acting in history; desiring certain attributes, the psalmist remembers their exhibition in Scripture. Meditating on memory, remembering the accounts of God, is a means for growing in faith, thereby producing and sustaining obedience.

Psalm 119

Psalm 119 expresses the concept of meditation in great length, even using the term *siyach* eight times throughout the acrostic (Ps 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148).

³¹Eugene H. Merrill, “Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship,” *Journal of the Evangelical and Theological Society* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 32.

³²Weiser, *Psalms*, 533.

The poet's chief concerns are for personal obedience and the magnifying of God's sustaining work in the elect. The psalm is intentionally repetitive, using flourishing and inventive language to describe the same exercise.³³ The psalmist writes of the various practical ways a believer may go through life in dependence on the Law of God.

There is no doubt the poet went to great lengths to give order and structure to the poem. While various commentators give hypotheses for the structuring of the psalm, Ross asserts the most conceivable argument is that the structure could be memorized by an ordinary person and function as a template for devotions and further meditation.³⁴ Acrostics and repetitive language are formulae still used in the contemporary world to benefit the practice of memorization. David Noel Freedman observes that, though the structure is easily identifiable, the elaborations and deviations from the poem's formality intentionally strike the reader to understand the grandeur of God's Law.³⁵

Many commentators openly avoid this psalm due to its seemingly redundant nature. However, Mitchell Dahood points out that, as he carefully analyzed and translated the psalm, he found the subtle intricacies and meticulous intentionality of the psalmist. Dahood writes that through his meditation on this particular psalm he discovered the "freshness of thought" and the "felicity of expression" passed over by other scholars, including Weiser.³⁶ Weiser critiques the psalm, stating its style is too simple to expound in detail.³⁷ Dahood's anecdote proves it is never useless to plumb the depths of Scripture, such deep reading brings the believer into contact with the beauty of the Word of God.

³³John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 3:378.

³⁴Ross, *Psalms*, 3:463.

³⁵David Noel Freedman, *Psalms 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 20.

³⁶Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 101-150*, Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 172.

³⁷Weiser, *Psalms*, 740.

For the psalmist, the act of meditation serves both as worship and as instruction of God's work in his covenant people. The poet teaches that truth will stick with the hearer only as often as it is thought of or considered.³⁸

God's enlightening of the reader by the Spirit does not preclude the person from actively reading the Word; rather it demands intentional reading. Calvin rightly insists, "The word is faith's objective and its goal to which it must forever look."³⁹ Increased knowledge, building through the foundational source, will invariably increase devotion as the Spirit compels the reader to recognize their union with Christ.⁴⁰ Meditation improves personal piety by addressing the inclinations of the heart. It is evidenced throughout this psalm that meditation is a deliberate, engaged work of the mind toward the heart. Thomas Manton urges that meditation on the psalms is not to be lightly understood as a "passing glance or transient daydream," but deliberate even when spontaneously initiated.⁴¹

Meditation, as interpreted from Psalm 119, is linked with the doctrine of sovereign grace. Psalm 1 identifies the sovereignty of God, and much the same way argues Ross, the psalmist in 119 acknowledges "that God is the greatest teacher, and that his law is superior to all other sources of wisdom and knowledge"⁴²; meditation brings forth obedience through the applied spiritual insight and wisdom absorbed in the believer. It is faith in the sovereignty of God that must be the starting place for all spiritual disciplines. One cannot practice proper meditation without faith that God's word is the sole infallible rule of such faith and its practice. God reveals himself clearly in his word

³⁸Manton, *Psalm 119*, 3:284.

³⁹Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 185.

⁴⁰Ross, *Psalms*, 3:491.

⁴¹Manton, *Psalm 119*, 1:131.

⁴²Ross, *Psalms*, 3:547.

and it is through his word and according to its profession of his attributes that he continues to work in the life of his people. Psalm 119 is a testimony to what Manton describes as “that work which God did not do by any necessity of nature, but by the free motion of his own will, will never be found out, unless God will discover it himself; for how could any man divine what God purposed in his heart, before he brought it to purpose, until he himself had revealed it?”⁴³

Paul writes in Colossians 3:16 to God’s elect, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” The word, as Paul uses the term, is measured or constrained by its connection to Christ; this word is the Scripture as it pertains to Christ and he by the will of the Father. God’s elect people have their eyes opened to the knowledge of the revealed word by nothing apart from God’s will and work in the Spirit (Eph 1:17-18). Manton preaches, “We have no other natural way to raise affection . . . the heart of man must be besieged with frequent and powerful thoughts” and these directed by the Word of God.⁴⁴ Is it any wonder that the psalmist inquires of the Lord to impart understanding, to teach as light to the blind (Ps 119:130)? The psalmist declares the sovereignty of God even in the exercise of meditation; both acknowledging that God appoints all things that they are his servants (119:91) and that the word of God is the direct and universal instrument to commune with God (119:25).

Exegesis of Psalm 119 shows how intentional and deliberate meditation, regularly practiced, will produce obedience. Freedman notes the clear and obvious structure of the poem is composed for the sake of the deviations and repetitions; that they would stand out that much more. As the person is called to meditate on the Word of God, they, like the poet, are compelled by the ordinary and begin to see the significance of all

⁴³Manton, *Psalm 119*, 2:314.

⁴⁴Manton, *Psalm 119*, 1:476.

parts of God in all aspects of life.⁴⁵ God sustains the obedience of his people through raised affections. Manton encourages the cultivation of disciplined meditation as he preaches, “The more men consider things with application to their own soul, the more wise they will grow, and the more understanding in the things of God, and able to apply all for their own direction.”⁴⁶ As believers meditate, implanting the word of God in their hearts, the Spirit transforms believers to produce good works. Believers are called to besiege their minds with God’s word and works so to deliberately, and with great frequency, rely on God’s work to progress in obedience.

An Exegesis of Select New Testament Passages

Select passages from the New Testament demonstrate how meditation on God’s Word and works cultivates holiness. This section includes two key texts: Philippians 4:7-9 and Colossians 3:1-17. These passages evince the nature of spiritual mindedness; Christians are to be set apart not only in confession, but in mindset through union with Christ and the work of the Spirit. Meditation orients the believer to see Christ in reference to everything. It also serves in the process of redeeming thoughts and attitudes that conflict with God’s glory.

Philippians 4:7-9

The argument for holiness presented in Philippians 4 comes from a single train of thought in three parts. First, the Christian is found in Christ to have a certain peace and capability for holiness by the renewing of the mind (v. 7). Second, the Christian is to actively think of what concerns and praises God, a labor of the renewed mind (v. 8).

⁴⁵Freedman, *Psalm 119*, 32.

⁴⁶Manton, *Psalm 119*, 2:347.

Third, through the rebirth by the Spirit and the renewed mind, the truths of God produce affections that result in piety; because the heart and mind are changed, the Christian is capable and compelled to practice good works (v. 9). Paul argues meditation on the word and works of God will result in characteristic holiness. The magnification of Christ is the motivating factor for the life of the Christian.

God, as Creator, is portrayed as forming, or asking his people to form, specific things out of raw materials. The construction of objects like the tabernacle or the ark of the covenant are instances where raw materials are designated holy by God based in their purpose. Holiness, according to the *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, is deliberate response to God through means and materials, whenever and wherever as the moment permits.⁴⁷ Holiness comes from a cultivated faith, growing from habitual meditation and delight in God's word and works. Whatever raw materials come before the mind of the Christian, meditation turns into an exercise of holiness.

James 2:17-18 explains that true faith will inevitably produce fruits of repentance and these fruits or virtues are representative of holy living. Moises Silva contends the list of virtues represented in Philippians 4 is not to indicate "different and individual virtues" but a general condition of holiness birthed from regeneration; the list uses different, yet associative words to describe a singular nature of holiness.⁴⁸ The list of holy virtues is indicative of the attributes of Christ and contingent upon his work as redeemer. Some commentators argue that Paul is referring to virtues of Roman peace, but the gospel is more than a moral paradigm to Paul.⁴⁹ Silva argues against Gerald

⁴⁷Eric James, *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), s.v. "Holiness."

⁴⁸Moises Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 199.

⁴⁹Todd D. Still, *Philippians and Philemon*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2011), 16.

Hawthorne's analysis that Paul is regarding the morality of the Greco-Roman world, Christians should not fail to live up to its regulative moral philosophy. Silva rightly notes allusion to civic duty is illustrative, the immediate context proves these virtues are distinctly marked by allegiance to heightened Christian perspective.⁵⁰ Morality is symptomatic of something greater at work within believers; through deliberate meditation on the attributes and works of God, Christians cultivate the mind of Christ.⁵¹ Union with Christ produces characteristically Christlike behavior, representative of holiness.

Christians are not expected to think only about what Scriptures tell of God and the gospel. Paul urges the people to “give consideration” to their surroundings and their culture to determine how these references intersect with what is expected of Christian living.⁵² Gordon Fee contends the gospel is the “ultimate paradigm” for discerning all that a believer experiences. When a Christian experiences a piece of music, art, or literature, the experience must be discerned through the paradigm of God's will and providence. Paul's word choice is important. He uses the term *logitzemai* in this passage, Joseph Hellerman defines, “to give careful thought to a matter’ thinking as a reasoning process.”⁵³ The Apostle stresses that Philippians meditate on their virtues “so that their conduct will be” affected.⁵⁴ This instruction echoes Psalm 119 where the psalmist prays God will work in him as he yearns to be made pious through Scripture contemplation (Ps 119:11, 27-29, 32). Morality is different than piety; piety is proportional and reflective of desire to delight in the word and works of God. Roman morality is not constrained by the

⁵⁰Silva, *Philippians*, 197.

⁵¹Still, *Philippians and Philemon*, 123.

⁵²Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 178.

⁵³Joseph H. Hellerman, *Philippians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2015), 248.

⁵⁴Hellerman, *Philippians*, 248.

word or works of God, but by the transient influence of societal norms in pagan culture; this considered good only by the common grace of God. Paul seeks more for Christians.

Exegesis of Philippians 4:7-9 shows holiness comes through meditation by God redeeming stray thoughts, attitudes, and affections. Deliberate meditation on the attributes and works of God is the means for cultivating the mind of Christ. Paul directs Christians to meditate so as to realize the union with Christ present in God's people. By the Spirit's work, characteristically Christlike behaviors are produced in the people of God; this holiness is a result of biblical meditation.

Colossians 3:1-17

According to this section from Paul's letter to the Colossians, Christians are to put to death all worldly connections and put on the attributes of Christ. James D. G. Dunn writes that this is language of "complete identification with another person or cause, when the service of that person or cause becomes all consuming, the basic determiner of all priorities, the bubbling spring of a motivation, resolution, and application which perseveres despite even repeated setbacks."⁵⁵ Dunn's phrase "basic determiner of all priorities" describes motivation at a primal level, where inclination drives the meditator into action. Paul urges the Colossians to be spiritually minded; at every basic level the Christian is motivated to worship God.

Holiness is the progressive work of the Spirit of God. Calvin testifies, to be holy is to cling to God "that he might pour out his holiness" on those actively pursuing him, continually distanced from iniquity.⁵⁶ Through sanctification Christians exhibit regeneration as their personhood focuses on Christ in the heavenly realm to the extent

⁵⁵James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 203.

⁵⁶Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 786.

that the virtues of the heavenly realm begin to be exemplified in the body of believers.⁵⁷ Jerry Sumney agrees: “Participation in [this new life] provides the ground of ethics. For Colossians, ethics are not based in seeing Jesus as a model or an example. Rather, believers live as they do because they participate in the resurrection life with Christ.”⁵⁸ Christian holiness is an expression of personal and communal life in the Spirit.⁵⁹

The Puritan minister Samuel Ward (1577–1640) said many professing Christians are too sluggish to seek the fullness of Christ. Paul commanded the *omnification* of Christ; Christians are to evaluate everything according to Christ’s lordship.⁶⁰ Sumney identifies the heart as “the seat of moral, emotional, and intellectual life” and therefore, the heart acts in accordance with one’s attentions and intentions to convey the object of its pursuit.⁶¹ Meditation is the pursuit of *omnifying* Christ through whatever thought is brought to mind, contemplating how Christ relates to the thought or how it is turned to praise of God. New life is exhaustive in bringing glory to Christ.

The language that Paul uses in Colossians 3 conveys “much more than,” what Ralph Martin calls, “a mental exercise” or any sort of emotional state. Paul expresses a motivation that directly effects what a person does.⁶² Paul is addressing the piety of the

⁵⁷Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, 1999), 152.

⁵⁸Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 175.

⁵⁹Sumney, *Colossians*, 185.

⁶⁰Samuel Ward, *Sermons* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1996), 7. Samuel Ward uses the term *omnify* to express how Christ is in all things and as such defies all that would take from his glory. Christ is, by Ward’s interpretation of Col 3:11, not simply to be magnified, but acknowledged as creator of all and glorified in and through all creation. The discrepancy is that magnifying should be properly understood in the sense of attributing all glory to Christ alone, every step of salvation and every thought, word, and deed.

⁶¹Sumney, *Colossians*, 178, 220.

⁶²Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 101.

individual and how the Lordship of Christ determines the inclination to act in a manner worthy of King Jesus. The Christian's "turning to God," Sumney argues, "must include an actual change in their manner of life, a change so radical that it can be described as killing the former way of life" given Paul's phrasing "put to death."⁶³ New life is indicated by the reorientation of the whole individual: desires, actions, and relations. The call for Christians to express values different from the world is based in the sovereignty of Christ as he reigns on the throne of grace. Paul's assertion is that because Christ is sovereign, his rule must predominate both the heart and the mind of his elect; to be redeemed is to exemplify Christ having full reign over one's personhood.⁶⁴ Becoming like Christ through progressive sanctification is radical—constituting a continual practice formed through piety and sovereign grace. As the Christian seeks to embody the Word, the Christian will gaze not only interiorly to the indwelling Spirit, but upon the works and the word of God, for the sake of producing affections in keeping with the Christ.

Christians are to reflect the kingdom that Christ has inaugurated, as he sits on the throne above. It is promised those in Christ will have his power—therefore, the ability to reflect Christ's righteousness. It is imperative to put to death all that would reflect something contrary to Christ's sovereign lordship over creation. Douglas Moo offers:

Setting our hearts and minds on the things above and not on earthly things is both necessary and possible. It is necessary because our union with Christ means we no longer belong to the realm of the earth but to the heavenly realm: and it is possible because our union with Christ severs us from the tyranny of the powers of this world and provides us with all the power needed to live a new life.⁶⁵

Living according to the heavenly perspective is indicative of the power that comes from Christ. If Christ is truly all in all, then the Christian must progress in a desire to live

⁶³Sumney, *Colossians*, 187.

⁶⁴Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition on Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1991), 281.

⁶⁵Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 249.

according to the life of Christ and the spiritual growth that comes from a habitual striving after his ethos found in the word and works of God. Paul's language juxtaposes striving after piety with the practice of meditation.

John Owen writes that to set affections on something is to "have such an apprehension of things as to cleave unto them with our affections" to "relish" and to "savour" what comes to mind in order to be inclined to glorify Christ.⁶⁶ According to Owen, spiritual mindedness is "to have the mind changed and renewed by a principle of spiritual life and light, so as to be continually acted and influenced thereby unto thoughts and meditations of spiritual things, from the affections cleaving unto them with delight and satisfaction."⁶⁷ Biblical meditation can only be practiced with a gaze set on Christ; he will direct the heart of Christians who desire to destroy and make obedient every thought that draws them away from worship (2 Cor 10:5). Affections that direct thoughts to worship are the product and sign of holiness, Christ's *omnification*, embodied in the believer. As Owen says, "Therein consists the minding of the Spirit," meditating on what can be mortified and what can be applied for holiness.⁶⁸

Spiritual mindedness and meditation are synonymous practices wherein believers take whatever they are made to think and turn those thoughts into considerations of God's providence.⁶⁹ Meditation is habitual; spiritual mindedness is demonstrated in Colossians 3 as setting the mind upon the throne of grace, devoting all that enters the mind to Christ, cherishing what brings him glory, and loathing all that does not. The discipline of spiritual mindedness is a fruit of holiness expressed by meditating

⁶⁶John Owen, "The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded," in *Works of John Owen*, vol. 7, *Sin and Grace* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1980), 269.

⁶⁷Owen, *Sin and Grace*, 270.

⁶⁸Owen, *Sin and Grace*, 277.

⁶⁹Owen, *Sin and Grace*, 317.

in such a way as to mortify sin (3:5-9) while glorifying God's grace (3:12-17).

Exegesis of Colossians 3:1-17 shows that biblical meditation produces holiness, a living out of being set-apart. Christians are called to spiritual mindedness as symptomatic of Christ's everlasting dominion. Christians progress in this spiritual growth by striving to *omnify* Christ. Biblical meditation is the practice wherein a believer orients their gaze heavenward and simultaneously mortifies sinful thoughts and submits their thinking to the glory of Christ. Holiness comes through meditation by setting the heart to consider and be affected by God's word and works.

An Exegesis of Select Old Testament and New Testament Passages

Select passages from the Old and New Testaments illustrate that meditating on God's work in and through creation produces a response of worship for God's glory. This section includes the exegesis of Psalm 8:3-4, Proverbs 6:6-8, and Luke 12:24-28.

Scripture speaks concerning the relationship humans are to have between the created order and meditation. Regarding God's creative attributes, creation is examined in accordance with Scripture to bring forth fruit of knowledge and application. These three selections from both the Old and New Testaments show how a person comes to worship and give glory to God based on meditation of God's creative work.

Psalm 8:3-4

Psalm 8 captures the poet David praising God in apparent spontaneity. Examining two verses, the reader hears David's astonishment as he looks into the wonder of creation and is compelled to ask questions about human existence based on the sudden spiritual perspective of what Steven Kraftchick calls "the sheer expansiveness of

space.”⁷⁰ Kraftchick explains that though humanity has advanced a great deal in understanding the cosmos through the enhancements of technology, even so, “these spatial and temporal reorientations do not eliminate but rather intensify the psalmist’s question, ‘what is man that you are mindful of him?’” Humanity is infinitesimal compared with the wonder of God’s creative power.

The psalm is an example of a believer orienting himself into a place of meditation. John Goldingay states, “Perhaps, like a lament, the psalm functions to give people opportunity to articulate their uncertainties about their positions as human beings in the world, before drawing them into statements of faith.”⁷¹ The poet utilizes the magnitude of space to direct his thoughts to need and submission before the Creator, contemplating how God still provides for the humbled sinner. Ross explains the word is derived from “remember”; this word “usually signifies acting on what is called to mind. The psalmist is amazed that the majestic God of creation thinks of him in such a way as to do things for him, to meet his needs.”⁷² This term is similar to what is used elsewhere paralleling meditation, such as Psalm 77. The poet demonstrates for the reader that meditating on God’s work in and through creation produces a response of worship for God’s glory.

Exegesis of Psalm 8:3-4 illustrates how meditation serves to direct thoughts to God’s sovereignty by the use of creation. The works of God declare something of his attributes to the person who has knowledge of God’s word. Observing God’s creation, the believer is instructed to learn and apply God’s purposes and attributes from his universe. Through knowledge and experience of God’s creative works, the person meditating will

⁷⁰Steven J. Kraftchick, “Plac’d on this Isthmus of a Middle State: Reflections on Psalm 8 and Human Becoming,” *Word & World* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 116.

⁷¹Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3:159.

⁷²Ross, *Psalms*, 1:295.

respond in worship.

Proverbs 6:6-8

Just as Psalm 8 depicts David staring into the sky and responding to the created order by contemplating the glory of God, so the wise man is depicted in Proverbs 6 as responding to God's created order with insight in how to live a holy and God-fearing life. The wise man does not look upon the grandeur of creation, but upon the lowliness of the insect—even ants provide spiritual consideration. Waltke explains, "When the ant is studied carefully with moral discernment, the imperative *and become wise*, necessarily follows."⁷³ Moral discernment is the operative word by Waltke's estimation; a prudent person understands objective sources for wisdom in reality. God's created order is meant and purposed to be a means for devoted believers to come to comprehend God's glory and store wisdom for both transformative and declarative purposes (Rom 1:19-20).

The ant, Daniel Treier observes, is a kind of "trope for the Christian learner" who pursues divine wisdom and stores faith "for the inevitable spiritual winter."⁷⁴ The wise person not only meditates to declare God's praise, but also experiences transformation through the practice of contemplating the applications of God's providence. The ant is safeguarding a harvest for winter while the Christian is storing wisdom that may be considered and applied throughout his life. The wise person takes knowledge of creation to heart in order to ponder and learn application.

This passage is not indicative of nature wisdom, but of God's gifted wisdom. Michael Fox notes, "Nature wisdom observes and compares analogous phenomena in order to discover hidden patterns and principles . . . it observes for its own sake and not to

⁷³Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 337.

⁷⁴Daniel J. Treier, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 102.

illustrate truths for human lives.”⁷⁵ The teacher in Proverbs 6 does not set out to make discoveries about ant behavior, but intends to examine creation in order to produce a response of worship for God’s glory. Those who accept the spiritual truths of examined creation will exemplify holy behaviors while those who refuse to learn will be shamed by lack of spiritual mindedness. Though nature evidences God’s design, it is not the object of wisdom, but a means for humanity to experience and meditate on God’s glory.

The wise prophet condemns the sluggard again in Proverbs 24:30-34, alluding to the comparison of ants. Discipline is stressed; one who does not prepare for and give maintenance to his spiritual wisdom will succumb to the corrupt world. The man’s field is overgrown with thorns, his wall is broken down, yet still he “folds his hands” as one without wisdom about what is happening. The ant prepares and stores, like a man observing God’s wisdom, spiritual decay is prevented while glorious thoughts are reserved for future days of trouble. The comparison between Proverbs 6 and 24 reinforces the biblical presentation of curse and blessing. Both curse and blessing serve to instruct and direct God’s covenant people to maintain affection toward God’s word and work. The wise prophet in Proverbs understands the necessity of describing both the positive and the negative when it comes to spiritual mindedness, in both instances the student learns of the vital practice of meditation.

Exegesis of Proverbs 6:6-8 illustrates that meditation on creation serves to produce wisdom in the practitioner. The act of considering God’s works applies transformative insight into the spiritual life of the observer. Examination of God’s creation is instructed for prevention of spiritual decay and for reservation of knowledge. Proverbs 6:6-8 teaches that meditation on God’s creative works benefits the lifestyle of worship.

⁷⁵Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 218.

Luke 12:24-28

Luke 12 contains a discourse where Jesus expounds on the necessity for Christians to obey and trust the grace God has secured. Jesus urges listeners to consider the ravens, some of “the least respected of birds” in the ancient world; yet God’s comprehensive care, as Darrell Bock phrases it, reveals even carrion have a purpose under Sovereign God.⁷⁶ Christians, like the original disciples, are susceptible to forgetting the implications of God’s sovereignty.⁷⁷ Birds, flowers, and grass all prove from nature God has a purpose and a plan. Jesus rebukes the anxiety of the followers, exhorting they grow in faith by utilizing the tools of creation to point their faith to God’s sovereignty.

The middle of this passage (vv. 25-26) provides a clear reference to what Jesus wants the disciples to learn from the birds and the flowers. A single hour is a small thing for God, but something no human is capable of adding to his life. Jesus asks his disciples to learn of God’s providence and bar themselves from anxiety over what is secure in God’s possession. Dale Allison expounds that if God *knows* all that is needed, then, based on this complete knowledge, he will *supply* all that is needed.⁷⁸ Birds and flowers are examples of God’s sovereign will in creation if disciples would meditate on the attributes of God evident through creation. Jesus teaches the natural order is to be a means of increasing faith by gaining knowledge of God. Rather than be hindered by anxiety and lack of spiritual discipline, Jesus insists his followers meditate on the word and works of God for the joy and benefit of their own progressive sanctification.

Just as with Proverbs 6, natural philosophy gives men to contemplate nature, which leads to the Maker of all things. God gives his people to ponder everything in this

⁷⁶Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 1160.

⁷⁷Bock. *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1163.

⁷⁸Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 2016), 149.

life for the furtherance of his glorification, to behold his wisdom and goodness and to know what Manton describes as the fullness “of the mystery of the incarnation, person, natures, and mediation of Christ.”⁷⁹ Natural philosophy, practiced in the observation of birds and fields, provides a means to look for the creator, to discern attributes of the creator, and to glory in creation. The provision witnessed in the care of birds and fields is here analyzed as a reason for trust and assurance of God carrying out his providential purpose more so for those made in his image. God will provide his peoples’ basic needs that they might have a singleness of mind; focusing the whole person on the concern of God’s kingdom with eyes set on the throne of Christ.⁸⁰ Jesus reveals that meditating on God’s work in and through creation produces a response of worship.

Exegesis of Luke 12:24-28 demonstrates everything in all creation has its purpose in giving God glory based in assurance that everything is under the Triune God’s sovereign command. Meditators are to share a singleness of mind in God’s providence and provision. Attributes of God are evidences throughout creation and these attributes are manifest in Jesus Christ. Through examination of creation, and analysis of the corresponding attributes of God, the person meditating is capable of experiencing the knowledge of God and responding with the worship due him.

Conclusion

The sections above examine the relationship between God’s words and works and how the believer is to utilize both for the purpose of meditation. The first section demonstrated that meditation provides a necessary means for sustained obedience to God’s Word. The second section demonstrated meditation inclines the heart of the believer toward holiness. The third section illustrated that God’s attributes and work in

⁷⁹Manton, *Psalm 119*, 3:445.

⁸⁰Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 354.

creation remind the Christian of the various applications found in meditation. These three sections come into unity in the practice of meditation. Biblical meditation begins with the Word of God and the objective understanding of what is to be obeyed for the purpose of peace and welfare. The Christian strives for holiness through mortifying sinful thoughts and directing attention to godly thoughts. Finally, the meditator is capable of identifying God's continuing presence in the world, utilizing creation as a means for identifying God's attributes as observed in Scripture. Not only does Scripture serve as the instrument for biblical meditation, it serves as a prescriptive manual for Christians in the proper method and usefulness of meditation while simultaneously enlivening the believer by the Holy Spirit. The following chapter will serve to explain further the history, practicality, and theory of meditation in the lives of God's people.

CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL, THEORETICAL, AND PRACTICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO BIBLICAL MEDITATION

Christian history provides valuable guidance for the practice of biblical meditation. A survey of the historical practices of biblical meditation not only illustrates diversity in practice, but reveals there is an underlying practice throughout two millennia that seeks for scriptural precision. An awareness of the historical practices of meditation serves as the background for the theoretical and practical issues of biblical meditation. The chapter begins with a historical survey, then offers three sections that identify the necessity of Scripture as the basis for meditation, the role and effects of meditation in progressive sanctification, and proper practice of biblical meditation outside of Scripture. Each of these three sections draw impetus from the witness of Christian history.

**Christian Practices of Meditation
across Two Millennia**

This section serves as a brief survey through church history by examining the various methods of meditation practiced by Christians. Due to the limitations of providing a full account of the history of biblical meditation, and due to the limited scope of this project, this survey will observe only the overarching meditation practices taught or witnessed through two millennia. The section will be broken into four subsections surveying church history: AD 1–1000, 1001–1500, 1501–1900, and 1901-present. Two approaches to spiritual discipline are witnessed in the survey: one that places authority on

the Word of God and one that places authority on the experience of man.

AD 1-1000

The Roman rhetorician Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC) instructs, “Virtue is not some kind of knowledge to be possessed without using it: even if the intellectual possession of knowledge can be maintained without use, virtue consists entirely in its employment.”¹ Cicero, a pagan, believed meditating on virtuous teachings would necessarily involve the living out of virtues; knowing something intellectually is not the same as experiencing its truth. Similarly, the early church fathers found meditation to be the key to living out the life of Christ. If Scripture is divine revelation from God, then its employment carries eternal consequence. Early centuries of Christendom show a manner of allegorizing Scripture in order to apply it to the self and others. Though allegorizing Scripture is a flawed hermeneutic, it points to the Fathers’ desire for personal application in every sentence of God’s Word. John O’Keefe and R. Reno explain, “For the fathers, the Bible is the array of words, sentences, laws, images, episodes, and narratives that does not acquire meaning because of its connection to an *x*; it confers meaning because it *is* divine revelation” with intrinsic power ordained by God.²

An early practitioner of meditation is Athanasius (296–373); in his letter to Marcellinus he instructs the believer to recite Scripture in order to affect the interior life.³

¹Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*, ed. James E. G. Zetzel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

²John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 12.

³Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), 126-27.

However, Athanasius explains, through dialogue in *The Life of Antony*, even recitation of Scripture for the purpose of prayer and contemplation can lose integrity if the inclination of the heart is not set on actual discipline.⁴ Recitation is not the whole practice of meditation as it can lead to a false piety, but Athanasius affirms spiritual discipline must be grounded in the authority of Scripture.

Augustine (354–430) does not explicitly instruct biblical meditation, but he models the reading of God’s word as a spiritual exercise, which is observed in his writing. He argued that God cannot be measured by human instrument, nor be seen fully in a penetrable comprehension. Augustine is not going back to his flirtation with Manicheanism. Further reading clarifies his instruction; a person cannot look at both the back of the head and the front of the head simultaneously in attempts to know a person fully.⁵ When reading Scripture, a person must be enlightened by the Spirit to grasp anything revelatory of God. The biblical reader is to pause upon the text and experience the immaterial guidance of the words. As the mind becomes saturated with Scripture over continuous readings, more of God’s presence will come to mind as the Spirit inclines the heart to comprehend the revelation of God. As the believer grows in knowledge, they likewise grow in the ability of experiencing the front and back of the person at once. Similar of Augustine’s writings elaborate that the meditator absorbs the Scripture in its

⁴Athanasius, *Life of Antony and Letter to Marcellinus*, 50.

⁵See Augustine of Hippo, *Essential Sermons*, ed. Daniel Doyle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007), 197-98.

spiritual sense, growing in knowledge and faith by the Spirit.⁶

Augustine's *Confessions* advances a method of reading Scripture and meditating to apply it to the interior through journaled prayer, what many Reformers would later refer to as contemplative soliloquy.⁷ Augustine processed knowledge of Scripture through personal memory and self-examination. Augustine understood memory as willed to act in accordance with thought; coaxed from memory thoughts are to be discerned and applied for specific purposes.⁸ Spiritual growth, through such means, is gradual and requires regular practice. Augustine practiced meditation by reasoning his memory in accordance with what he knew from Scripture.⁹ The Christian grows in conviction, faith, and worship by distinguishing personal memory and processing the memory with spiritual mindedness.

The practice of *lectio divina* grew out of the Christian community's concern for a methodological means of maturity in spiritual growth. *Lectio divina*, in English, translates to 'holy reading,' or 'divine reading.' It is a four-tiered schedule or loose organization of reading Scripture, praying, meditating, and experiencing communion with God. The purpose of *lectio divina* is to orient Christians to experience the sense of God

⁶Augustine explains that as disciples mature they are to become more enlightened by Scripture, reading it in light of love for God and love for neighbor. See *Instructing Beginners in Faith*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Raymond Canning (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 110. Augustine's writing on the spiritual reading of Scripture is found throughout *Teaching Christianity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996).

⁷Janette Tilley, "Meditation and Consolatory Soul-God Dialogues in Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Germany," *Music & Letters* 88, no. 3 (2007): 438.

⁸Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 218.

⁹Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 274.

by climbing through four particular moments of spiritual activity.¹⁰ The benefit of *lectio divina* is its uniformity among both new and mature Christians. The system afforded through this particular blend of spiritual disciplines is a template for growth and practice that, at first take, works for any believer. However, the practice grew into different and less accessible forms as it evolved over time.

Duncan Robertson points to John Cassian (360–435) as the progenitor of the practice *lectio divina*.¹¹ However, Greg Peters argues even earlier monastic communities, those from whom Cassian likely received his information concerning meditation practices, had such practices in place before Cassian’s instructions were compiled.¹² Following Cassian’s writings on regimented prayer and reading, Benedict of Nursia (480–547) systematized his own pattern for meditation in his rule for monks.¹³ Benedict taught *lectio divina* as a means to ascend the spiritual ladder to God.¹⁴ Benedict’s ladder consists of four movements: reading Scripture (*lectio*), meditating on what is read

¹⁰Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Triumph, 1996), 57.

¹¹Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Pub., 1996), xiii.

¹²Greg Peters, *The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 45. Peters provides the testimony of Pachomius (d. ca. 346) as an attestation that meditation practices were already organized and used as a regimental discipline in the lives of monks prior to a recorded design like that of John Cassian or Benedict of Nursia.

¹³Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 4.

¹⁴Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, trans. W. K. Lowther Clarke (London: S. P. C. K., 1931), 2. The concept of *lectio divina* is most often derived from chap. 48 of Benedict’s Rule, however, the teaching is drawn from several different pieces of the document (such as the reading of the Psalter and the Passion narrative). According to his prologue, Benedict explains the way to salvation is narrow, therefore, “It is by progressing in the life of conversion and faith that, with heart enlarged and in ineffable sweetness of love, one runs in the way of God’s commandments, so that never deserting His discipleship but persevering until death in His doctrine within the monastery, we may partake by patience in the suffering of Christ and become worthy inheritors of His kingdom.”

(*meditatio*), praying according to the reading (*oratio*), and anticipating beatific vision (*contemplatio*).¹⁵ Development of *lectio divina* grew out of monasticism, where certain people privileged to recluse could dedicate themselves to spiritual exercises. Steven Ozment notes, “Withdrawal from the world was believed to be the most perfect form of Christian confession, second only to actual martyrdom.”¹⁶ Christian meditation post-Benedict’s Rule became synonymous with the expectation of monastics whose goal was “complete self-forgetfulness, a spiritual death of one’s natural self and a transformation into a godlike self.”¹⁷

Pseudo-Dionysius focuses specifically on the fourth rung of *lectio divina*—contemplation, anticipating beatific visions. Sometime in the sixth century, Dionysius writes that symbols and other manufactured items, such as words, are merely types that Christians are to use for the purpose of contemplation, so to be lifted to enlightenment with the divine. Dionysius’ view, argues Ozment, is that “Scripture is more titillation than revelation.”¹⁸ According to Dionysius’ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* as practitioners contemplate the outer-shrine of the world, the exercise of contemplation will lead to a revelation of the arch-type in the believers inner-shrine.¹⁹ Expected from Gnostic texts, Dionysius, in his *Mystical Theology* presents certain levels of attainment as though to

¹⁵Robertson, *Lectio Divina*, 226.

¹⁶Steven E. Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 83.

¹⁷Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 84.

¹⁸Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 119.

¹⁹*The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, trans. John Parker (1897; repr., n.p.:Veritatis Splendor Pub., 2013), 343.

manipulate or earn spiritual transcendence; the practitioner is expected to ascend a ladder from base symbols to complete abstractions and thereby reach unintelligible union with the Divine.²⁰ Unintelligibility is asserted because humanity cannot comprehend the divine unless gifted the ability to comprehend the abstractions of the arch-type symbols.

Gregory the Great (540–604) wrote his process for meditation in the second half of the sixth century.²¹ There are striking similarities between Gregory and Augustine’s theology of contemplation, yet Gregory is known for a more concrete process. Gregory writes of the need for Christians to meditate in order to purge sin and corrupted thoughts from the interior life. Purgation, as a process, consists of mortification, active good works, and contemplation on God’s word and attributes. All things, whether heavenly or earthly, are meant to work in a particular way so to stir the creature in contemplating God’s purpose. All things ecstatic, “all such psycho-physical phenomena,” were outside of Gregory’s limits for orthodox practice or experience.²² At this point, distance between the two approaches of meditation grew fully realized.

1001-1500

Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) wrote on the contemplation of God and the things of God.²³ Anselm, in the vein of Augustine, records in both his *Monologion* and *Proslogion* personal reflections and prayers to God as he contemplated questions of

²⁰*Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 167.

²¹Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life* (1926; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003), 68-69.

²²Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 87.

²³Anselm of Canterbury, “Proslogion,” in *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and Gillian Evans (New York: Oxford, 1998), 86, 97.

theology. Anselm writes that it is through rational thought and reasoning that a person, by meditating, comes to any true understanding of God, or supreme essence.²⁴ Whether or not God’s light is comprehensible, Anselm holds that God has gifted the intellect and rational capabilities for the exact purpose of humanity to seek after his supreme essence. Eileen C. Sweeney writes that Anselm’s reason for rejecting esotericism when practicing or seeking to understand spirituality is due to his view that God gifted the intellect in order for his saints to seek him without restrictions of benefit. Sweeney attests, “Anselm is arguably the medieval thinker whose commitment to reason in this sense is most audacious and complete.”²⁵ Not only did Anselm hold to a strict orthodoxy when he approached knowledge and Scripture, but this orthodoxy fed into his views on spirituality as well. Robertson rightly credits Anselm for re-founding “meditation and prayer on a basis of doctrinal understanding applied to reader’s own self-examination.”²⁶

The early twelfth century erupted with new and divisive concerns for monasticism and contemplative mysticism.²⁷ As scholasticism spread through the Holy Roman Empire, so too divergent patterns for running monasteries and for exercising personal piety—these patterns spread by way of correspondence between scholars and their public lessons as well as through sermons and homilies. Religious leaders and instructors like Peter Abelard (1079–1142), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), and Hugo

²⁴Anselm of Canterbury, “Monologion,” in *Major Works*, 72.

²⁵Eileen C. Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2012), 371.

²⁶Robertson, *Lectio Divina*, 149.

²⁷Horst Fuhrmann, *Germany in the High Middle Ages c.1050-1200* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 115.

of Saint-Victor (1096–1141) had great disagreements in how to approach Scripture for the purpose of contemplation.

Bernard, still a major influence in contemplative theology to this day, instructed a deeper concern for spiritual emphasis in the Christian life.²⁸ He preaches, in the sermon *On Conversion*, that through contemplation, which he used synonymously with meditation, the Christian's will is changed by a transformed desire brought on by raised affections toward heavenly things, those things worthy of meditation.²⁹ The method Bernard describes for meditation is to scrutinize God. He explains, "Scrutinizing God's majesty, then, is something to regard with awe. But it is safe and devout to seek to know his will. Why should I not devote myself wholeheartedly to studying the mystery of his holy will when I know that I must obey it in all things?"³⁰ The argument Bernard makes through his sermons on contemplation and meditation identifies a distinction between a purely rational process of considering God's Word and works and a method to incline the heart and will to desire after what is discovered through rational consideration. Bernard teaches that contemplation apprehends truth doubtlessly, but consideration searches and weighs the possibility of truth.³¹ According to his instruction to Eugenius III, contemplation is the greater means for communing with God because God himself created the human mind to act rationally, but he likewise enlightens those minds that

²⁸Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 212.

²⁹Bernard of Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, ed. Gillian R. Evans (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1987), 84. This sermon was preached in 1140 in Paris.

³⁰Bernard, *Selected Works*, 249. This quote comes from Sermon 62.

³¹Bernard, *Selected Works*, 145.

search his truth as a spiritual discipline.³²

During this period the figure Guigo II (1114–1193) molded and popularized “the Carthusian manner of life.”³³ Guigo offers a balanced view of *lectio divina* by using language that does not quite push for beatific visions or perfectionism and maintains the use of Scripture as the means for spiritual edification. His *Ladder of the Monks* flourishes in the trappings of Neoplatonism, arguing for the use of *lectio divina* to experience a life that is “wholly spiritual.”³⁴ Inferred from the title of his treatise, Guigo suggests there are certain levels or ladders of attainment when approaching the spiritual life. Even with the expressions of Neoplatonism and transactional spiritualism, Guigo agrees with Anselm’s assertions concerning the use of Scripture and the Holy Spirit’s role in enlivening the saints. Guigo observes that those seeking to learn, or practice spiritual disciplines like meditation, can “learn more clearly only from the book of experience where God’s grace itself is the teacher,” the Bible.³⁵ Though Guigo believes the influence of the Holy Spirit will enrapture the successful student of *lectio divina*, he also holds that the student must utilize rational thinking and reasoning when approaching and applying the text of Scripture prior to the divinely ordained enrapturing of the spiritual soul.³⁶ Given the further exaltation of this latter teaching throughout the history that followed, it appears

³²Bernard, *Selected Works*, 166.

³³Peters, *The Story of Monasticism*, 144. Peters distinguished Carthusian monasticism as a movement seeking to identify with the desert fathers in more primitive and secluded spiritual lifestyle.

³⁴Guigo II, *Ladder of the Monks and Twelve Meditations*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1979), 74.

³⁵Guigo, *Ladder of the Monks*, 75-6. Guigo identifies both a literal sense and a spiritual sense to the Scriptures. This understanding is in line with much of what is taught in *lectio divina* and what can be drawn from writings like Pseudo-Dionysius and *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

³⁶Guigo, *Ladder of the Monks*, 68.

Anselm's influence was not strong enough for Guigo's contemporaries.

The late twelfth century witnessed the laywomen in Belgium, known as the Beguines, leading and practicing *lectio divina*. This movement, personified by Mary of Oignies (1177–1213) consisted of married or unmarried women who sought to foster spiritual formation in impoverished communities without reservation to social class.³⁷ These women were especially focused on meditation as a means to separate from the world around them, a world of lepers and poverty, and become perfect saints even in their present circumstance.³⁸ These unstructured communities began including men, known as the Beghards. Ozment notes that these groups, the Beguines and Beghards, were eventually referred to as Free Spirit heretics.³⁹ Those who came under Beguine care and authority were taught that meditation, *lectio divina*, and good works served to bring spiritual enlightenment that beatified the saints as they climbed the spiritual ladder.⁴⁰

Bonaventure (1217–1274) held to a spirituality permitting the world around him to be a means for contemplating on the attributes of God.⁴¹ Through his writings Bonaventure strived to make apology to the disparity between the two approaches to meditation; the Neoplatonist approach of hierarchy and the Augustinian approach of the interior life. The distinction Bonaventure makes contrasted with *The Cloud of Unknowing*

³⁷Glenn E. Myers, *Seeking Spiritual Intimacy: Journeying Deeper with Medieval Women of Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 21-23.

³⁸Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 133.

³⁹Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 91.

⁴⁰Myers, *Seeking Spiritual Intimacy*, 53.

⁴¹Louis K. Dupre and James A. Wiseman, *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 134.

and Dionysius is noted by Denys Turner as “an ascent of the intellect to God” rather than obtaining esoteric enlightening; “though not of intellect to the exclusion of desire and love.”⁴² Bonaventure did not divorce the attributes of God from the communion to be experienced through scriptural knowledge. Philosophically aligned with Gregory, Bonaventure insisted upon the sufficiency of Scripture for the enlightening of the person to experience affections. The believer is enlightened solely by God’s sovereign grace; the instrument of God’s work in sanctification is none other than Scripture and contemplation of its divinely revealed doctrines.⁴³ Bonaventure was concerned to organize and categorize these theological truths for the purpose contemplation. This organizational method continued in the popular works of the late medieval Thomas à Kempis.⁴⁴ While Bonaventure was arguing for the use of Scripture among God’s people for the purpose of enlivening and knowledge-based spiritual formation, Stephen of Sawley was actively arguing an opposing tradition. Stephen’s teaching for monks, concerning *lectio divina*, had beginners use biographical material and devotional writings for their meditations before attaining to a place where they could receive Bible verses for their meditations.⁴⁵

The contribution to contemplative theology entitled *The Cloud of Unknowing* emerged around the second half of the fourteenth century. Reminiscent of Pseudo-

⁴²Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 116.

⁴³Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 25-26.

⁴⁴See Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ: Called Also the Ecclesiastical Music* (1441), trans. Charles Bigg (London: Methuen, 1908). This staunchly Roman Catholic work paved the way for post-Reformation contemplative practices observed in the Jesuit Order and Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* (1548).

⁴⁵Peters, *The Story of Monasticism*, 142-43.

Dionysius, the unknown author of *The Cloud* denies any manner of contemplation that relies upon intellect; such a stance was antagonistic toward Bonaventure who was a contemporary scholar of Christian spirituality. Disregarding Scripture, the actions, and most attributes of God, the treatise posits that God is a gloomy cloud outside regular means of human contemplation; to come to know God is to know nothing. The anonymous author explains this as “perfect union . . . of nothing to nothing.” The human is to carry no affections or images to the throne of unknowing, but, in the act of the Divine Spirit, the meditator apprehends “God with an exclusion of all conceptions and apprehensions.”⁴⁶ Esoteric ideas are used to compel the mind into the dark cloud. Entrance into the cloud of unknowing is a mysterious and unintelligible encounter incapable of description, as it exists outside earthly boundaries. Contemplative prayer, the author teaches, “is a gratuitous gift of God” issued by blind love, not from practical forms of biblical meditation.⁴⁷ The form of meditation stylized in this work is recognizably dualistic. While much of the Christian scholarship at the time did not treat such mysticism as concerning, the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and *The Cloud* found their way into the church and its communal understanding of spirituality.

1501-1900

The Reformation was more than just a break from the papacy—it also gave rise to revival of, and new approaches to spiritual disciplines. The great Reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) was concerned with Christian conscience and the need for protection

⁴⁶Phyllis Hodgson, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counseling*, Early English Text Society 218 (London: Oxford, 1958), 202.

⁴⁷Dupre and Wiseman, *Light from Light*, 250.

against sin and Satan.⁴⁸ Luther, finding the ladder-mentality of the Roman Catholic Church to be despicable, condemned *lectio divina* and contrived his own method consisting of three equal and simultaneous categories indicative of the Christian life: prayer (*oratio*), Scripture meditation (*meditation*), and trial (*tentatio*).⁴⁹ Luther, with great concern for abiding solely in God’s Word and not in our own reasoning and understanding, cautions, “God wants to give you his Spirit only through the external Word.”⁵⁰ Luther’s retrieval of the doctrine of *sola fide* contradicts the medieval understanding that man’s likeness to God served as condition for saving knowledge and saving relationship.⁵¹ The Reformer showed regard for disciplined meditation only as it utilized God’s word and works; Luther instructs, “Constantly handle and compare, read and reread the Word as preached and the very words as written in Scripture, diligently noting and meditating on what the Holy Spirit means.”⁵²

Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) does not explicitly mention meditation, but he conveys something similar to Paul’s understanding of spiritual mindedness in Colossians 3. Zwingli, debating those he labels catabaptists, argues that the Christian has dual citizenship both on earth and in heaven in the present reality. Prayer and Christian duty are two outcomes of a perpetual contemplation on things above. Zwingli states of the

⁴⁸James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1986), 76, 80, 285.

⁴⁹Tilley, “Meditation and Consolatory Soul-God Dialogues,” 446.

⁵⁰Martin Luther, *Luther’s Spirituality*, ed. and trans. Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), 122–23.

⁵¹Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 242.

⁵²Luther, *What Luther Says*, 3:1359.

meditative Christian, “He lives there [heaven] in contemplation and moves thither in possession and in fruition, no doubt.”⁵³ Christians are to be so heavenly-minded that whether or not they serve or perform any duty, they do so in service and mindfulness of their Lord in heaven as though they are possessing glory even now on earth.

Scripture is the chief concern in Zwingli’s reform, as everything a Christian believes must come from this objectively revealed source. It is the Spirit who creates the faith in the Christian to believe the objectively revealed source (1 John 2:20-21, 27). Elaborating on Zwingli’s explanation of the believer’s relationship with Scripture, W. P. Stephens insists, “It is the word that needs the Spirit, rather than the Spirit who needs the word.”⁵⁴ While the Word is the infallible revelation of God, its revealing to the Christian always and only comes through the Spirit. Zwingli believed in the intersection of the Word and the believer’s conscience as a production of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that indwells the believer and produces what is commanded in Scripture. Likewise, the believer seeks to be spiritually-minded as directed by Scripture.

John Calvin put a high focus on the mystical union the individual has with Christ, a union that consists of the believer’s engrafting through the gift of faith by means of Scripture.⁵⁵ Dennis Tamburello posits that Calvin was not compelled to discuss much about mystic practices beyond condemning those of Dionysius and the contemplative movement. However, as Tamburello and Wilhelm Kolffhaus explain, Calvin agreed with

⁵³Huldrych Zwingli, *Selected Works*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, trans. Lawrence A. McLouth, Henry Preble, and George W. Gilmore (Philadelphia: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901), 204-5.

⁵⁴W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 136.

⁵⁵Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 86.

Bernard of Clairvaux that God's elect are grafted into union with Christ; this union is partly experienced through meditation. However, Calvin firmly held to a belief in mystical union that grew out of the Scripture. Faith was gifted by the Spirit through the reading and hearing of God's Word and increased with a growing knowledge of God's Word.⁵⁶ Calvin considered the experientially-focused nature of contemplative practices, like that of *lectio divina*, to be dangerous and heretical, which is why he was so cautious and reluctant to make a case for personal experiences in meditation. Scripture reading and prayer are historically, and unanimously, grounded practices for those in the faith; therefore, Calvin drew from these observances in Scripture. Based on the doctrine of union with Christ, meditation is a means of grace that further realizes and evidences the faith that comes from Scripture and the engrafting of the believer to Christ through that faith.⁵⁷

Following the Reformers, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a reinvigoration concerning the practice of biblical meditation. The impact of Luther's pattern of meditation is witnessed by the liturgy of Lutheran churches in Germany. Janette Tilley points to the example of Andreas Hammerschmidt (1611–1675) and his composition from 1646 (*Mir hast du Arbeit gemacht*) observing how meditation became a congregational tool in liturgy. Tilley observes a “dialogue takes place between two musical forces that personify the Soul and God.”⁵⁸ God takes up the text of the Soul and a unified whole emerges through integration among the choir and congregation. This is to

⁵⁶Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 85.

⁵⁷Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 96.

⁵⁸Tilley, “Meditation and Consolatory Soul-God Dialogues,” 449.

speak to those participating as they seek comfort and plead together with the choir and meditate in the music recognizing the work of Christ.

A multitude of Puritan treatises specifically focus on the topic of meditation, with emphasis and caution as to an orthodox methodology for the Christian desiring to meditate; examples include those of Joseph Hall (1574–1656), Richard Sibbes (1577–1635), John Ball (1585–1640), Edmund Calamy (1600–1666), Nathanael Ranew (1602–1678), John Owen (1616–1683), Thomas Watson (1620–1686), and Richard Steele (1629–1692), to name a few.⁵⁹ These treatises and instructions provide methods for the personal exegesis of Scripture and further meditation. Watson speaks of rumination in the same language as Luther, allegorizing the clean animals who chew the cud with the Christians who meditate on the Word of God.⁶⁰

Unlike the contemplative practices of the Roman Catholic Church and other syncretistic practices fostering eastern mystic traditions, Puritans believed the Scripture to be the single authority for all faith and practice. It would undermine the authority of Scripture and the sovereignty of God to initialize meditation without the means of God's

⁵⁹See Joseph Hall, "The Art of Divine Meditation (1606)," in *Works of the Right Reverend Joseph Hall*, vol. 6 (Oxford: University Press, 1863); Richard Sibbes, "Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations (1658)," in *Works of Richard Sibbes*, vol. 7, *Miscellaneous Sermons and Indices*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2001). This is actually a short recommendation for the practice of meditation followed by Sibbes' own meditations on various topics for the purpose of assisting the reader in the practice. See also, John Ball, *A Treatise on Divine Meditation* (London: H. Mortlock, 1660); Edmund Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1680); Nathanael Ranew, *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation* (1670; repr., London: Religious Tract Society, 1839); John Owen, "The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded," in *Works of John Owen*, vol. 7, *Sin and Grace* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1985), 262-499; Thomas Watson, "A Christian on the Mount," in *Select Discourses on Important and Interesting Subjects* (Glasgow: Blackie, Fullarton, and Co., 1829), 197-271; Richard Steele, *A Remedy for Wandering Thoughts in the Worship of God* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1835).

⁶⁰Watson, "A Christian on the Mount," 198.

revelation, but to instead use the depraved human mind to attain to God's truth. Even when imagination is employed, such fantastical thinking is hemmed in by Scripture and those thoughts organized as secondary or for the purpose of application.⁶¹ U. Milo Kaufmann writes on the unintentional disuse of imagination in Puritan meditation:

The Reformers' need for unambiguous authority in the written Word . . . meant that when the Puritan set about meditating on the Word, he would seek for inspiration in a certain kind of subject and through a particular process; to this task the imagination constituted not so much a feeble instrument to be sanctified and used despite its weakness as an utter irrelevancy. The Puritan was not likely to meditate upon events in the life of Christ but rather upon doctrines or specific propositions of Scripture.⁶²

Puritans were not so much antagonistic toward the implementation of the imagination in Catholic practices as they were against the theological premises behind the Catholic practices of meditation, the heresy that allowed for man's will to supersede God's revelation in Scripture. The reining of the imagination is true generally of the Puritans, however, some like Sibbes found that the benefits outweighed the dangers of utilizing the imagination to meditate over events of life alongside the Scripture.⁶³

John Ball laments that the practice of meditation had become to Christians nothing more than a self-directed means to speculate of God with personal notions.⁶⁴ The Puritans instructed that meditation was not merely spiritual speculation, but an intentional exegetical endeavor. Ball continues that that intentional use of meditation is nothing less

⁶¹David W. Saxton, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 42.

⁶²U. Milo Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress: And Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 126.

⁶³Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 144.

⁶⁴Ball, *A Treatise on Divine Meditation*, A3.

than communing with God by the means the God gave to know his deity and his provision of salvation.⁶⁵

Meditation is a practice and lifestyle commissioned by God for all Christians. Watson sees that while remembering and studying are vital and necessary activities for humans, they are complacent exercises. God's grace, through meditation, provokes transformation within and from the outside of the believer. Meditation is the exercise that takes hold of a memory, or Scripture, stored in the mind's cupboard and implements change for the glory of God.⁶⁶ Joseph Hall, in company with Watson and Ball, shows meditation is a divine gift mandated for new creatures in Christ, evidenced by the fact of the union to be had between man's soul and God through Scripture.⁶⁷ Far from the assertion of gnostic spirituality, the Puritans held that union with Christ was an assurance present now, yet fulfilled at the consummation of Christ. Though Hall uses the analogy of a ladder when recognizing the needed pursuit in the discipline of meditation and its role in progressive sanctification, Puritan theology clearly suggests that union with Christ is not mechanistic or manipulative. The labor of meditation is practiced in worshipful obeisance, indicative of the fruit of the Spirit's work active in the Christian life. Meditation is the means for cultivating the fruits of desire for God and the willingness to live accordingly.

Catholic meditation practices continued throughout the Puritan period and continue to find revival today, just as evangelicals are finding renewed interest in Puritan

⁶⁵Ball, *A Treatise on Divine Meditation*, 54.

⁶⁶Watson, "A Christian on the Mount," 202-3.

⁶⁷Hall, *Works of Joseph Hall*, 78-79.

piety. John Eudes (1601–1680) is one name among many purveyors of Catholic spirituality who still holds great influence in the present day. Eudes explains that meditation is discursive reasoning on the things of God in our heart, which is the superior intellect of the soul.⁶⁸ While it is true meditation reasons of God within the heart of the believer, Eudes misplaces the object of meditation. Using esoteric language, Eudes teaches that the blessed heart of Mary, the mother of God, contains the three hearts of the Trinity; based on her containing of the trinity, Eudes calls Christians to unite all faculties in adoration, “praise, and thanksgiving to the innumerable graces and treasures of the Heart of Mary.”⁶⁹ According to his devotional material, Mary’s heart “progressed incomparably farther in the mystical and supernatural world of grace;” therefore, we are to meditate upon this heart and receive the radiating light of the “dearest Mother.”⁷⁰ Eudes’ Mariology is on full display, however, his work was blessed by the Pope and he is considered a venerated saint for such spirituality and concern for icon devotion. The object of worship and meditation is after all, not even the whole person of Mary, but chiefly her mystical heart is said to contain the union of the trinity.

The devotions to Mary elicited by Eudes became so prevalent in the spiritual life of the Catholic church that they are even referenced in the apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* published October 16, 2002. The letter explains that the more a soul is consecrated to Mary, the Holy Mother, the more it will be truly consecrated to Jesus Christ. Eudes’ work continues to be an integral force for the

⁶⁸John Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, trans. Charles Di Targiani and Ruth Hauser (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1948), 8.

⁶⁹Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, 10-12.

⁷⁰Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, 40.

incorporation of Mariology within the spirituality of the Catholic faith.

While experiential meditation grew to accept and even honor subjective and personal devotional practices, evangelical Christianity continued to focus and center spiritual disciplines upon the Bible as the sole infallible rule of faith and practice. Two contemporaries of the eighteenth century display both the instructive and personal practice of biblical meditation. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) recounts in his *Personal Narrative* of his habits and experiences of biblical meditation.⁷¹ Edwards resolved “to trace each sin back to its original cause;” he carefully examined his doubts and personal holiness according to the standards of Scripture and doctrines of God.⁷² His careful meditation practice during the Northampton revivals resulted in his work *Religious Affections* wherein, as James Ford explains, he “took hold of the mixed phenomena of revival experience, and by a process of dissection and analysis he exposed the spurious and established the genuine.”⁷³ Edwards grounded true religious affections on the revelation of God through Scripture; the Word of God, according to Edwards, is the sole means to apply and invigorate the heart of man since imagination and sensation come through the natural and carnal creature.⁷⁴

Edwards’ contemporary George Whitefield (1714–1770) also preached on the

⁷¹Jonathan Edwards, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2003), 289. Edwards writes of seeking solitary places for meditation, where he would often have great affections and experiences from the Scripture by recalling particular passages and ruminating upon each word.

⁷²James M. Ford, *Evangelical Spirituality: From the Wesleys to John Stott* (London: S. P. C. K., 1991), 43.

⁷³Ford, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 52.

⁷⁴Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (1746; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2007), 44, 146.

necessity of biblical meditation. In his sermon, “Walking with God,” Whitefield preaches, “Be frequent therefore in meditation, all you that desire to keep up and maintain a close and uniform walk with the most high God. Be guided by the Holy Ghost . . . and by the unerring rule of God’s most holy Word.”⁷⁵ In another sermon, “Christians, Temples of the Living God,” Whitefield instructs his hearers that meditation ought to be a habitual and delightful means of grace for believers.⁷⁶ He explains meditation as a magnet that draws and attracts Christians to continue with Christ as the center of being; it serves to dissuade temptation and to find rest in God as all. This evangelical understanding of biblical meditation continued into the 1800’s as observed in the practical writings, popular level books, of Hannah More (1745–1833) who found her personal experience of meditation and self-examination to be worthy of illustration and instruction to other Christians.⁷⁷

As evangelical spirituality rose in both concern and practice among European and American congregations, many fringe clergymen began questioning other avenues for spirituality; either in ecstatic experiences or in the esoteric traditions of the Roman Catholic church. The prime example of this dissolution and dissent is observed in the ministry of John Henry Newman (1801–1890). Newman, who began ministry as an Anglican, left evangelicalism for the experiential draw of Catholic spirituality. He wrote of meditation in his *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* where he refers to the living traditions of the Catholic church, its dogmas and propositions of doctrine, as those things

⁷⁵George Whitefield, *Sermons of George Whitefield*, ed. Evelyn Bence (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 7-8.

⁷⁶Whitefield, *Sermons*, 274.

⁷⁷Ford, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 109, 111.

which “make clear for us the truths on which the religious imagination has to rest.”⁷⁸ The essay instructs that the knowledge the church provides is the means by which Christians are to exercise their affections. For a proper understanding of what Newman means regarding the teachings of the church it is necessary to view the doctrine he is referencing: *sensus fidelium*, or the living sense of truth provided in the community of the Catholic congregation. This doctrine was later approved and asserted in Vatican II. Newman believed the Holy Spirit dwelled in each person and acted in a way to provide truths of the faith.⁷⁹ Whether or not some certain practice of the community was heretical did not concern Newman, as Frank Turner elaborates, “Corruptions are not corruptions but rather developments if they persist in particular ways.”⁸⁰ John Connolly and Brian Hughes write, “For Newman, prayer and meditation are essential elements in the ongoing quest to realize the presence of the indwelling Spirit and to grow in the spiritual life.”⁸¹ This is a strong statement many evangelicals would agree with; however, Newman believed these essential elements could bring about further developments in the truths of the faith, such as incorporating new devotions to Mary for spiritual benefit and ascent.⁸² Turner analyzes the elements of Newman’s spiritual life to evidence why he left the

⁷⁸John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, and Co., 1874), 93-94.

⁷⁹John R. Connolly and Brian W. Hughes, *Newman and Life in the Spirit: Theological Reflections on Spirituality for Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 6.

⁸⁰Frank Miller Turner, *John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2002), 634.

⁸¹Connolly and Hughes, *Newman and Life in the Spirit*, 159.

⁸²In Newman’s own book of devotions, as Eudes before him, he instructs such prayerful meditations as “Heart, vessel of the Holy Ghost, Heart of Mary, shrine of the Trinity, Heart of Mary, home of the Word.” John Henry Newman, *Meditation and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman*, 3rd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), 334-35.

evangelical faith, concluding that Newman was restless; he resented spiritual authority and carried with him an inability “to find steady spiritual refuge.”⁸³ Turner includes in his analysis a lifelong determination to dwell with other celibate males. Newman’s personal grudges over the evangelical faith weighed into his personal desire for forming his own spiritual discipline practices; at the core of his instruction is an antagonism toward a central objective means for biblical meditation and a propensity to assent to whatever brings about sensational experience.

While some like Newman managed to flee from their evangelical roots in search of experiential spirituality, many within evangelicalism did not cease to encourage and instruct the practice of biblical meditation as the modern era approached. Robert Murray McCheyne (1813–1843) wrote letters and journal entries both shepherding congregants to meditate as well as providing evidence his own personal times of meditation. McCheyne “felt meditation and prayer to be the very sinews of his work;” he regarded the times he spent riding his horse in solitude as a “systematic pursuit of personal holiness.”⁸⁴ Andrew Bonar explains McCheyne’s practice of meditation as a prayerful examination of God’s Word, noting the meditator would wander in the woods until, “he had drunk in refreshment to his soul by meditation on the Word of God.”⁸⁵ One particular letter of advice to a congregant explains the need and course of meditation, exemplifying an organized and systematic means for the intake of God’s Word.⁸⁶ Though

⁸³Turner, *John Henry Newman*, 641.

⁸⁴Robert Murray McCheyne, *The Works of Reverend Robert Murray McCheyne*, ed. Andrew A. Bonar (New York: Robert Carter and Bros., 1874), 55

⁸⁵Andrew A. Bonar, “Memoir,” in *Works of Reverend Robert Murray McCheyne*, 86.

⁸⁶McCheyne, *Works*, 222.

McCheyne lived only a short time, his legacy of writings demonstrates his, and his evangelical correspondent's, adherence to an orthodox methodology of meditation.

John Charles Ryle (1816–1900), like McCheyne, instructed meditation as an organized Scripture-centered exercise. Ryle feared too many Christians were living below their privileges afforded by their union with Christ because of their lack of knowledge on the subject of biblical meditation.⁸⁷ He explains in his book *Holiness* that prayer, reading of the Scripture, and meditation and self-examination are the roots of true Christianity. He critiques the too-common frivolity in Christian piety: “Many professing Christians never seem to get on. They are careless and slovenly about their private prayers. They read their Bibles but little, and with very little heartiness of spirit. They give themselves no time for self-inquiry and quiet thought about the state of their souls.”⁸⁸ The heart of spiritual discipline, according to Ryle, is the intake of God's Word; biblical meditation cannot be divorced from the Christian's daily spiritual exercise.

A contemporary to Ryle, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) carried on the personal practice of biblical meditation, frequently preached on the subject, and instructed the personal habit through devotions.⁸⁹ Arnold Dallimore documents that Spurgeon practiced meditation prior to his preaching, even during his first pulpit ministry. He meditated on the day's Scripture during his eight-mile walk from his house to the pulpit of his first church in order to prepare that morning's sermon.⁹⁰ He believed

⁸⁷J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (1877; repr., Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace, 2001), 58.

⁸⁸Ryle, *Holiness*, 57.

⁸⁹Spurgeon models and directs the practice of meditation in his devotional *Morning and Evening*. See the morning of August 15 and the evening of November 16 for specific examples of his teaching and direction for biblical meditation practice. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 456, 643.

⁹⁰Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 34.

the practice allowed for him to preach from the heart. Years later, preaching on the subject of biblical meditation, Spurgeon encourages that Scripture is “not only the word of God, but a Word *with* God,” indicating the primacy of Scripture as well as the power and sufficiency of Scripture for experiencing communion with God through meditation.⁹¹ Numerous times during Spurgeon’s benedictions he witnessed his faith in the Holy Spirit’s work through meditation and self-examination; he called the Holy Spirit to aid and give blessing to the process.⁹²

1901-Present

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) ushered the orthodox practice of biblical meditation into the twentieth century. Lloyd-Jones carried forward those scriptural meditation practices observed in Augustine and Edwards; he saw Christian obedience as the result of a mind grasping hold of God-gifted truth.⁹³ As truth is gifted by God the mind becomes affected through ruminations, through this process the will is turned over to God’s purposes. Meditation for Lloyd-Jones is a central characteristic and habit of the Christian’s regenerated heart and renewed mind (Rom 12:1-2). Ford notes, “To Lloyd-Jones, theological reflection by a reverent mind was a spiritually formative discipline, an exercise in passionate wisdom, a fusion of logic and prayer.”⁹⁴ The evangelical practice of biblical meditation did not wane through the millennia, but continued to be instructed even through the 1900s. Evangelicalism did not change the practice of meditation, much less redress any methodology. The practice of biblical meditation in evangelicalism continued to situate the Word of God as the objective source for spirituality while

⁹¹Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Sermon 2166: Experience and Assurance,” in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1890), 530.

⁹²Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 98, 147, 470, 578.

⁹³Ford, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 288-89.

⁹⁴Ford, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 287.

hedging off the distractions of personal revelation or syncretistic developments. As the church moved forward into the next century biblical meditation in evangelical congregations still echoed of Augustine's, Bonaventure's, the Reformers', and Puritan submission to God's Word above all else.

The twentieth century grew increasingly contentious of mysticism and the propagation of spirituality, at least in the intellectual world. In other places, the twentieth century became a time of thriving for mysticism in all gnostic forms. Postmodern thought prevailed in the early second-half of the twentieth century and continues to compel those privy to spirituality, those searching for individual paths to higher planes of existence or higher purposes. It is this individualism that brings Christians to profess themselves as Christian, but also Buddhist;⁹⁵ Christian, but also Zen;⁹⁶ Christian, but also practicing forms of Transcendental Meditation.⁹⁷ What is revealed in postmodern spiritual practice is the immense shift into individualistic subjective religiosity. David Wells understands that individualistic spirituality offers a naturalistic object to be obtained whenever and however the Christian desires, but by way of subjective and unrestrictive personal paths toward attainment.⁹⁸

⁹⁵Paul F. Knitter, interview by Thomas C. Fox, "Double Belonging: Buddhism and Christian Faith," *National Catholic Reporter*, last modified June 23, 2010, accessed December 13, 2017, <https://ncronline.org/news/double-belonging-buddhism-and-christian-faith/>. Knitter is the author of *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*, and is a professor at Union Theological Seminary.

⁹⁶For instance, the self-congratulatory personal narrative of J. K. Kadowaki, *Zen and the Bible: A Priest's Experience*, trans. Joan Rieck (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

⁹⁷Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation* (1979; repr., Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2002), 10.

⁹⁸David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 166.

Modern recapitulations of *lectio divina* share in the same subjective spirituality found in New Age and transcendental movements. John Main writes as the self-professed voice for Christian meditation, “In our meditation we begin to enter into this state by our renunciation of words, images, thoughts and even self-consciousness, everything which is in itself contingent, ephemeral, tangential.”⁹⁹ Continuing, Main alleges that the purpose of meditation is to empty the self and attain to a sense of unity with the Absolute; such language could easily be spoken by any Buddhist meditation instructor.

Considering the Buddhist influence in modern forms of Christian meditation, a caution is quite clear in the story of J. K. Kadowaki, who studied meditation from Zen masters. He expresses meditations on the cross are shallow because they include willfulness on the part of the practitioner. Kadowaki chastises Christians for allowing the mind and heart to actively participate in meditative experience, rather than emptying their minds.¹⁰⁰ Kadowaki goes so far as to emphasize certain levels of enlightenment, considering himself as enlightened.¹⁰¹ Through enlightenment, esoteric, or “simple,” wisdom is imparted as a means to earn deeper revelatory truth only the most achieved Christian meditators attain.

In spite of the above transgressions against biblical meditation throughout the twentieth, and into the twenty-first centuries, several discourses on the nature of Christian

⁹⁹John Main, *Word Into Silence: A Manual for Christian Meditation* (Norwich, England: Canterbury Press, 2006), 28.

¹⁰⁰Kadowaki, *Zen and the Bible*, 158.

¹⁰¹Kadowaki, *Zen and the Bible*, 155. Kadowaki reveals the synergism at work in this type of Neoplatonist meditation: “In both Zen and Christianity, the person who has reached the pinnacle of truth is simple and docile, like a little child. In that simplicity, however, there lie hidden infinite riches.”

meditation continue to hold the orthodox sail against postmodernity's tumultuous waves. Calvin Miller cautions against the emptying of the mind when he instructs believers to instead empty themselves of sin and self only to fill their hearts with the knowledge of Christ and his kingly desires.¹⁰² Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, in reflection on Psalm 119, that in order to understand Christian doctrine with any authority, a person must spend time in meditation, pondering the knowledge of God: "Nothing could be more wrong than that activism or that feeling of contentment which denies the worth of reflection and meditation."¹⁰³ Bonhoeffer teaches that meditation is "essential to anyone who seeks God's commandments and not just [their] own thoughts."¹⁰⁴

The historical research reveals a consistent practice of biblical meditation observable throughout two millennia. While divergent practices—even those bordering on heresy—persist, the Bible still teaches meditation. Practices taught by the Puritans were not original, but a recapitulation of those described in the Bible. Modern scholarship draws from a historical analysis of biblical meditation that goes back into biblical history. The Spirit still moves in the interior of the saints just the same as he did in the first century; God does not change nor does his commission and ordered practice of meditation change. Two currents are observable in the survey of Christian meditation, those that hold to Scripture and those that hold to subjective experience and the desire to attain to something other.

¹⁰²Calvin Miller, *The Table of Inwardness: Nurturing Our Inner Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 50.

¹⁰³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, trans. David McI. Gracie (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1986), 132.

¹⁰⁴Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 132.

Scripture as the Basis for Meditation

Understanding the biblical affirmation and the historical practice of meditation, it is important to examine a proper methodology for this spiritual discipline by noting the practices that are flawed and those practices that should be encouraged. Michael Haykin writes, “The power and blessing of meditation does not lie in the technique but in the *content*.”¹⁰⁵ It is bizarre to not use the revelation of God as the means for meditative content. Hans Urs von Balthasar asks, “Can an angel speak of God in such a way as to reveal his inner depths?”¹⁰⁶ The answer to that question is emphatically no, only God can reveal himself, and has revealed himself specifically through Scripture. Balthasar continues, “Meditation can only meaningfully be reflection on and assimilation of God’s Word.”¹⁰⁷ Meditation is not a practice that has fallen into disuse in the modern church, it is a practice that has fallen into misuse from lack of faith in the authority of Scripture. As Haykin notes, intentional meditation upon God’s word and works will result in blessing.

Herbert Benson describes the western approach to mysticism as actively involving the human and natural world as an expression of God’s incarnate and intrusive prerogative. Union with God in meditation is engaged by human and natural means: intellect, creation, human love and emotion, etc. Conversely, he observes that Eastern mysticism holds that all “humanness” and created order serves as an obstruction to some

¹⁰⁵Michael A. G. Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2007), 65.

¹⁰⁶Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Christian Meditation*, trans. Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 8.

¹⁰⁷Balthasar, *Christian Meditation*, 8.

form of self-attaining ascent. “The emphasis” writes Benson, “of Eastern mysticism has been on pure soul-consciousness, to annihilate the flesh and deny its reality in order to reach absolute freedom.”¹⁰⁸ The ascetic, or dualistic, approach to meditation is rooted in a simultaneous denial that the present reality is good or intended for humanity and desire for an inner reality involving only spiritual essence contented in God-hood. Balthasar argues against this dualism when he articulates, “The Spirit does not ‘spiritualize’ what is earthly”—what God reveals of himself is not too far from those to whom he affects.¹⁰⁹ Going back to the early gnostic writing of Pseudo-Dionysius and up to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, even in Christian spirituality there continues to be echoes of Eastern mysticism prevalent in the church’s understanding of spirituality, especially regarding meditation. The only solution to spiritual ignorance is the intake of God’s Word.

The Practitioner Internalizes Truth

David Mathis describes meditation with concision when he says,

Christian meditation . . . is fundamentally different from the “meditation” popularly co-opted by various non-Christian systems. It doesn’t entail emptying our minds, but rather filling them with biblical and theological substance—truth outside of ourselves—and then chewing on that content, until we begin to feel some of its magnitude in our hearts.¹¹⁰

Meditation is the internalizing of truth; this internalization is more than simply ingesting the words, but of internally conforming the person to harness those words as personal and objective truth for the purpose of living differently. John Owen encourages, “God hath

¹⁰⁸Herbert Benson, *The Relaxation Response* (New York: William Morrow, 1975), 89.

¹⁰⁹Balthasar, *Christian Meditation*, 30.

¹¹⁰David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 56.

secured the growth of this spiritual life, by the provision of food for it, whereby it may be strengthened and increased; for life must be preserved by food. And this in our case is the Word of God, with all other ordinances of divine worship which depend thereon.”¹¹¹ If man neglects food he will see decay throughout his whole person. So too, if man neglects rumination, what Owen regards the “suitable nourishment provided . . . in the good Word of God’s grace,” then spiritual decay will pursue him until all corruption takes hold. Internalizing God’s truth is eating the bread of Christ, the Christian’s eternal sustenance.

Meditation, according to Glen Scorgie, “creates a context in which it is more possible to develop creative connections between the text and the reader’s own life and immediate context.” Scorgie continues, “Meaning is not so much embedded in the text as it is discovered in the interplay between the text and the reader’s own reality,” what he calls the dynamic intersection of the two.¹¹² Similar to what was observed in Lutheran Germany during the seventeenth century, a dialogue of the Soul and God is produced in meditation. The practice cultivates an internal environment for listening to the voice of God and positioning the believer for the work of God. This art of positioning is a labor of the meditator and not the mechanism that attains to the voice of God. The believer positions himself by taking hold of God’s word or work and ascertaining what is comprehended of God and how it relates to the person. Truth convicts, instructs, corrects, and rebukes the believer, but the process is not ended there; the believer is also enlightened by the Spirit to be transformed by the truths of God.

¹¹¹John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1, *The Glory of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1998), 441-42.

¹¹²Glen A. Scorgie, “Hermeneutics and the Meditative Use of Scripture: The Case for a Baptized Imagination,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 277.

The Practitioner Is Enlightened by the Holy Spirit

John Piper contends, “Our entire encounter with the Bible, even if it involves our natural abilities, is a supernatural encounter.”¹¹³ Piper does not just mean the encounter is supernatural because the Bible is revelation from God, but the actual reading of Scripture is an activity that takes place supernaturally; the regenerate human being is accosted, so to speak, by the intervention of Holy Spirit. Just as depraved humanity is incapable of acting in a way to bring about salvation through faith, humanity cannot produce the affects brought on by the Spirit; one affect being the application of God’s word. Sovereign grace is at work in the sanctification of believers as God gifts the illumination of Scripture through the discipline of meditation. Meditation is a part of progressive sanctification, one facet of the whole communion with God.¹¹⁴ Balthasar, against contemplative mysticism within his Catholic tradition, confesses “we need not acquire any other ‘spiritual senses’ for savoring God than those God has given us.”¹¹⁵ Humanity is gifted the means to be affected by the Word of God.

John Calvin discusses the enlightening produced by the Holy Spirit:

God is active in us in two ways: within, by his Spirit, and without, by his word. With his Spirit enlightening the mind and training the heart to love righteousness and innocence, he makes man a new creature by regeneration. Through his word he moves and encourages man to desire and to look for this renewal.¹¹⁶

Two parts are observed in the process: first, the believer internalizes the truth of God, and second, the believer is enlightened by the Spirit to desire after the transformation is instructed by the truths of God. The Spirit uses the means of the Scripture to convict the

¹¹³John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 180.

¹¹⁴Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 102.

¹¹⁵Balthasar, *Christian Meditation*, 53.

¹¹⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1541 ed., trans. Robert White (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2017), 94.

sinner and train the believer in the righteousness prescribed against sin. Regenerate believers are enlightened for the purpose of godliness that issues by the application of Scripture.

Scripture Is Applied to the Practitioner

Bonhoeffer records in his personal writing, “Daily, quiet reflection on the Word of God as it applies to me (even if only for a few minutes) becomes for me a point of crystallization for everything which gives interior and exterior order to my life.”¹¹⁷ Bonhoeffer’s sentiment, common to Puritan consideration, is that Scripture must generate a presence and action in every area of life by the readiness to meditate on Christ at any moment. The imagination is a mechanism, harnessed by the repeated exercise of meditation, for deployment, rather than a distraction prone toward wandering.¹¹⁸ Donald Whitney writes that when a person is oriented to meditate on what is read in the Bible, this form of intake will naturally involve application that improves prayer life; meditation on Scripture leads to application and prayer.¹¹⁹ Not only must the practitioner read the Bible but also anticipate responding to what is ingested.¹²⁰ The anticipation of application is a symptom of trusting God’s sovereign work of grace in Scripture’s commissioned disciplines.

The application of Scripture to the believer, the exercise of piety that occurs upon exiting the meditation experience, is the sign of inward affection. Affections come from internalizing a particular truth, allowing it to saturate the heart by way of the

¹¹⁷Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 51.

¹¹⁸John W. Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 130.

¹¹⁹Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 87.

¹²⁰Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 71, 75.

regenerative power of the Holy Spirit. The new creature, is affected to act in a manner pleasing to God, desiring what God desires. Piety is born of discipline. John Newton insists, “By treasuring doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of Scripture” the Christian will be able to mull over and compare his lifestyle and actions according to “an habitual frame of spiritual wisdom.”¹²¹

The manner of working to apply Scripture to a Christian’s life can be practiced in numerous ways. Meditation is a form of learning Scripture through information processing. Karen Lynn Estep explains, “Information-processing is focused on one’s ability to transform his or her experiences and thoughts into learning. It is a cognitive approach in which learners watch, manipulate, and strategize their information in the cognitive process of both memorizing and thinking.”¹²² Estep issues caution with this approach, noting Scripture intake is not solely about intellectual ascension; she addresses the “more affective, application aspect of Scripture, a processing of Scripture into life itself.”¹²³ Information-processing is observed in Puritan methods through their discipline of meditation as an exercise of exegesis into lifestyle or piety. Seen throughout Christian history, there are numerous manuals for how to exegete Scripture for the purpose of meditation. Piper provides a manual for the practice of arcing the text of the Bible in his appendix to *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, a highly structured system for reading the Bible reminiscent of Joseph Hall’s prescription. Donald S. Whitney, in a similar manner, asks questions to enliven internal dialogue of the reader and the Word. Methods of this nature encourage exegesis, but also construct an atmosphere of devotion.

¹²¹John Newton, *The Select Letters of John Newton* (1960; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2015), 88.

¹²²Karen Lynn Estep, “Following Topographical Details: Learning Theory and Curriculum,” in *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church: Cartography of Christian Pilgrims*, ed. James Estep, Roger White, and Karen Estep (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2012), 105.

¹²³Estep, “Following Topographical Details,” 106.

Biblical meditation internalizes God's truth, positions the practitioner to recognize the reality of the Spirit's indwelling, interpret the purpose of God's word and work through personal reflection, and to apply God's truth. What is attached to the application of God's truth is the mortification of sin and the sanctification of the believer. The Spirit's work in sanctification is not to make a person special or holier than others, but to provide spiritual protection and habitual communion with God.

The Role and Effects of Meditation in Progressive Sanctification

The chief concern of this section is the involvement of the Spirit's work in the practitioner and the fruits of meditation. What happens with the person meditating is wholly the work of God through his Spirit; edifying the mind and growing through sanctification by the practice of biblical meditation.¹²⁴ However, the believer must understand the manner by which application is affected. Colossians 3:16 states, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly"; this term *dwell* refers to the saturation within the Christian by God's word. Christians are to meditate with the intent and purpose of a complete saturation of the word of God into their life and practice. It is not merely for emotional experience Christians focus and ingest God's word. Richard Sibbes contends, "Meditation is not a passion of melancholy, nor a fit of fiery love, nor covetous care, nor senseless dumps, but a serious act of the Spirit in the inwards of the soul, whose object is spiritual, whose affection is a provoked appetite to practice holy things."¹²⁵ Sibbes

¹²⁴Samuel Ward, *Sermons* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1996), 9. Ward writes that prayer, reading, alms, and meditation are all performed with the aid of Christ and accomplished by his power. Therefore, the practice is a good work of the human, but the subsistence of the work and its fruitful results are solely evidences of God's sovereign grace.

¹²⁵Sibbes, "Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations," 182-83.

understood meditation to be practiced no matter the state of the person as it served both to reinvigorate and perpetuate numbed and numbing hearts. Therefore, Paul agrees, let the word dwell in hearts as it should for all Christians.

Peter Toon writes, “A sound method of meditation ought to help the reader hear, see, taste and feel the Word of God. . . . this was why methods were invented at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation” —because these methods exploited all of the resources accessible to the instructor so that the whole of the person could experience the Word of God.¹²⁶ Exploitation of both scholasticism and the natural world for the glory of God is not only prescribed by Bonaventure, but the Word of God. It is through meditation the Christian is able to consider the various ways the word and works of God manifest in and affect the whole person.

The Whole Human is in Communion with God

Spiritual disciplines, like that of focused meditation, foster a reframing of the mind, even the neural pathways of daily living.¹²⁷ A renewal has taken place in the regenerate believer as mentioned in Romans 12; this renewal constitutes not only a new way of thinking, but a new intention within the motivation of the believer, a new starting place for all phenomena. The experience of the individual is now completely oriented toward something else, every interaction is positioned and understood as it relates to

¹²⁶Peter Toon, *Meditating as a Christian: Waiting upon God* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), 87.

¹²⁷Sudi Kate Gliebe, “Neuroplasticity and Spiritual Growth: Weaving Circuits of Faith,” *Lutheran Education Journal*, last modified June 13, 2012, accessed December 13, 2017, <https://lej.cuchicago.edu/research-in-education/neuroplasticity-and-spiritual-growth-weaving-circuits-of-faith/>.

Christ. Meditation is not about attaining enlightenment, but drawing greater notice of the reality of Christ's union with his elect. Meditation is a means of discerning and practicing this orientation. Worship by means of Scripture meditation involves the renewal of divine communion. Why would a Christian not seek to experience such a transcendent and intimate relationship with God?¹²⁸

John Jefferson Davis elaborates on the concept of being new *in* Christ and how such assertion relates to meditation. Christ is not in the person, Davis appeals, "in a molecular sense, but by his Spirit, truly extending himself into" the persons' spirit.¹²⁹ The truth of being in Christ and he being in the person is not metaphorical, but a real and weighty new reality; every molecule is under the reign and scope of Christ's spiritual supervening, even if they are themselves not physically Christ. The communion experienced *in* Christ presently is an indication of the reality to be experienced fully in New Creation. Meditation is *in* Christ, just as the whole person is transformed *in* Christ at the moment of effectual calling. Meditation is therefore an experiential discipline, a reality where the entire person is actively present for the communion and spirit-enlightening of God by God's holy words and works.

Through meditation the practitioner responds to communion with God by means and by the reality of God's unique presence. Edmund Clowney observes, "Meditation reflects on the truth of God in the presence of God."¹³⁰ This simple sentence

¹²⁸Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "What is Biblical Meditation?," in *Renewing Your Mind in a Secular World*, ed. John D. Woodbridge (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 39.

¹²⁹John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 61.

¹³⁰Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 46.

reveals meditation is not a means of attainment, but a practice of worship. The practice not only seeks to worship Christ for what he is doing in and through the believer, but to worship him as sovereign king. Christians can rest assured that the Triune God is active in their progressive sanctification and this assurance is for the purpose of glorifying God and his desire for the process of finding all welfare and grace in him.

The whole human is in communion with God as a regenerate being. The triune God brings the saint into communion by the indwelling of the Spirit. If meditation produces or is a means of manipulating an experiential presence of God, then inference shows God is withholding his presence from his people; Scripture refutes such assertion (e.g., Matt 28:20; Rom 8:38-39; 1 Cor 1:4-9). Meditation is a means to bring awareness of the renewed state of the believer in the presence of God by God's design and power. The whole person is impacted by the indwelling of God's Spirit and the regeneration brought through sanctification. Meditation is a practical outcome of regeneration and a means of experiential grace. Communion with God, by means of meditation, is not without effect in every aspect of the believer's life.

Wholeness of Mind, Heart, and Body

Herbert Benson performed medical studies on meditation and its effects on blood pressure, hypertension, and other stress related ailments, and he finds faith to be the eluding factor in the success of his subjects. Benson insists the wholeness of a person is contingent on the mind, body, and soul finding a unity in something.¹³¹ However, Benson fails to see distinction in the spirituality of Eastern mysticism and Christianity.

¹³¹Herbert Benson, *Beyond the Relaxation Response* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 4-5.

The wholeness of the Christian is appropriately found solely in the gift of the Spirit and the instrument of saving knowledge, the Scripture.¹³²

Meditation incorporates not just will, but passions, desires, location, appetite, conflict or peace; the whole person is involved in the exercise of thinking, whether passively or actively.¹³³ The spontaneous act of meditation is something every person performs multiple times a day, it is simply thinking and pondering on anything for a moment in time; the Puritans termed this occasional meditation.¹³⁴ While this form of meditation is brought upon the mind by internal and external circumstances, it carries with it the ability to be transformative. Counseling literature shows evidence that dozens of meditative methods prove beneficial to patients.¹³⁵ However, biblical meditation requires deliberation by means of objective revelation or refocuses the mind by taking captive any stray thought. Scorgie cautions that “an undisciplined imagination could easily delude us,” referring to the atmosphere among Christians of simply meandering in their spirituality, focusing only on personal profession of faith; this is not truly

¹³²As the *Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689) asserts, “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience, although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation.” Peter Masters, ed., *The Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689) (Oberlin, OH: Wakeman Trust, 1981).

¹³³Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, 93-94.

¹³⁴Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 34. Saxton explains that occasional meditation is deliberate in the sense that a Christian should be armed, prepared, to turn whatever spontaneous thought into an opportunity for meditation as a gift from God.

¹³⁵Daniel Gutierrez, Jesse Fox, and Andrew W. Wood, “Center, Light, and Sound: The Psychological Benefits of Three Distinct Meditative Practices,” *Counseling and Values* 60 (October 2015): 234-47.

disciplining the whole person.¹³⁶

Another aspect of meditation that brings wholeness to the mind, heart, and body of the meditator is found in the formed habit of responding to affliction, whether mental, physical, emotional or otherwise. Sudi Kate Gliebe refers to the discipline of forming habits that orient the mind to God's providence. When anger or despair begin to overwhelm the Christian, meditation, as an information-processing technique not divorced from the work of the Holy Spirit, can be instrumental in reframing the mind so as to respond to whatever is happening physically or emotionally in a worshipful or contemplative manner.¹³⁷ Gliebe's psychological understanding of the brain's capacity to reframe the mind to act in response to the heart and body is compelling, but it is not new in the field of biblical meditation. The Puritans, Sibbes in particular, asserted that meditation should be used in the lives of Christians in cases of affliction, suffering, and sin.¹³⁸ These instances were important because it allowed for the Christian to be corrected or taught by God's providence, rebuked and disciplined in grace, prepared for future instances of affliction (Ps 6:2). John Owen, referring to spontaneous thoughts of sin in the heart, instructs Christians to meditate on what is evil to thereby destroy it with God's grace. He contends heavenly-mindedness is the "implanting, habitual residence, and cherishing of a principle of grace that stands in direct opposition" gifted to oppose sinful

¹³⁶Scorgie, "Hermeneutics and Meditative Use of Scripture," 281.

¹³⁷Gliebe, "Neuroplasticity and Spiritual Growth."

¹³⁸Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 204-5.

thoughts.¹³⁹

God uses Scripture to correct and rebuke, as well as to assure salvation and teach his providence. Meditation involves not only the properly oriented mind of the Christian, but the heart and body of the saint, bringing wholeness. God's providence is observed in every area of the creature's life, so too his communion with the saints produces effects in the mind, heart, and body. By meditating on God's word and processing his active presence, the Spirit works in uniting the whole person to experience their regeneration. As Miller writes, the "sign that Christ indwells our lives is that we turn outward to display the same kind of compassion that he did."¹⁴⁰

Wholeness of Personal Will

Meditation directs the person to live in unity with the Scripture, the revelation of God. What meditation often includes is a reorienting of the person to live out doctrine that might otherwise be superseded by personal will. The will of the Christian must be continuously reoriented to the tenets of faith laid out in Scripture. The Christian is convicted of depravity and allows for the conviction to serve as a means to be made right through the Spirit. A whole will is a will that is congruent with the prescription of Scripture, the attributes of God, and his providence.

On the subject of congruency in the whole of the believer, Stephanie Paulsell describes how a Christian may be inclined to dress themselves if a person is willing to meditate on God in accordance with their adornment. Paulsell is not referring to the

¹³⁹John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6, *Temptation and Sin* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991), 32.

¹⁴⁰Miller, *The Table of Inwardness*, 86.

covenant of works and the forbidding of blended fabrics, but the production of the clothing, whether the company's policies align with Christian ethics.¹⁴¹ Paulsell asks if the purpose of adornment is to adopt what the production company stands for or whether the clothing is a hindrance in bringing glory to God. Such analyses can be an area of meditation for the purpose of realigning the depraved will. The goal of mindfulness towards clothing is not a legalistic approach to dress, but a deeper intentionality to walk in a manner that glorifies Christ by the Spirit's work in sanctifying the practitioner.

A man properly oriented toward Scripture, properly disciplined in meditation, will evidence saturation of God's word and work. David Mathis urges, "His spare thoughts should go there, his idle mind gravitate there."¹⁴² The personal will is the most difficult discussion when it comes to Christian spirituality as it conjures up two disparate definitions to believers. The orthodox understanding of the personal will is alignment to submission with the Father's will in order to produce fruit of good works for God's glory through the mind, heart, and body. The other understanding of personal will is that autonomous projection of self that works to meet personal enlightenment. Personal will is often shaped by concern for discovery of human potential, a potential only properly realized through therapeutic and psychological validation.¹⁴³ The flawed view of the personal will teaches that it is not discovered by means of any external or objective

¹⁴¹Stephanie Paulsell, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 69.

¹⁴²Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 57.

¹⁴³Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 130, 132.

source of authority.¹⁴⁴ Orthodoxy suggests that an objective authority is necessary for any potential true human flourishing, as related in the exegesis of Joshua 1:8.

The will of man is mortified through consistent communion with God. As the believer seeks communion with God the Spirit works to unify the mind, heart, and body so that the Christian may produce good works. Meditation is the means to produce affections through communion with God, then those affections transform the thinking of the believer to coordinate with godly thinking, and those thoughts produce works throughout the members of the believer's body. Stirring up affections is great, but affections without direction are useless.¹⁴⁵ The process of sanctification is joined with a renewal of the personal will.

Biblical Meditation Outside of Scripture

This section demonstrates that Christians are called to meditate on God's work of redemption as well as God's wonder of creation. A regular practice of biblical meditation does more than provide affection to God or stir up love for neighbor. Meditation gives application to the root of man's heart so that God's word directs the affections of man; this is piety. Donald Bloesch insists that a stark difference between mysticism and proper meditation is that, whereas mysticism sees petition as a beginning point of prayer and meditation as a state of gazing at the divine, the biblical practice of meditation carries petition into meditation as a necessary element of communion with

¹⁴⁴Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 138

¹⁴⁵Saxton, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind*, 52.

God.¹⁴⁶ God compels believers to see his work in and through redemption and creation and thereby desire for application of revelation. Meditation petitions God to reveal his attributes through his works and invigorate the faith of believers.

God has gifted humanity with a mind capable of attention and determination to exercise faculties that reward meditation with practical application. Peter Toon details several ways humanity can choose to focus the meditative mind on both the words and works of God: considering, imagining, feeling, willing, and remembering.¹⁴⁷ Meditation is not to be practiced with focus on what is imaginary nor without due consideration to what is imagined. All faculties of the being are designed as instruments to give God glory. However, all instruments must be understood in their nuance of perspective. Imagination must be put into subjugation of other faculties, such as Scripture demands, asking does what is imagined make sense rationally with what is taught in Scripture and can what is imagined be reasoned through the natural world?¹⁴⁸ Jonathan Edwards notes too much weight is often put upon believers' own imaginations to the inadequacy of representing true biblical faith. The resolve for utilizing those categories outlined by Toon is the act of memorizing Scripture in order to meditate upon it with frequency.

Memorization does not occur as often as it should in the modern church. However, the practice of memorizing Scripture for the purpose of meditation goes back to Athanasius and Augustine, as well as the *lectio divina* and Puritan methodologies.

¹⁴⁶Donald G. Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 56, 133.

¹⁴⁷Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 107.

¹⁴⁸Jonathan Edwards, "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," in *On Revival* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995), 96.

Simon Chan notes that today memorization and meditation are given little attention because such traditions are replaced by personal allegory and superficial clichés that motivate poor theology and poor Christian practice.¹⁴⁹ Easily digestible principles amount to poor meditation, let alone application, because they forsake the work of Spirit and the instrument of God’s revelation. When the practice of meditating on the redemptive work of Christ is mentioned it is not out of simplicity for digestion, but out of memorized Scripture and theological ponderings. God gifted humanity with the faculties of imagination and reason for the purpose of contemplating and glorifying his works.

Meditation on God’s Redemptive Work

Meditation on God’s redemptive work is asking in what sundry ways does salvation affect the Christian, both internally and externally. “Examine yourselves,” prescribe the Puritans.¹⁵⁰ To come to know the work of the Lord is to observe, internalize, and interpret the work as it is experienced in the believer. While the Christian meditates on the work of redemption, it is still necessary to observe the redemptive work through its instrument, the Word. Sinclair Ferguson reminds believers, “God’s Word is the instrument of both the initial cleansing which takes place in regeneration and the sanctification which continues through the whole Christian life.”¹⁵¹ Meditation upon the redemptive work of the Triune God includes the conviction of sin, its redemption through

¹⁴⁹Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 165.

¹⁵⁰Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 898.

¹⁵¹Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 68.

the gift of faith, the sanctifying role of the Spirit, the providence of God in suffering, affliction, and sin, and the future glory of God and his people.

Consider the significant difference in the practice of meditation between an orthodox view of Christian mysticism and the heretical view of Eastern mysticism so frequently thrust upon modern Christianity. The difference, Donald Fairbairn expresses, is understood by the proper definition of the term *theosis*. Eastern mysticism propagates the belief that humans are capable of pulling down essences from God or gods in order to attain to something deified or some deification in themselves. The practice of elevating oneself in this way serves to lower the understanding of God—it only gives the meditator “a false sense of importance.”¹⁵² Christianity provides the term *theosis* to affirm the biblical attestation that God not only condescends, but by way of the Trinity, indwells in the human persons of the church to bring them to himself.¹⁵³ Meditation on how God does this work serves to exhaust the faculties of man’s mind and glorify the transcendent God.

The mysticism of orthodox Christian doctrine is identified through fellowship with God, a mysticism John Flavel conveys through his teaching.¹⁵⁴ It is the work of God to bring his elect, not only into salvation, but into union with the Trinity. Union with God

¹⁵²Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 56-57.

¹⁵³The term *theosis* is used to describe the relationship of communion with God. In no way do humans become deified, but the Christian life is a life lived in relation to the Triune God. It is God’s condescension that brings about a transformation in the human that is solely dependent upon the relationship of the Trinity. Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 7-12.

¹⁵⁴J. Stephen Yuille, *The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 26.

is not some eastern mystic enhancement in the sharing of deific power. Winfried Corduan argues, according to New Testament mysticism, “there is no plan of asceticism or meditation to actualize this mystical reality.”¹⁵⁵ Nothing apart from God brings about the union he desires and through no detriment or degradation of his Triune being; meditation is not the explicit means to this union, but it is a practice and means to worship God and acknowledge the Spirit-led sanctification exercised in union.¹⁵⁶ Meditation is a part of the redemptive work of God whereby believers actively experience participation in the sanctification process. While contemplating the work of salvation, the believer affirms their communion with God and the union wrought by sovereign grace.

Meditation on Creation

Meditation inevitably changes the way Christians observe and orient themselves to the world around them; “For what else is the world but an open stage on which God will have his majesty to be seen?”¹⁵⁷ According to Romans 1, humanity determined to turn its back on God’s stage and manufacture things to falsely identify as creator. Christians are at war with themselves to properly identify God as the glorious displayer of his own majesty. The problem of meditation is that human minds are quick to seek distraction, business, and self-involvement and too slow to make connections that grip the heart for God’s glory. The heart may comprehend the majesty, yet not render that

¹⁵⁵Winfried Corduan, *Mysticism: An Evangelical Option?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 138.

¹⁵⁶Kaiser, “What is Biblical Meditation?,” 53.

¹⁵⁷John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Arthur Golding (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2017), 181.

majesty to the creator, instead rendering it to anything or not at all.

Those practicing biblical meditation are to recognize attributes of God in creation; utilizing the experience of the world to flourish the mind with God's activity. The utilization of creation must align with and be mindful to the Scripture and how creation is perceived by the authors of Scripture. As was discussed in the exegesis of Psalm 8:3-4, Proverbs 6:6-8, and Luke 12:24-28, creation displays the glory of God and elucidates how God works in, through, and for his creation to make known his glory. Christians are called to seek out the glory of God in creation, to relish in the Scripture so to understand how God declares his attributes in the world.

Conclusion

God does not change, nor do his commands. What God spoke to Joshua, "meditate day and night," still stands as a means to find the peace of God receiving his glory. Consensus through history assures modern Christians of the purpose and method of rendering to God the whole person; that method is unchanged since Joshua's time—God's Word. Practitioners of biblical meditation are to internalize the truths found in Scripture, the Spirit's role is to enlighten what is internalized and provide the power to apply affections for God's will and glory. The methods of meditation observed through history vary, but the Scripture maintains the role of the human in communion with God and the affections produced through the whole person based in the aforementioned process. When Scripture is internalized, hid in the heart, and remembered it produces the spiritual mindedness described by the Apostle Paul and the Puritan John Owen. Spiritual mindedness is the means to further reflect on God's redemptive work and his glory throughout creation. Reflection, in this manner, is the byproduct of orthodox biblical

meditation, a foretaste of new creation saturating the whole regenerate believer.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTING BIBLICAL MEDITATION

Introduction

This chapter includes a description of the ministry project from preparation to completion. It offers an assessment of the purpose for this project, an analysis of its three primary goals, and an evaluation of the quantitative and qualitative research findings from the project. The purpose of this project was to educate members of Mount Washington Baptist Church (MWBC) in how to practice biblical meditation so that they would grow in their faith. The means for reaching the objective was two-fold: to increase the knowledge of the participants and to enhance the practice through what they learned. This project began implementation on April 1, 2018, and concluded on August 13, 2018. This chapter argues that the project was successful in meeting its purpose.

History of the Ministry Project

The true origin of this project came about several years prior to my enrollment at Southern Seminary. I led a group in a Bible reading plan that started in January and dissolved before August. I contemplated why so few wanted to stick with the Bible, especially new believers who had never read it before. It became imperative to my ministry to organize a means for these participants to grow in their spiritual discipline. MWBC is an older church that has never had any formal training in spiritual disciplines. We have had prayer meetings in abundance, but never any lay training in prayer, Bible

reading, fasting, etc. How could a church with this type of apathy about spiritual disciplines be invigorated? I picked up several books concerning Bible reading and prayer, and stumbled upon the discipline of biblical meditation. I found this to be a providential solution as will be shown in the results described in this chapter and in chapter 5.

Structuring the Ministry Project

The design of this project was driven by the practicality of getting church members to understand and put into practice Bible reading and prayer. I sought to cultivate a spiritual discipline that was neither understood or previously practiced for most in the church. Due to the lifestyle of church members and their attendance patterns, I desired a shorter season for my project, within a range of four to eight weeks. I wanted to bring about a deeper understanding of and training in the members with regard to biblical meditation, but I also wanted to provide a means for carrying out meditation and actively practicing the discipline in a setting where other participants could share and interact in fellowship about their practice. By including a uniform guide, such as the guidebook, participants would be able to account for and encourage one another, and it would likewise serve as a means to individually measure the discipline's fruitfulness. This led me to consider four sessions of teaching and four weeks of practice. I began constructing a four-week guidebook with daily templates for meditation. I also wanted to speak to the personalities of different hypothetical individuals; therefore, I included multiple ways to practice meditation, drawn from Puritan authors.

As I considered the organization of this structure, it dawned on me that for the sake of successful participation it would be prudent to overlap the classes and the four-

week guidebook. Wednesday nights are the most accessible time for new classes in MWBC as they are the most attended by old and new members; this would give my class the highest potential for regularity in attendance. My Wednesday night class was approved by MWBC's board of deacons for the six-week period that fit within the church calendar.

The structure would consist of a lesson of introductory material for the first week and tools and considerations for the second class. At the end of this second class I would distribute the guidebook. This meant that for the next two-weeks participants would be practicing meditation as well as attending lectures and discussions the following two Wednesday evenings. Participants would be able to discuss their practice and raise questions, comments, and concerns within the class as they learned how to meditate in an orthodox, biblical way. This structure left two weeks without lessons. I prepared two more sessions where the first session (fifth in the overall course) participants would come together and discuss their experiences. The second session (sixth in the course), participants would reflect on the four-week guidebook. During this last session I would distribute the post-survey and give a small gift to each participant as a thank you for their attendance. This framework seemed to be the most successful and practical way of introducing a new spiritual discipline, such as biblical meditation, to the members of MWBC.

Promoting the Ministry Project

I began promoting the approved ministry project at the beginning of May 2018. I utilized the church newsletter, Sunday bulletin, word-of-mouth, announcements from the pulpit, and Facebook. I created an event on Facebook using the church profile and

invited all users connected with MWBC. In each of these avenues I advertised the course and requested that those wishing to attend RSVP to my email address or the Facebook event page. Though I promoted through these various means, I only received a handful of RSVPs and therefore had limited knowledge as to who would attend the course. I was happily surprised to find 21 participants in the first session, which provided a healthy sample size.

Implementing the Ministry Project

Three goals framed the specific implementation of this ministry project. First, I wanted to assess the knowledge and practice of certain spiritual disciplines, with emphasis on biblical meditation, among a select group of MWBC members. Second, I planned to develop a multi-week curriculum for biblical meditation as well as a multi-week self-guided devotional. Third, I hoped to increase the knowledge and enhance the practice of biblical meditation among the select members of MWBC through curriculum and devotional practices. These individual goals served as a guide to determine the success or failure of implementing the project. The following three sections describe and assess each of these goals.

Population

The population of the total membership (Sunday worship attenders) of MWBC is approximately 125. The course consisted of a population of 21 participants. Though the significant results according to this scale cannot be determinative of the entire membership, the data shows it is likely that a project of this nature could produce positive effects in the life of the whole church. There were 21 participants, but I measured effectiveness according to the surveys of only 16 participants, a number which would

give a relevant assessment. The following reasons informed that decision: three people were only present for the first session and did not participate in the survey; one person participated for the length of the course, but is mentally incapable of understanding the information or recording responses; and one individual did not participate in the surveys, but attended the course.

Goal 1: Assessing Knowledge and Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

The first goal of this project was to assess knowledge and practice of certain spiritual disciplines, with emphasis on biblical meditation, among a select group of MWBC members. This goal was considered to be met when I distributed and collected surveys and provided an assessment of the spiritual discipline practice current among the population of the class. Each participant's survey was recorded according to their select PIN and their agreement to participate in the pre- and post-testing phase. I was successful in meeting this goal as will be shown through the following explanation.

Spiritual Disciplines Assessment

During the first meeting, I introduced the topic of the course and proceeded to explain the need to assess, by means of survey, the knowledge and practice of participants concerning spiritual disciplines and specifically biblical meditation. Participants were given a ten-minute period to complete the preliminary survey.¹ This survey included a section of five questions related to general practice of spiritual

¹See appendix 3.

disciplines. These five questions were not included in the post-survey, but were useful in gleaning some information that proved fruitful for the background of this study.

An insightful correlation was discovered pertaining to the scores of questions 3 and 5. Question 3 asked if participants perceive they are adequately trained or educated by the church for the use of spiritual disciplines; the findings reveal a low score of 46 percent. However, question 5 asked if participants believe their corporate worship is impacted, whether positively or negatively, by their use of personal spiritual disciplines; 80 percent responded yes.

This preliminary assessment showed what I assumed to be true of my congregation: a lack of education and encouragement in personal spiritual discipline effects the worship of the congregation. This also proves a helpful indicator as to what I assumed in the creation of this project; participants will see greater propensity to practice their faith as they are trained in the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation. Projects of this nature may serve as a solution to the problem of church members' lack of desire to read the Bible and keep regular devotional practices. Further testing could be beneficial in addressing the corporate worship aspect of personal spiritual disciplines.

As mentioned above, the pre-survey included a section for assessing the participant's current practice of and attitude toward the spiritual disciplines. Aside from this spiritual disciplines assessment, the majority of the pre-survey was identical to the post-survey. Twenty questions in the survey provided preliminary data concerning participants' perceptions and frequency patterns in biblical meditation. The following sections provide an assessment of the pre-survey data.

Pre-Survey Perceptions of Biblical Meditation

Due to the fifteen questions under the category of perceptions concerning meditation, I will display only the three questions that found the largest percentage point growth. I will separate this assessment into two sections. The first section will analyze the participants’ understanding of biblical meditation. The second section will analyze the participants’ personal practice of meditation. The participants’ pre-survey results show there was in fact a need for increased knowledge in biblical meditation.

Table 1. Pre-survey perceptions related to understanding

Perceptions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have been formally instructed in the personal spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.	3	5	3	0	4	1
I could define and explain biblical meditation to another Christian.	2	5	3	6	0	0
I could explain to someone else how to use the Bible for meditation.	5	3	3	3	2	0

Table 1 demonstrates a perceived lack of knowledge of biblical meditation among the project’s participants. The three questions displayed in this table are meant to be triangulated. When asked if participants were trained in biblical meditation they scored 50 percent. When asked if they could define what biblical meditation is they only

scored 47 percent. Lastly, when asked if they could explain biblical meditation to someone else they produced a score of only 44 percent. These scores reveal that even if some participants believed they were trained in biblical meditation, they were unlikely to be able to define or explain the spiritual discipline adequately.

Table 2. Pre-survey perceptions related to personal practice

Perceptions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am frequently convicted of sin and led to repentance through my personal intake of Scripture.	1	0	3	1	10	1
I often find myself contemplating God's activity in creation during my day.	0	2	1	9	2	2
I am confident in my ability to use multiple methods for meditating on God's Word and Works.	2	6	4	1	3	0

Table 2 examines questions related to personal practice of biblical meditation. The question regarding the use of Scripture for the conviction of sin required participants to think through how they think about the Bible as they are reading it. This question produced a healthy score of 73 percent. Participants were then asked if they find themselves contemplating God's activity in their lives, which yielded a score of 68 percent. Lastly, participants produced a score of 47 percent when asked if they were

confident in their ability to make use of multiple means of meditation. This score is not surprising based on assessing table 1 because practice necessitates the utilization and synthesis of previously obtained knowledge.

Combining these two tables shows participants had a concern for devotional experiences in communion with God, but were unaware of the means and methods for those experiences. Over the whole section of perceptions, participants made use of their Bible, but in no structured or regular way. Taking this data with the consideration of the spiritual disciplines assessment, participants demonstrated a lack of education in their spiritual disciplines that impacts their experience of both corporate worship and their personal devotional life.

Pre-Survey Frequency of Biblical Meditation

The spiritual disciplines assessment indicated the average participant in the course was practicing spiritual disciplines to some degree. The pre-survey frequency questionnaire provided a deeper gleaning of these practices. Table 3 records three of the scores related to frequency of biblical meditation type practices.

Table 3. Pre-survey frequency of biblical meditation

Frequency	0 times per week	1 time per week	2 times per week	3 times per week	4 times per week	5+ times per week
I read and meditate on Scripture.	2	2	3	7	0	2
I share experiences of my spiritual life with others.	2	6	1	4	1	2
I spend more than three minutes meditating on a specific verse or Christian doctrine.	3	3	6	2	2	0

Through this pre-survey, participants revealed percentage scores indicating they did not place a high value on meditating over Scripture (a score of 57 percent) and they are not prone to share spiritual experiences with others (a score of 48 percent). Participants were unlikely to spend more than three minutes meditating on a specific verse or particular doctrine (a score of 47 percent). These scores are not unreasonable for these particular individuals given what was revealed in the perceptions section of the pre-survey. What those frequencies reveal is the need for meditation practices to be encouraged among the people. The pre-survey helped to ensure the course and the accompanying guidebook would truly be of use for those participants who desired to grow in their faith by learning and practicing the discipline of biblical meditation.

Goal 2: Development of Curriculum

The second goal of the project was to develop a multi-week curriculum for biblical meditation as well as a multi-week self-guided devotional. The goal was

considered to be successful when a panel of two experts agreed I had met the requirements of a rubric.² The curriculum rubric offered criticism in four categories with regard to theology, practicality, history, and the guidebook's ease of use for participants. The curriculum and guidebook were developed through the course of my research and writing of chapters 2 and 3. These items were sent to my reviewers on May 13, 2018, and received final approval on May 30, 2018. The guidebook was approved on June 4, 2018. These approvals indicate that this goal was successful. The curriculum met the standards of the panel while the guidebook exceeded the necessary requirements and was purported to be beyond what was necessary for the project.

Constructing the Lectures

As I worked through my exegesis of chapter 2 and the historical and theological research for chapter 3, I began developing a curriculum of what I deemed necessary for lay people to know in order to proficiently practice meditation according to orthodox theology. I came up with a four-session design focusing on the differences between scripturally-informed meditation practice and experiential or transactional meditation practice. This theme is carried through chapter 3 and was natural in approaching the topic among lay people who would be concerned with how to practice and how not to practice meditation. The theme of these two streams of thought were manifested in how I shaped the four lessons of curriculum.

The structure of the lessons was as follows. The first lesson served as an introduction to biblical meditation and as a comparison of how a person goes about

²See appendix 2.

practicing biblical meditation versus other forms of meditation. The second lesson briefly touched on progressive sanctification and the purpose of the spiritual disciplines in a sanctification framework. This lesson featured issues about how a person attains knowledge or what the end goal is in the act of biblical meditation. This became an important topic of discussion, especially given the format of looking at the two streams of Christian thought on the discipline. The third lesson examined how several verses in the Bible teach and affirm particular practices of meditation. The fourth and final lesson provided a lecture on the history of meditation within the Christian community. This final lesson sought to connect the dots as to how the two streams worked their way to modern biblical meditation practice.

Constructing the Guidebook

The purpose of constructing the guidebook was to present the same information and templates for practicing biblical meditation to all participants. The guidebook would serve to keep individuals accountable while setting a precedence for participants to be able to discuss the things upon which they meditated. The guidebook would also serve as a reference after the course was completed, so the participants would be able to go back and practice the discipline if they felt unsure how to meditate on their own without prompts. I wanted to design the guidebook as a resource much like training wheels on a bicycle. The participant would begin with strong guidance and structure, but would be led through the practice in order to move on their own. The end result would be members of MWBC practicing biblical meditation on their own to such a degree that after the course they would be able to communicate how they practice the discipline to other members of MWBC.

The construction of the guidebook went through several changes. I first thought of having participants meditate over a single chapter of the Bible for a 40-day period, but this seemed an odd approach. I began writing on particular themes and doctrines of Christian faith, but then it was not quite as evident that this was biblical meditation. I decided to focus on particular methods of meditation, but the same issue of arguing for biblical meditation arose. While I wanted to teach multiple methods of meditation, I also wanted to reinforce the object to be Scripture-based. Finally, and with counsel from my project supervisor, I began concentrating on training people rather than teaching material. I came up with two groupings of meditation. The first section would be two weeks of beginner-level material and the second section would be two weeks of more advanced ways of thinking about meditation.

Included in the guidebook was an introduction wherein I discussed and detailed the methods that would be used throughout the four weeks. I also explained some of the theological implications of this pattern for biblical meditation. The template for each day included several lines for journaling about the prompt as well as a special space for writing down the practical application drawn out of the meditation exercise. Each meditation prompt included questions to consider in the hopes the participant would begin ruminating on the verse on their own. The guidebook, meant for this particular course, can work on its own as a reference and for future courses, but would likely need some editing and inclusions in order to stand by itself, without the lectures and guidance of an instructor.

The first week of meditation followed Psalm 23 verse by verse. The second week followed Psalm 130 verse by verse. Both the first and second week used the same

seven methods for meditation influenced by Joseph Hall. The third week consisted of verses related to God's providence; this met my desire to reinforce doctrine as an important issue for meditation while including the Scriptures that backed up the doctrine. This week revealed a new method for meditation of my own design. The fourth and final week looked at six different verses where I gave the option of approaching the text with a particular doctrine. I instructed the participants to choose for themselves their form of meditation practice, but I gave a suggestion as to what I felt might be the most appropriate method. The last day served as a rehashing of the verse from the first day of practice (Ps 23:1) as a capstone to the experience. As demonstrated through the construction of the guidebook, participants would begin with training wheels and end the last week pedaling their bicycles through their own strength and knowledge. A sample of this guidebook is presented as an appendix to this project.³

Once the curriculum, both the lesson outlines and the guidebook, was approved, having met the standards of the panel, I set forth to educate those invested in the project. I used a recording device to record each lesson as I taught in case a person missed a lecture and also for my benefit in hearing how the information was transmitted in case I needed to restructure or change something for future classes. I was determined to finally increase knowledge and enhance the practice of biblical meditation among the members of MWBC.

³See appendix 4. The preface, introduction, and chap. 2 of the guidebook have been edited to fit this format.

Goal 3: Increase of Knowledge and Enhancement of Practice

The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge and enhance the practice of biblical meditation among the select members of MWBC through curriculum and devotional practices. The course, which served as the means for increasing knowledge and enhancing the practice of biblical meditation, was conducted between June 6, 2018, and July 13, 2018.

Assessment of Course Participation

During the scheduling of the six-week span of the course it became apparent there would inevitably be a lack of attendance on the fifth week because it fell on the 4th of July. Given the timing of the course and the calendar of the church, the deacons and I decided to make due. The fifth week was comprised of review questions and a time of discussion, so it was not as essential as the lecture nights and the post-survey distribution night. Other than the fifth week, no surveyed participant was absent for more than one session.

All surveyed participants meditated through at least one week of the guidebook. Half of the participants attempted to journal their personal applications. A quarter of participants actively journaled through the four-week experience. Discussions over multiple topics took place over four of the sessions. The first session had no discussion because I unfortunately tried to cram too much into the lesson. This assessment shows the level of active participation of the select members regarding biblical meditation. The atmosphere of the course was joyous and eager. Though some information was beyond what was necessary, and likely meant for seminary students, the

participants took notes through the course handouts and asked questions throughout each meeting.

Quantitative Data

The sixth session served as the final session of the project. During the final meeting I reviewed our information, and the class discussed their use of practice. The second half of the hour included the distribution and collection of the post-surveys. This section analyzes and considers the results of these post-surveys as compared with the pre-surveys.

There was a statistically significant difference ($t_{(15)}=3.8$, $p=.001$) in the participants' pre- and post-survey results. The positive significance was acceptable only if the t value was greater than 2.131. This number comes by calculating factors of chance as a means of change and by assessing the total number of participants and their mean scores. Because the t value is greater than the t critical the null hypothesis is rejected and the score proves the project was successful in increasing the knowledge and enhancing the practice of biblical meditation among select members of MWBC. While this initial reading indicating a positive significant change is permissible to conclude a success of the goals, I determined it necessary to assess the numbers of goal 3 according to the two individual categories: increased knowledge (perceptions) and enhancement of practice (frequency). The combination score was significant, but the two categories, when measured on their own, offered different findings. The perceptions category remained significant, but the frequency category showed no significant change. This would mean the project was successful in increasing knowledge, but the knowledge and provided tool (guidebook) were ineffective in enhancing the practice of biblical meditation among

select members of MWBC. This assessment was startling after interviewees indicated the strength of the guidebook in their meditation practice.

Through deliberations concerning the discrepancy in the quantitative data compared with the qualitative data, I determined to search the participants scores again to see what variables might produce this discrepancy. There was one individual whose scores seemed peculiar among the other statistics. When accounting for this outlier in the frequency category, I found the numbers grew to show an unexpected significance, one greater than the perceptions category. This assessment will be detailed in the following sections.

Perceptions of Biblical Meditation

The post-survey responses to perceptions of biblical meditation demonstrate what the statistics show—there was an increase in knowledge among the surveyed participants. Through the analyzation of these two tables of questions, it is shown how participants moved from one side of a scale to the other when compared to their relative pre-survey results. The tables will be structured according to table 1 and 2 counterparts of the section in goal 1.

Table 4. Post-survey perceptions related to understanding

Perceptions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have been formally instructed in the personal spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.	0	1	0	3	4	8
I could define and explain biblical meditation to another Christian.	0	1	3	6	4	2
I could explain to someone else how to use the Bible for meditation.	0	0	3	8	3	2

Table 4 provides the same three questions observed in table 1. What is evidenced through these three questions is that the participants increased in knowledge in understanding the practice of biblical meditation. These three questions ask for an identifiable growth in knowledge: Did the participant become so equipped in their training that they could teach someone else the discipline? According to the data, participants scored 85 percent in the question asking if they were formally instructed in biblical meditation; this is an overwhelming 35-point increase. Participants scored 70 percent in the question asking if they could define biblical meditation, a 23-point increase. Last on table 4, participants scored 71 percent in the question about being able to explain to someone else how to use the Bible for meditation, which is a 27-point increase. Participants largely agreed they knew and understood the discipline of biblical

meditation at a deeper level than they had during the pre-survey. Continued below are the perceptions related to personal practice.

Table 5. Post-survey perceptions related to personal practice

Perceptions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am frequently convicted of sin and led to repentance through my personal intake of Scripture.	0	0	1	3	7	5
I often find myself contemplating God's activity in creation during my day.	0	0	2	3	8	3
I am confident in my ability to use multiple methods for meditating on God's Word and Works.	0	0	3	5	6	2

In similar fashion to the previous table, table 5 reintroduces the same three questions found in table 2. Though table 5 does not share the extent of overall percentage growth for each question, there is still an increase worth noting. For the question concerning the conviction of sin, participants scored 83 percent, which shows a 10-point increase. The question about participants' inclination to contemplate God's activity throughout their day scored 79 percent, which is an 11-point increase. The largest increase came from the question of whether participants were confident to utilize multiple

methods for meditation; this question scored 74 percent, which is a 27-point increase. Examination of these two tables according to their pre-survey corollaries illustrates the significance of the increase of knowledge. While this increase in encouraging, putting such knowledge into practice is far more significant.

Frequency of Biblical Meditation

Regarding frequency, four questions showed a movement at or greater than 10 percentage points. Of those four, table 6 examines only three of the frequency questions because these questions were observed in table 3. These questions serve as a preliminary look at the data prior to analyzing the issue of the single outlier. The outlier is included in the tables, but the *t*-test statistical analysis provided at the end of this section will account for the individual’s scores.

Table 6. Post-survey frequency of biblical meditation

Frequency	0 times per week	1 time per week	2 times per week	3 times per week	4 times per week	5+ times per week
I read and meditate on Scripture.	0	4	0	5	2	5
I share experiences of my spiritual life with others.	3	3	1	2	3	4
I spend more than three minutes meditating on a specific verse of Christian Doctrine.	2	4	2	2	2	4

In terms of percentage, the question related to reading and meditating on Scripture received a score of 71 percent, which is a 14-point increase from the pre-survey

score shown in table 3. The question related to sharing personal spiritual experiences received a score of 61 percent, which is a 13-point increase. The question of spending more than three minutes meditating on Christian doctrine received a score of 60 percent, which is a 13-point increase. These increases are collectively less than those in the perceptions category, but they are still evidence of substantial growth among the participants.

The post-survey distribution took place after participants were given the opportunity to make use of the guidebook, which offered daily Scripture reading and meditation over a four-week period. Ideally, each participant who utilized a guidebook would select their frequency for reading and meditation as five or more times a week; this was not the case, nor did I assume it to be. There was substantial improvement in this question. While four participants stated they read and meditated one time per week, twelve participants meditated three or more times per week, with five meditating more than five times each of the four weeks. Another significant improvement was the number of participants who prayed for more than three minutes.

All of this seemed excellent upon my first reading of the scores. However, when looking to the t-value of the frequency category in my spreadsheet, I discovered the statistic did not exceed my necessary critical value. While the t-critical is 2.13, the resulting score was only 1.95. Though the combined scores of frequency and perception reach a total higher than the needed critical value, frequency alone does not indicate a significant shift, and its *p* value is too high to give credence to any change (I required a number less than .05 and my calculation was .07). At this point it would appear my

curriculum offered only head knowledge and no enhancement in the practice of biblical meditation.

The Outlier

During the interviews conducted for the qualitative portion of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, I discovered one participant who responded in such a way to the questions that it became clear his information made sense to be removed as an outlier. Not only did the outlier evidence a distinguishable score during the interview process, but the individual was discovered to have distinguished himself in the quantitative data. Through the course of the interview the outlier provided contradictory answers. The outlier spoke positively concerning the lectures and the instruction, the structure and ease of the guidebook, and the intent of the course overall. However, the outlier was concise in stating, “I do not like meditation” and “I did not want to practice it.” Through the course of the interview, it became clear the outlier had misconceptions about what meditation was to begin with and then chose not to practice meditation even though he enjoyed participating in the course. This interview provided a helpful analysis of why this individual should be considered an outlier.

Given that the individual did not give a quality effort to the process, my supervisor and I determined to re-run the quantitative analysis without this person’s scores. Accounting for the outlier participant, who appeared to be skewing the numbers of the frequency category, I processed the data again and by God’s grace the results indicated what was observed in the qualitative data. It was not merely an assumption, but a true factor that this individual was atypical. The t-critical score of 15 participants was 2.14 and the t-value I reached when accounting for the outlier became 3.45; this showed a

clear enhancement in the practice of the participants through the course of my project. The p value of .0038 serves to indicate this significant change was almost positively a result of the utilization of my guidebook and had practically nothing to do with chance. It will be shown in the following section, participants would prove the outlier was anomalous; interviews concur the practice of biblical meditation was enhanced through this ministry project.

Qualitative Data

As an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, my project incorporated both surveys and interviews. The interview protocol was written according to the positive responses in the survey data. My goal was to explain through these interviews how instruction and practice of biblical meditation was received positively and what conclusions could be drawn from the participants' experience in their personal practice. Participants were sampled based on willingness to participate in interviews. The interviews offer a broad scope in the diversity of population, but content was not correlated with regard to gender or age. Of note, age played no factor in participants' ability or propensity to use meditation in their personal spiritual disciplines.

I waited two weeks after the last class session to interview the people who agreed to participate in follow-up research. The reasoning behind this delay was to allow for a processing of the quantitative data and to allow for participants to have time to think through and consider what they learned and how they would maintain any practice of biblical meditation. The interviews took place over the length of a week, with seven in-person interviews and one email correspondence. This gave me an eight-person sample which supplied enough data to give thorough analysis of the quantitative content from 16

participants.⁴ Each person responded to a prompt informing them the interview responses would be confidential and the content would be used only in this project. All interviewees agreed to participate and the seven in-person interviewees agreed to my use of a recording device. These recordings were saved into audio files which I referenced numerous times for qualitative analysis.

I categorized the interview questions into four categories: course and curriculum, personal practice, fellowship, and further questions. The first three categories are meant to probe the interviewees reception of the entire course experience. The further questions section served as a forum for interviewees to change answers they may remember about their survey responses or serve as a vehicle for personal testimonies about their experiences with biblical meditation. I analyzed the data according to these four categories.

Course and Curriculum

Prior to the course and the use of the guidebook, participants were mostly uneducated in the discipline of biblical meditation. A consensus grew from each interview, none of the participants were aware of the particular spiritual discipline of biblical meditation. Through the course participants grew in their knowledge of the discipline and came to find specific ways of practicing meditation that benefited them individually, often one person was drawn to a method another participant found odd or

⁴John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 186. Creswell and Plano Clark argue qualitative sample sizes in a sequential explanatory mixed methods design should be small because the most “important consideration lies in collecting enough qualitative information so that meaningful themes can be developed” (86). Based on the quantitative data, the qualitative information is a means to explain why and how participants found their practices of biblical meditation to be meaningful, insights for this type of evaluation do not necessitate an equally proportioned sample size to the quantitative data.

unappealing. Though biblical meditation was something new, interviewees found they grew in comfort in their practice as the course progressed. The sense of comfortability came out of the organization of the guidebook and the foundation of God's Word as the object and means of the spiritual discipline.

Interviewees were in agreement that the guidebook was something they would reference and utilize for their personal practice of the discipline even after the completion of the course. One interviewee shared though they were not privy to the abstract nature of meditation prior to the class, they were now finding the concept in the Bible and enjoyed looking through and scrutinizing different translations of the Bible for the sake of discovering the multiple terms and how they are used in the text. Another interviewee expressed a type of growth in the faith as they began meditating over things not necessarily positive. They were under the assumption their spirituality must always be focused on positivity, happiness, and comfort, but the meditation templates gave them access to contemplating negative parts of their life or their need for grace and mercy from God. Overall, participants perceived they were handling the Bible in a new way and drawing deeper into the text. Each interviewee commented in some fashion their focus was sustained by use of an organized help, particularly the guidebook. Interviewees explained the course would not have been as beneficial had there not been a means for personal practice.

Personal Practice

A majority of the interviewees explained how their faith was increased through biblical meditation. This increase of faith was due to an invigorated engagement with Scripture and an organized means for deeper thinking on Scripture. One interviewee

explained how biblical meditation caused them to approach the reading of God's Word differently, even when not intending to meditate, such as when it was read during the Sunday service. It became harder for this person to gloss over a text because of their growth in fondness for examining Scripture.

Most interviewees agreed, through their growing awareness of the discipline they desired to practice it more and were convicted of the need for changes in their lifestyles so as to permit the deliberate practice. One solution to continued meditation practice a number of respondents shared was the conviction to be held accountable by others who took part in the course. At least four interviewees expressed their desire to continue using the guidebook as a reference for their personal practice while setting a deliberate time each morning or evening for meditation on God's providence. An interviewee spoke of their desire for personal practice: "I want to be a person who meditate like this."

Fellowship

Through the questions pertaining to fellowship, interviewees reiterated their desire for accountability. Many respondents expressed a need for sermons and small groups to include mentions of biblical meditation, so the congregation would grow in awareness of the discipline. Several interviewees expressed the need for the church to hold courses on other spiritual disciplines and to especially offer the course on biblical meditation again in the future.

Interviewees shared how important it is for Christians to establish individual patterns of spiritual discipline, so their experiences can be shared with others in both community encouragement and worship. As participants shared in uniform practice

offered by the guidebook they were able to reflect and share one with another. One interviewee said, “I’ve had deeper conversations with people in the class”; this individual went on to express how healthy it would be for them to have more interactions like they experienced in the course. A majority of respondents agreed biblical meditation is for all Christians both newly converted and longsuffering; however, the discipline should be shepherded for the sake of both accountability and orthodox methods. Interviewees expressed how they missed this interaction when the course was completed. Often repeated in each interview, participants found the guidebook to be of great use to them after the class for their continued practice and each hoped the class would be offered again.

Concerning the question of a connection between individual and corporate practice of biblical meditation, interviewees responded with consensus that their personal practice invariably affected their corporate worship. Interviewees agreed to the necessity of both private practice of spiritual disciplines and corporate practice of worship. A majority viewed the two as essential for any thriving Christian spirituality. These types of responses correlate with the general belief in the interviewees that corporate worship and fellowship must include reference to personal spiritual disciplines and training in those disciplines for the spiritual growth of the congregation.

Further Questions

Interviewees expressed no desire to change anything they had recorded in the pre- and post-surveys. Several interviewees gave responses relating to their personal testimonies with biblical meditation. One interviewee shared that he “learned how to better worship God.” Others indicated they found a clarity in their spirituality because

they learned meditation was not just an Eastern mystic practice. Many interviewees felt they were opened up into the world of spiritual disciplines and because of this they were reinvigorated in their communication with God. These respondents believed they could now incorporate new patterns into their lifestyle and pray beyond the church bulletin prayer requests. Participants overwhelmingly found the guidebook to be a boon to their practice and express how they want to use it as a regular means for practicing meditation throughout the next year.

Synthesis of Data Collection

The consensus of the data reflects that not only did participants affirm their knowledge and practice of biblical meditation were positively changed, but the data indicates this project was the vehicle for God enhancing the spiritual maturity of his people in biblical meditation. For this reason, I consider the third and final primary goal of this project to be successfully met. The results of the qualitative interviews assure what was found when considering the statistics, the select members of MWBC who participated fully in the course grew in their knowledge and practice, but more importantly, they grew in their faith and desire to be in communion with God and God's people.

Conclusion

This chapter served to demonstrate the means and results of how my project met three primary goals: assessment of the knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines with an emphasis on biblical meditation, development of curriculum, and increasing the knowledge and enhancing the practice of biblical meditation among select members of MWBC. It is with great joy and thanksgiving to God that I can present data indicating the

success of meeting these primary goals. However, if this project is to be repeatable for the sake of growing and shepherding more members of the body of Christ, then it is essential to evaluate how this project can be a greater glory to God's bride. The following chapter provides an assessment on how this project can be of greater use to the church through assessing each goal's weaknesses and strengths.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter serves as an evaluation of the ministry project, offering assessments of the project's purpose, goals, weaknesses and strengths. A portion of the chapter also addresses how the project might be changed for greater benefit in future use at Mount Washington Baptist Church (MWBC) as well as among other local congregations. The last section of the chapter contains personal reflections on the experience as a whole. The chapter closes with a conclusion for these evaluations.

Evaluation of the Purpose

The purpose of this ministry project was to educate select members of MWBC in how to practice biblical meditation in order for these members to grow in their faith. The purpose was successful through the teaching of a particular curriculum targeting the context of those who would attend the class and through the distribution and guided use of a supplemental book. This success in achieving the proposed purpose accounts for two objectives: the increase of knowledge and the enhancement of practice. Evaluating whether the purpose was met entails assessing whether or not I educated the members sufficiently and whether or not those members were capable—or saw the necessity of—

practicing the discipline of biblical meditation as a means to grow in their faith.

According to the assessment in chapter 4, the purpose was successfully achieved.¹

Though the purpose was achieved, I do not believe this is the type of project that should cease at the close of the final interview. Spiritual discipline is an essential aspect of the Christian life which ought to be perpetually cultivated among local congregations. This ministry project aimed to educate the church in cultivating a particular spiritual discipline, but this was in order to introduce the congregation to the greater need of our church. Completing this project led me to discern both a greater wealth of means for spiritual formation and a greater necessity for continued shepherding of my congregation. My context had no prior educational model or structure for personal spiritual disciplines in its ministry. This ministry project ascertained not only the need for such a model, but served as a test for how such a model could be profitable and sustained in our ministry context.

Evaluation of Goals

The goals of this ministry project were progressive, one building off of the other. Each goal, when successfully met, prepared for and served as foundational to the success of the preceding goal. The three goals of the project were as follows. First, I assessed the knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines, emphasizing biblical meditation, among a select group of MWBC members. Second, I developed a multi-week curriculum and a multi-week self-guided devotional. Third, I increased the knowledge

¹See the “Synthesis of Data Collection” section of chap. 4.

and enhanced the practice of biblical meditation in the select group of MWBC members. These three goals will be evaluated individually in this section of the chapter.

The first goal of this project was meant to set a foundation for what was known and practiced among the select members who participated in the survey. Though I had already prepared the curriculum for the course in advance, I sought to identify specific areas for the purpose of encouraging those particular weaknesses among the participants. The assessment tool was structured out of the prepared curriculum, to analyze what information was gained through the curriculum rather than the lack of knowledge among the participants. Since the completion of the course, I observe the merit in basing the curriculum off of the contextual weaknesses in the group. However, because my project targeted such a specific spiritual discipline I felt it necessary to structure my assessment the way that I did.

The preliminary survey offered three categories: a spiritual disciplines assessment, a section pertaining to perceptions of biblical meditation, and a section pertaining to the frequency of certain biblical meditation items. The spiritual disciplines assessment was something I cared little for prior to my analysis of the post-survey. I was primarily focused on the survey related to biblical meditation, but once I reflected on the post-survey analysis I understood the need for background related to the whole of spiritual discipline practice. Conceptually, the spiritual disciplines assessment is something I found useful in explaining my assertions about the need for biblical meditation education. I lament the fact I did not put more time into developing a larger and more thorough assessment of spiritual practices that could be regularly implemented in the church. This type of instrument would work well in the future for the development

of other courses aimed at particular spiritual disciplines. Offering a wide range of considerations related to biblical spirituality in a congregational survey, I would be further capable of understanding questions of correlation and causation among the membership of MWBC. Through the assessment I discovered how necessary personal spiritual disciplines are to corporate worship; in chapter 4 I address how this could be an important issue to study in MWBC.

The other two sections of the preliminary survey were identical to the post-survey. As I was constructing this survey I determined it would be prudent to separate the categories of perception and frequency, what I refer to in my goals as knowledge and practice, respectively. I am pleased by this decision because it offered a greater usefulness in understanding the tendencies of my participants, and it also offered insight into the need for proper understanding prior to any enhancement of practice.

The downside to my assessment was the population of participants. If I had to do this project over again, I would recruit through more face-to-face interactions among my congregation in order to gather data from a wider pool. Observing a wider population regarding the spiritual disciplines assessment would provide further support to my argument. More importantly, it would enable me to hypothesize a means for growth with further specificity. The design of this project for biblical meditation served the need of Bible reading and prayer, but additional assessments might reveal other spiritual disciplines that could be enhanced for the increased faith and devotion of MWBC.

The second goal of this project was to develop a curriculum to be taught to the members who participated in the preliminary survey. This curriculum utilized a series of lectures and a supplemental guidebook. This twofold means for education was

determined based on the desire to both increase knowledge and enhance practice of the select members. The lectures, and the guidebook to some degree, offered information concerning various aspects of biblical meditation. This subject matter was developed into four categories: instructions for proper practice, progressive sanctification, biblical exegesis, and historical examination. The guidebook was instructional and designed for immediate practical use. Both means of education were heavily built out of my research in chapters 2 and 3 of this project. However, the details and concepts were altered in their delivery for the sake of lecture and for language suited to the average layperson. The four lectures were produced as outlines; from these outlines I created hand-outs for participants to take notes and refer to throughout the course. The hand-outs followed the lecture material.

The guidebook was something I began constructing prior to the lectures, although it went through several changes throughout the process.² The priority for the guidebook grew to be its practicality in encouraging Scripture-based meditation methods. This priority came from several conversations I had with my supervisor. I was pleased with the guidebook and used an online publishing platform (CreateSpace) to produce a hardcopy of the guidebook. I used this publication method for two reasons. First, publishing in this manner was more cost-effective than occupying the church copy machine; second, the professional construction of the guidebook would increase its aesthetic value to the participant, which I believed would encourage its practical use.

²See the “Constructing the Guidebook” section of chap. 4.

The curriculum, both the lectures and guidebook, were reviewed by two experts in the field of biblical spirituality. Both of these experts were asked to refer to a curriculum rubric I designed with consideration from the PDS office. The rubric included four criteria: theological competency, historical competency, application, and clarity. The curriculum was considered either sufficient or exemplary in the four criteria following several reviews by the expert panel. Efforts were made to re-word or re-phrase abstract language to better suit laypeople or to simply remove unnecessary language from the guidebook. This goal was vital in fulfilling the preceding goal.

The third goal of this project was to implement the curriculum and assess if it in fact increased the knowledge of all surveyed participants and, by such knowledge, enhanced their practice of biblical meditation. This goal was achieved through the means of four lectures, discussions, the use of the guidebook, and the assessment of participants through surveys and interviews. I will evaluate three aspects of this goal in the following section: the lectures, the guidebook, and the collection of research data by means of surveys and interviews.

I enjoy teaching; it would be bizarre to say otherwise as a person working toward a degree in educational ministry. However, enjoying something and being adequate at something are not always a package deal. The gifts received from the Lord are meant to be affirmed and honed in the local congregation; this was made evident during the course. After the first lecture I was convicted by the Spirit that I had spent an hour ranting about a subject few in the room could comprehend. All participants would have gladly complimented me on my knowledge, but few could have likely explained to me the content of the lecture (the role of the Holy Spirit and the process of

sanctification). I attempted to cram too much into the lectures without considering the audience and context. I prayed and reviewed my purpose statement, then I prepared to train my people for the remainder of the class sessions. One resolution for this problem would be extending the timeline to include more lectures with more time for discussion. The subject matter was important and the participants desired to know more concerning progressive sanctification, but it was not so essential to the evening's lecture to monopolize discussion time. When these lessons are taught again I will prepare manuscripts rather than outlines. The experience was humbling as I learned my limitations in coherently and orderly presenting information to laypeople. While I was sufficiently passionate about orthodox spirituality, I learned to prepare information as a prayerful shepherd rather than relying on head knowledge alone.

The guidebook served as the backbone to the course. The conversations and discussions revolved around the guidebook, especially the responses in the participant interviews. I had not prepared for the guidebook to be so essential to the participants, though I intended it for their use. As of this writing, I know the women's group at MWBC discussed their time spent in biblical meditation through the use of the guidebook in their recent meeting over a month since the post-survey. I intend to incorporate more information into the guidebook and revise it as a tool without need for accompanying lectures.

I discovered how imperative it was that my design be sequential-mixed-methods when I discovered the outlier in my data. Had I not investigated the numbers in the survey, I would be unable to deduce the practical success of my course. Taking the time to interview my participants was helpful in discerning what it was about the course

that actually motivated people to consider their spiritual disciplines. Even the outlier, though dismissive of the concepts instructed through the course, had to think through their spiritual discipline practice in order to say something during the interview process. I am thankful to God I had the opportunity to take courses like Applied Empirical Research that educated me in the proper use of quantitative and qualitative instruments, as I cannot imagine trying to explore these issues of spirituality without some form of proper analysis. If I could change something in this collection of data it would be a greater population of both survey and interviews, but I do believe the population I had is a relevant mix of the congregation of MWBC.

One issue I faced in accomplishing the three primary goals of my project was the desire to widen my focus. Though my passion throughout the project was the discipline of biblical meditation, I continually felt the need for deeper analysis of other issues of spirituality. As I constructed the course I continuously removed subject matter for the sake of streamlining the focus of the information. I discovered through the weekly discussions a majority of congregants struggled with the concept of sanctification. Some participants struggled with issues of mysticism and charismatic tendencies. Some participants continually referred to their lack of prayer or their lack of biblical education. These issues pressed on me and drew me to concern myself with how to handle such questions in a considerate manner. I am thankful God brought such depth to the conversations based on orthodox spirituality, but I desire to actively educate these congregants with deeper doctrinal matters. Now I see vividly how essential biblical spirituality is in conversations of discipline and fellowship. I was not prepared for such

conversations, but when I am called to a senior pastor position I pray to be equipped with both doctrine and compassion.

Weaknesses

Reflecting on the course in its entirety and completion, I note three particular points of weakness. First of these weaknesses is the amount of information with which I sought to inundate my participants. I included far too much for four weeks. This overload is witnessed in the fact that several participants struggled to find where we were in their handouts because I had moved around too much. Though my participants loved my seeming brilliance and thought the lessons were extremely helpful, I came to the conviction I must teach people and not lessons as reiterated elsewhere in this project. A one-hour block is an appropriate time for teaching and discussion, but for the sake of truly learning the material I intended to present for the purpose of biblical meditation, the course would need to be extended for future implementation and ease of learning and synthesizing the material. From a more practical sense, the course could simply be adjusted to only fit a six-week timeline.

A second weakness was that some of the content was over the heads of multiple learners. I had one interview where the person asserted the teaching was wonderful and life changing, but the person felt too old for some of the curriculum. The interviewee remarked how I was a seminary student so it did not pertain to her. I see this less as an issue with the participant's intelligence and aptitude, and more of an issue with my ability to present the information as applicably as I can. These are considerations I take to heart not just in repeating this course in the future, but in my regular role as a teaching pastor and preacher.

The third weakness has to do with time as it relates to the collection of data. Upon finishing the course, I struggled to complete ministry work, school work, perform my responsibilities as a husband and father, collect interviews and analyze the statistics. This lack of time stewardship can be extremely taxing on all those in ministry. The results of stretching myself too thin are easily evidenced in shoddy work that reveals an immature heart. Truly God's grace was with me and only through Christ was I able to accomplish the tasks needing handled. My goal was to finish my project and complete the requirements for school, but as I continued to forget ministry concerns I realized that I needed to back up and reassess what was actually important and glorifying to God. Through this project God humbled me numerous times, including my weakness of time mismanagement. I was blessed to realize my mistake before it was realized in me by others.

Strengths

One important strength worth mentioning in this ministry project is that my church has requested I teach the course again after I complete my graduation. This is the greatest compliment I have received from my congregation. Those who did not think it worthwhile and those who were on vacation or simply too busy before wish to participate based on the outcomes of those practicing the discipline of biblical meditation. While it was gratifying to hear various participants compliment me through the experience of this project, the adoration means little without observable spiritual growth manifesting in the daily spiritual walk of the participants. The truest compliment I received in the completion of this course continues to be the practice of piety observed in many participants who are actively influencing other members of MWBC. Through the use of

the guidebook and the handouts I witness the excitement I remember in my own discovery of the field of biblical spirituality, chiefly the spiritual disciplines. I pray this strength is cultivated more and more in the life of MWBC and that other spiritual disciplines will be explored. I am already witnessing the lasting impact such a ministry project can have on the life of a particular ministry.

How the Project Could Be Improved

This project could be improved for future use in a number of ways. Though the project was successful in meeting its goals and successful in providing what is, at first appearance, a wider and lasting impact in the life of the church, these factors do not necessarily mean the congregation is sustained in their spiritual formation. Though the criteria for this ministry project did not require a post-project plan of action, I believe such a plan of action would be worthwhile. I would construct this plan of action for the sake of covering numerous spiritual disciplines and instilling their practice in the congregation.

The spiritual discipline assessment that served as a preliminary glimpse at the congregation showed weaknesses in spiritual disciplines education. I deduced this was impacting the corporate worship according to the data I received. If the practice of spiritual disciplines is a factor in the health of the church, then it would benefit the congregation to make spiritual disciplines a regular part of the ministry in the life of the church's ministry. A course offering like biblical meditation should not simply be offered once and then cease to be a topic in the church. A course like biblical meditation should be offered in a regularly-cycled series on spiritual disciplines. If MWBC took a yearly survey of its spiritual discipline practices and continued to offer courses and

supplemental materials related to spiritual disciplines, then it may reveal not only an impact in the corporate worship of the congregation, but an overall healthier and spiritually thriving community for Christ.

Personal Reflections

I am a young pastor by the standard of my congregation. I am an associate pastor who grew into the position through my start in ministry as a part-time youth director while still in college. Though I have pastored for almost nine years, this is still the church that gave me the opportunity for ministry. Through teaching this course and distributing the guidebook I was able to experience interactions with adult members of my church in ways I had not accessed prior to this project. Though I preach regularly and teach throughout the year, there was something special about leading and teaching my own curriculum in such an intimate manner that granted me a new kind of relationship with my congregation. I was no longer simply a young person with a Bible. In their eyes, I was a pastor shepherding them spiritually.

The curriculum I taught and the conversations I had with participants centered around certain doctrines and concepts this population had not considered. I grew, in my reflections, to have a greater passion for presenting biblical doctrines to these congregants. It is unwise to expect less from people than what the Bible speaks. I consider those to whom I ministered to for six-weeks to be able to come to terms with doctrines like God's providence, sanctification, and the meaning of baptism. I realized through the course that these people had not experienced teaching or preaching on these matters and it was no difficult job to bring such doctrines to light. The participants were eager and ready to learn, even from a young pastor. I will treasure this course as an

affirmation to God's doctrines of grace and as a blessed opportunity from God to grow in my calling as a shepherd.

Conclusion

This project was successful in meeting its purpose and goals. As mentioned in one interview, there is already a lasting impression from the course as participants are hearing the public reading of God's Word differently because of their experience with biblical meditation. Personally, I am only just beginning to unpack the effects of this ministry project in my philosophy of ministry and the blessings I have discovered in the field of biblical spirituality. God will continue to sanctify his people through his Word, myself included. It has been an immense blessing to shepherd God's people in the truth of his Word for the duration of this project. I will continue to evaluate the weaknesses and strengths of this project as I look ahead to wherever God is calling me in ministry. May God continue to enrich those members of MWBC who learned to experience the treasures of biblical meditation in their communion with God.

APPENDIX 1
BIBLICAL MEDITATION INVENTORY

The following survey was distributed to a select group of members for the purpose of focusing on their practice of biblical meditation prior to formal instruction and guided practice. The survey is almost identical to the post-survey except for the inclusion of several questions related to overall spiritual disciplines practice.

BIBLICAL MEDITATION INVENTORY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to explain the current practices and perceptions of biblical meditation in your spiritual disciplines practice. This research is being conducted by Chris Osterbrock for the purpose of a research project pertaining to biblical spirituality. In this research, you will be asked several questions regarding your personal and individual perceptions of current and future biblical meditation practices. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this inventory, or checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate I do not agree to participate

Directions: Answer the descriptions below by circling or placing a mark on the appropriate option. The answer should align with your current practice and not with what you assume to be the ideal response. The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,
AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

Spiritual Disciplines Practices:

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I have read at least 50% of the entire Bible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I recognize and make use of organized spiritual disciplines on a weekly basis. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I struggle with my spiritual health because I am not properly educated in biblical spiritual disciplines. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. Those close to me are aware that I practice some form of Christian devotional spirituality. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. My corporate worship is positively impacted by my personal spiritual practices. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Perception of Biblical Meditation:

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 6. I frequently consult God's Word in my decision-making. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|

7. I have been formally instructed in the personal spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. I am often conscious of how God's Word changes my thinking.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. I reflect on God's Word in my prayer life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. I am frequently convicted of sin and led to Repentance through my personal intake of Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. I often find myself contemplating God's activity in creation during my day.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. I have a hard time keeping my concentration when reading Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I could explain to someone else how to use the Bible for meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I prefer to be spontaneous in my devotional practices and don't like a fixed method.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. Biblical meditation is an important and useful spiritual discipline for ALL Christians.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. I have some knowledge of how meditation has been practiced in Christian history.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. I am often aware of the Holy Spirit's work in me as I am reading or meditating on Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. I could define and explain biblical meditation to another Christian.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. I am confident in my ability to use multiple methods for meditating on God's Word and God's Works.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. I have a basic understanding of sanctification.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Frequency and Practice of Biblical Meditation:

Directions: Answer the following questions according to the frequency (amount of times) you practice each item by circling the appropriate number.

	Times per average week...					
21. I read and meditate on Scripture	0	1	2	3	4	5+
22. I share experiences of my spiritual life with others	0	1	2	3	4	5+
23. I spend more than three minutes meditating on a specific verse or Christian doctrine	0	1	2	3	4	5+
24. I wrote (in my Bible, a journal, notebook, etc.) something related to my faith, my spiritual walk, or a topic of Christian doctrine	0	1	2	3	4	5+
25. I pray for more than three minutes at a time	0	1	2	3	4	5+

APPENDIX 2
BIBLICAL MEDITATION CURRICULUM
AND GUIDE

This appendix includes the curriculum and devotional guide-book utilized in the project. Only a sample of the preface, introduction, and week two are included in this appendix, as the size precludes full demonstration of the guide-book.

Biblical Meditation: A Guided Journey

A Four-Week Curriculum for the
Practice of Biblical Meditation

Christopher Ellis Osterbrock
May 16, 2018

All Scripture quotations taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2001).

Lesson 1

Objectives:

The student will:

- Understand the biblical directive for meditation
- Be able to communicate a definition for biblical meditation
- Assess multiple approaches to meditation
- Gain an understanding of the doctrine of sanctification
- Become familiar with methods of Bible reading
- Become familiar with the role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual disciplines
- Understand the need for proper training in Christian disciplines by examining in what ways our spiritual lives might be enriched through this experience

What is biblical meditation? What are its cause, means, and purpose or result?

What does it mean to be biblical?

Why be biblical? Why not something else?

What does it mean to meditate?

Why meditate? Why not meditate?

First, approach to the exercise:

Prepared with Bible, enough lighting, adequate amenities for comfort, optional fasting for a particular instance or 'event meditation'

Second, recognizing the approach theologically, psychologically, and physiologically

What is the psychological means for spirituality?

Neuroplasticity – the reconfiguring of the conscience (Sudi Kate Gliebe)

Third, what's the deal with sanctification?

The idea of “spiritism” in the postmodern world (prominent in pantheism, animism, and the occult). Any idea of unlocking, opening, or some secret freeing wisdom is antithetical to Christ and what sanctification actually is.

God is the cause and his grace/disciplines are the means: Psalm 119:73 “Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.”

A quick design of meditation:

1. Preparation, prayer, and profession
2. Meditation and Journaling
3. Close in prayer with . . .
 - Explanation of text (for worship)
 - Application of text (for sanctification)

Share the Experience

Step One:

Distractions will abate as you learn and practice meditation (regular and habitual discipline takes time to grow). When notice is drawn to what is distracting you, you can assert your mind to Scripture. As you prepare your body for meditation, carry with you Scripture either in print or in your mind; you may also have a doctrine handy in your thoughts or a work of God to consider. Prepare your “table,” making sure you can spend some time in your location and that you can read or take notes, then move into prayer while drawing in some calming and focusing breaths.

What you are **not** preparing for:

- A time to explain to God what He was thinking in His revelation.
- A time of vision-quest or mystical enlightenment
- A heavenly vision or revelation from God based on sources outside of the Bible
- An answer to asserted demands

Come to the “table” with the intention of listening to God’s Word, prepared to mold your mind accordingly.

Prayer is inseparably linked to the gospel. J. Gary Millar writes, the Gospel is “God’s promised and provided solution to the problem of human rebellion against him and its consequences. The Gospel shape of prayer is evident . . . all biblical material build on this basic understanding:” prayer is calling on the name of the LORD, not for His sake but for our own conformity and union to Him in Christ Jesus whose very name we pray.¹ Biblical meditation is connected with this definition of prayer, as a matter of fact, the one

¹J. Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 17.

overlaps the other. We begin in prayer and we close in prayer and the whole way through we are intentional about the activity being practiced in the presence of God, for the praise of God, for our edification by God. Our good works follow this process, by way of the grace of God in our progressive sanctification.

Through prayer we direct all attention to God. First, we profess to God that we anticipate his work to be accomplished in us, humbly, submissively, that this is not a time of study but an expression of deep communion that must have eternal impact. “I am going to read through the first nine verses of Jeremiah because I know you speak through your word the same yesterday, today, and forever. Therefore, I recognize that you have given me your revelation alone as the gift of saving and sanctifying knowledge” (see LBC 1689, 1:4).

Second, we articulate our plan of action or our purpose statement for the experience. Not as though commanding what we want to get out of it, that is the opposite of our practice! But we humbly point our hearts to God and explain how we intend to conduct our approach to him. Nowhere do we state that we expect to find our answers to our own particular questions. Wouldn't it be better to have God tell us what questions He can answer. He knows what answers we actually *need*! We go to the text first, but we articulate whatever our method might be with openness and anticipation of God to answer for us. We articulate this plan to hold ourselves accountable to God.

When we profess and articulate the purpose of our meditation we establish who is in charge and we maintain a heart and mindset of subordination to the text. We expect of ourselves to grow and be edified, not to empty our minds or to create experiences for ourselves. This is what makes prayer such an integral part of the discipline, it is the gateway for our understanding of what it is the Bible accomplishes in God's people: communion with Christ (the Word).

Step Two:

We do not end our prayer! We open the Word and read; acknowledging the text in three particular ways: Covenant, Context, Command. Covenant: we draw attention to Christ. Context: we see the text in light of its peculiar Scripture reference. Command: we identify God is speaking still, directly to us and our situation in life. God is at work even now. As your mind cascades over the text, incline your heart to whatever form of meditation you have prescribed (see Guidebook). I will not go over all of the methods at this point, but understand this is where such methods fit into the format. Included in this design is journaling. I cannot overstate the benefits of journaling the meditation experience. Whether or not you *enjoy* writing, there is no drought of benefit from putting pen to paper with the experience of meditating on God's Word.

Step Three:

When done meditating, speak to God and yourself about what it is the text says. Explain succinctly the purpose God seemed to have for recording these words. Explain the text as a means to worship God; “why (or how) do I worship God through this Scripture?” When you have explained the text, then apply the text to yourself. The experience is between you and God, but you may also ask the Lord to help you be

attentive to opportunities to share your insights with others. You are advocating that God be worshipped, that he is mightily working through you by his revelation, and he *will* work through others. Share what you experienced of God's personal communion by being in God's corporate communion.

Purpose:

The purpose of meditation is ALWAYS application. How does application work?

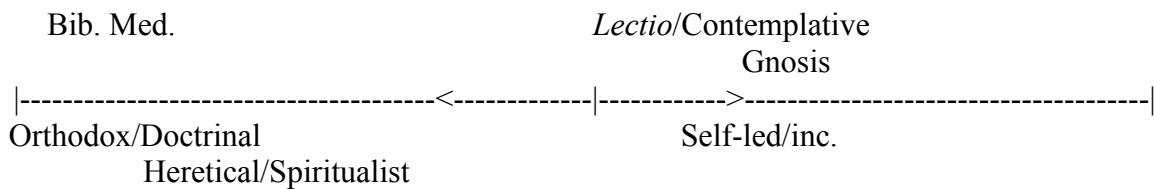
The Puritan concept of casuistry. Not history of kazoos, but the examination of the conscience.

Differences of other forms (nonbiblical and mystic)

Look to *Lectio Divina* and contemplative ritual.

Look to Eastern Mysticism and Gnosis.

Tracing the paradigm:



Sharing questions, answers, and concerns.

Lesson 2

A how-to for biblical meditation and making use of the devotional guidebook. Explain (include descriptions from David Saxton): Occasional (Thomas Boston, Sermon 39) and Deliberate (Joseph Hall, John Owen)

Meditation as a conversation not as a pursuit. We will go over the triangle of meditation and then the spiral of meditation. Edmund Clowney asserts, "Meditation reflects on the truth of God in the presence of God" (46). One might say I have ripped the rug out from under them by shedding greater light on the supposed "mysteries" and "secrecies" of meditation. But ponder what kind of God could be conjured or manipulated? To quote Star Trek V, "What does God need with a starship?" We need only look to Elijah to see it was no pageantry that caused God to rain fire on the soaking altar...but it was *only* pageantry and ecstasies, void of deity, practiced by the prophets of

Asherah and Baal. Let's look to our triangle (figure A1) to see further details of the logic and right practice of biblical meditation.

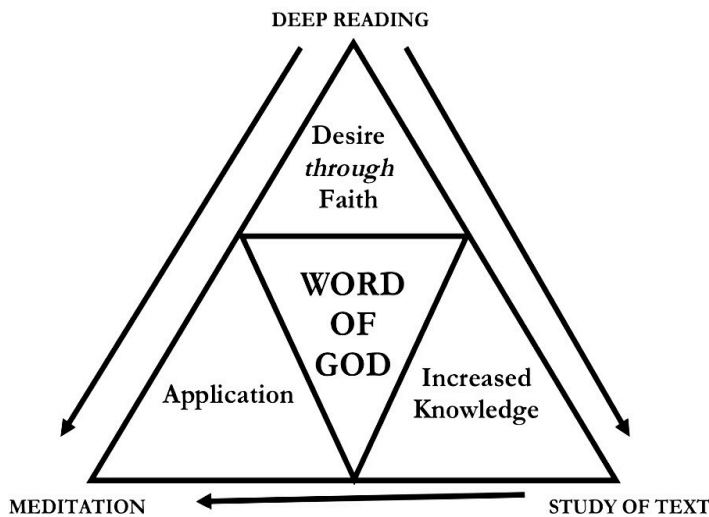


Figure A1. Bible reading triangle

Notice we begin with deep reading. Contemplation by itself is empty, however, as Christians, our reflections are to be directed by God's Word in Scripture by the Holy Spirit as noted in the 1689 *Baptist Confession* (10.1): "He enlightens their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God."² It is a work of faith by which we desire to conceive of God's attributes in our minds. Through the gift of faith our reading of God's Word is illuminated (See also LBC 1689, 1.6 and 8.8).³ This is the peak of the triangle. From there our mind cascades in either of two directions: straight into meditation or into knowledge-based study. [Teach the difference between application and increased knowledge. Explain the passing from study of text into application; this is the ideal example of biblical meditation.]

²Peter Masters, ed., *The Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689) (Oberlin, OH: Wakeman Trust, 1981).

³The 1689 *Baptist Confession* states, "The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience, although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation." Masters, *Baptist Confession of Faith*, 9. Of communion between God and His elect, "uniting them to Himself by His Spirit, revealing to them in the Word and by the Word the mystery of salvation. He persuades them to believe and obey, governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit" (21).

It is with a proper understanding of how we enter meditation that brings us to understand how we then proceed in meditation of the text. Here is the Spiral:

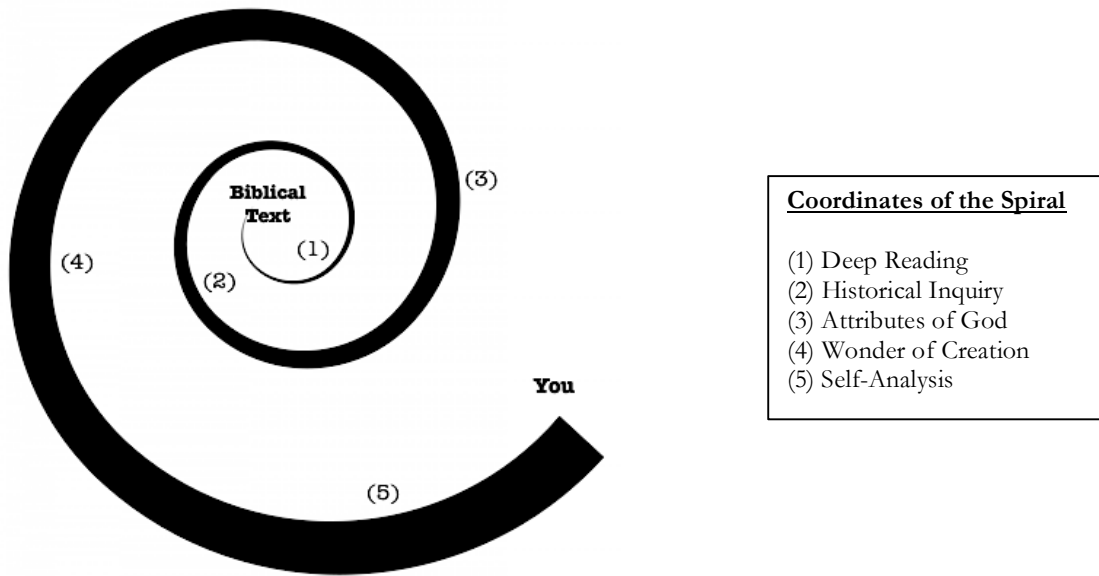


Figure A2. The spiral meditation method

Explain the spiral.

In what ways are the causes, means, and intentions (purposes), different between differing theological perspectives on meditation (including our “work” of sanctification)?

What did you believe of entering meditation prior to hearing about this perspective?

How might you perceive the benefits of biblical meditation versus other forms?

Lesson 3

Ask about the first week using the guidebook.

We have determined there must be a “Christian” or biblical way to meditate because we are created for such exercise. Sanctification is not part of the meditation

practices of the secular world. However, we see that we are sanctified by the Word of God; meditation is biblical and we are to meditate and so grow in our faith and sanctification. Let us allow Scripture to direct us. We will find tonight that the format and design that we look at is from the Bible. I think of the author of Hebrews and his meditations on the prophet Isaiah, or on Job's meditations on God's sovereignty in chapter 23. How do we follow after these saints? Scripture sets the precedent for all spiritual disciplines.

As Christians entering the practice of biblical meditation, it must be obvious we would desire to meditate biblically, that is, how the Bible teaches the practice of meditation. First, we look to the vocabulary utilized in the Bible of meditation, its practices, methods, and purposes.

Biblical Meditation:

Hebrew:

- *Hagah* – meditate, moan, muse, mumble to oneself (Ps 143:5 uses both *hagah* and *siach* for the practice, along with the act of remembering: “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands.”)
- *Siach* – to meditate, muse, complain, consider, even sing (suach, pensive)
- *Sakal* – consider, comprehend, make wise, show oneself attentive, prosper (Is 41:20 “that they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.”)
- *Raah* – consider, to see (Prov 6:6, make yourself wise by contemplating the things you witness and observe)
- *Bene* – consider, discern, contemplate (Job 42:3; Dan 8:5 “and as I was considering...”; 1 Kings 3:11-12 “And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.”)

Greek:

- *Katanoeo* – discern, understand, perceive (Luke 12:24-27; Heb 3:1 “you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession...”)
- *Phroneo* – to have understanding, to think, to gain insight, postulate (Rom 12:3; bad Phil 3:19; Col 3:2 “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”)

- *Logizomai* – think, consider, reason, reckon (Phil 4:8 “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”)
- *Meletao* – devise, plan, exercise in study, ponder (1 Tim 4:15 “Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.”)
- *Enthumeomai* – meditate, ponder, reflect (Matt 1:20 “But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”; 9:4; Acts 10:19 “And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you.”; Heb 4:12)

Turns of phrase and other instances:

- Colossians 3:10 speaks of renewed knowledge
- Romans 12:2 renewing of your mind
- Luke 2:19 Treasure in the heart
- Proverbs 4:26 (make level/balance or ponder)
- Remembrance (general)

Language used of God:

- Job 11:11 “For he knows worthless men; when he sees iniquity, will he not **consider** it?”
- Psalm 8 – God “thinks” of his people.
- Luke 24:45 – eyes are opened to the Scripture by the work of the Triune God. “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...”
- Romans 8 – the Spirit guides in prayer, in reading, and in renewing our minds.

John 17:17 “Sanctify them with the Truth; Your Word is Truth.”

We look at how the below passages describe the practice of meditation:

OT Passages:

Genesis 24:63 (Edmund Calamy)

Joshua 1:8-9

Psalm 1
Psalm 119

NT Passages:

Luke 12:24-28

Philippians 4:8-10

Colossians 3:1-17

To get in the mindset of the biblical principle of meditation, let's describe some of the ways you are thinking or imagining a person in the OT and NT to meditate. How might they analyze or condemn the Eastern Mystic understanding of meditation?

How would you now describe some of the differences we discussed in the first lesson?

Sharing questions, answers, and concerns.

Lesson 4

Ask about second week utilizing the guidebook.

Once again relating a deeper analysis of Purpose

Historical Patterns:

Examine the multiple practices through the centuries.
Describe what makes things different theologically?

Look to two disparate teachings from each era...

AD 1 – 1000

Positive: Augustine (354-430) and Gregory (540-604)

Negative: Benedict of Nursia (480-547) and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

Some idiosyncrasies we find in the movement from the first century church into the first millennium. Include point of early meditation and syncretism from Europe (Anglo-Saxon poetry and homily).⁴

⁴Kevin Crossley-Holland, trans., *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology* (New York: Oxford

AD 1000 – 1500

Positive: Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) and Bonaventure (1217-1274)

Negative: Mary of Oignies (1177-1213) and anonymous *Cloud* author

Quest for experience versus devotion to knowledge/reason based spirituality. A cultural clash and economical struggle. Illiteracy, ecstasy, and perfectionism.

AD 1500 – 1900

Positive: Joseph Hall (1574-1656) and John Owen (1616-1683)

Negative: Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and George Fox (1624-1691)

Reformation brings ever more non-conformity. Established protestant doctrines and autonomy births new movements in spirituality.

AD 1900 – Modern day

Positive: Edmund Clowney and Donald Whitney

Negative: Evelyn Underhill and John Main of WCCM (M. Basil Pennington)

[J. Kadowaski]

Lots of syncretistic practices have latched themselves onto Christianity based on culture and prevalence. This means we must continue to seek a standard that is biblical and orthodox. As we look through history we can find there is a fine thread that moves from the first century to us. Our spirituality is enriched when we hold this thread: Scripture. We look to the Puritans for models of biblical meditation, not simply because there is an abundance of teaching, but because the chief concern of their teaching is *biblical* meditation.

Specifically looking at Puritan practices:

First, the Reformers, then . . .

Thomas Watson and Nathaniel Ranew

Joseph Hall

John Owen and Spiritual Mindedness

What sorts of theological things might you meditate on given this new information?

Look to the John Main quote, the same way we looked at the fake Buddha quote in Lesson 1, and analyze how it is terrible: “In our meditation we begin to enter into this

University Press, 2009).

state by our renunciation of words, images, thoughts and even self-consciousness, everything which is in itself contingent, ephemeral, tangential.”⁵

We will look at distinction in the practice of these examples: theological factors, Holy Spirit, Sanctification, etc.

Even when not meditating on Scripture, Jonathan Edwards shows through occasional meditation we can manage to still be stilled by biblical doctrines like the Trinity.

Do you believe there might be greater benefit studying God’s word as opposed to simply emptying your mind or meditating on nature?

Why do you think there is such a bend/stress to make spirituality so process driven or attainment driven? What in us causes that assumption or comparison-based reasoning?

What makes mystery and secrecy so attractive?

Sharing questions, answers, and concerns.

Meeting 5 (Post-Class Discussion)

Discussion of material since the end. Ask about third week utilizing the guidebook.

How has your understanding or perception of meditation changed since taking this class?

Are there aspects of meditation that you do not agree with from this class?

What have we missed, or what could we talk about more?

How is your use of the meditation guide-book coming along?

Have you noticed a particular type of meditation that works best/worst in your personal devotions? Explain.

Share a particular instance of your meditation experience. What have been some of the challenges (besides time management)?

⁵John Main, *Word into Silence: A Manual for Christian Meditation*, ed. Laurence Freeman (Norwich, England: Canterbury Press, 2006), 28.

Meeting 6 (Post-test survey and gratitude night)

Ask about fourth week utilizing the guidebook.

Distribute post-survey.

We will worship together and explain how we have grown through the experience.

Lesson 1 Handout, Part 1

What is “Biblical Meditation”?

What is sanctification?

Preparation for meditation:

Environment:

Preparedness:

Prayer and proper orientation:

What happens in meditation:

Theologically:

Psychologically:

Physiologically:

Seven steps design of meditation:

1. Preparedness
2. Prayer

3. A profession of anticipation (articulation of plan)
4. Opening the Word [Do not 'end' prayer here]
5. Meditation Method and Journaling
6. Close in prayer:
 - Explanation of text (for worship)
 - Application of text (for sanctification)
7. Share the Experience

Lesson 1 Handout, Part 2

What is "Casuistry"? _____

The process goes:

The Cause of Meditation:

The Means of Meditation:

The Purpose of Meditation:

What is UN-biblical meditation?

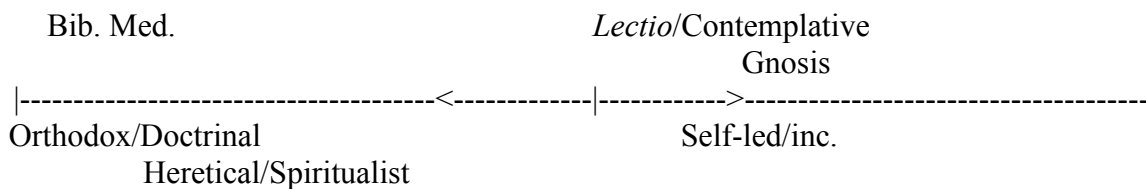
Spiritism:

Gnosticism:

Contemplative:

Self-enlightening:

Tracing the paradigm:



Note your questions or comments below for further clarification:

Lesson 2 Handout, Part 1

Occasional (Spontaneous) Meditation is

Edmund Calamy –
Thomas Watson –

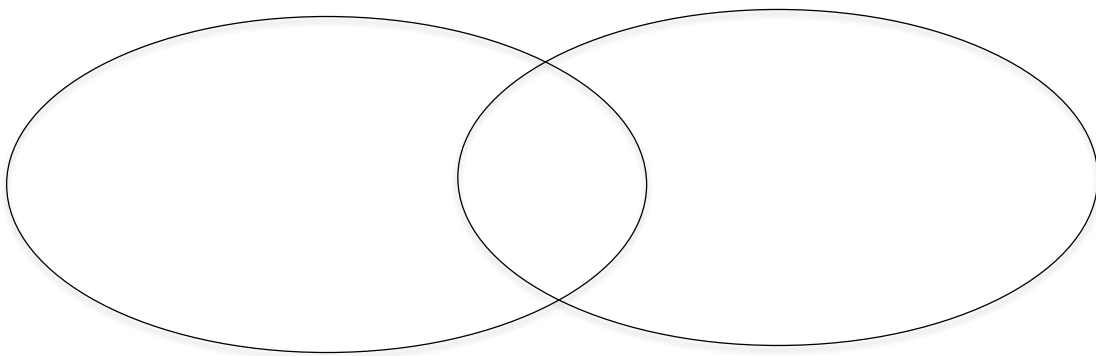
Deliberate Meditation is

Charles Spurgeon –

Deep Reading:

Studying the Text

Applying the Text



What is Piety?

M >>> **A** >>> **W**

Lesson 2 Handout, Part 2

We discuss the Spiral Method of meditation.

Deep Reading:

Historical Inquiry:

Attributes of God:

Wonder of Creation:

Self-Analysis:

In what ways are the causes, means, and intentions (purposes), different between differing theological perspectives on meditation (including our “work” of sanctification)?

-
-
-
-

What did you believe concerning meditation prior to hearing about this course’s perspective?

How might you perceive the benefits of biblical meditation versus other forms?

Note your questions or comments below for further clarification:

Lesson 3 Handout, Part 1

Biblical resources for “meditation”:

Hebrew:

- Psalm 143:5, “I **remember** the days of old; I **meditate** on all that you have done; I **ponder** the work of your hands.”
- Isaiah 41:20, “that they may see and know, may **consider** and **understand** together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.”
- Proverbs 6:6, “Go to the ant, O sluggard; **consider** her ways, and be wise.”
- 1 Kings 3:11-12, “And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to **discern** what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and **discerning** mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.”

Greek:

- Hebrews 3:1 “you who share in a heavenly calling, **consider** Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession...”
- Romans 12:3, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to **think** of himself more highly than he ought to **think**, but to **think** with **sober judgment**, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”
- Philippians 4:8, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think** about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

- 1 Timothy 4:15, “[*Take pains in*] these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.”
- Acts 10:19 “And while Peter was *pondering* the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you.”

Lesson 3 Handout, Part 2

Turns of phrase and interesting instances:

- Colossians 3:10 –
- Romans 12:2 –
- Luke 2:19 –
- Proverbs 4:26 –
- Remembrance –

Language used of God:

- Job 11:11 “...when he sees iniquity, will he not **consider** it?”
- Psalm 8 – God “thinks” of his people.
- Luke 24:45 – “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...”
- Romans 8 – the Spirit guides in prayer, in reading, and in renewing our minds.
- John 17:17 “Sanctify them with the Truth; Your Word is Truth.”

Particular instances of meditation or calls for meditation:

Old Testament

Genesis 24:63 (Edmund Calamy)

Joshua 1:8-9

Psalm 1

Psalm 119

New Testament

Luke 12:24-28

Philippians 4:8-10

Colossians 3:1-17

Note your questions or comments below for further clarification:

Lesson 4 Handout, Part 1

Two Streams

Scripture based –

Experience based –

AD 1 – 1000

Positive:

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

An early church father from Africa who is best known for his work *Confessions*.

Gregory the Great (540-604)

A pope in the Catholic church who is known for his contemplative lifestyle and writings.

Negative:

Benedict of Nursia (480-547)

Known as the founder of monasticism and writer of *Rule of Saint Benedict*, which is the manual for how to have a monastery and be a monk. Developed what is known as *lectio divina*.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

Little is known of the person who wrote his works, but the name Pseudo-Dionysius indicates the claim of the author to be the Dionysius from Acts 17:34 is false.

AD 1000 – 1500

Positive:

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

A Benedictine monk known for his writings and for consistent conflicts concerning the work and relationship of the Holy Spirit.

Bonaventure (1217-1274)

A Franciscan cardinal bishop who is known for being influenced greatly by Augustine and Anselm; writing and arguing chiefly on the existence of God and contemplation.

Negative:

Mary of Oignies (1177-1213)

A married woman who decided to live out her spiritual life as if she were a nun, by working with poor and sickly people.

The Cloud of Unknowing (anonymous)

The author of the cloud was likely one of the many spiritualists who developed during this time period.

AD 1500 – 1900

Positive:

Joseph Hall (1547-1656)

An English bishop who wrote satire and devotional material.

John Owen (1616-1683)

An English nonconformist (Puritan) theologian, widely regarded by Presbyterian and Baptists. Taught at Oxford and was chaplain to Oliver Cromwell.

Negative:

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

A Carmelite nun and Spanish mystic, progenitor of the 'Discalced Carmelites' or simply put, mystics who disregard the physical world or use it to become more holy.

George Fox (1624-1691)

Father of the Quaker movement. Dissented and was forced to rebel against religious and political leaders due to his faith. Held deeply to an “inner guide” gifted through faith.

AD 1900 – Modern Day

Positive:

Edmund Clowney (1917-2005)

A president of Westminster Theological Seminary and theologian

Donald S. Whitney

Author of several books on biblical spirituality and dean of Southern Seminary’s school of theology.

Negative:

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941)

Catholic mystic who took to Gnosticism as well as Neoplatonism; she worked to translate and update such mystical and esoteric writings on contemplation.

John Main (1926-1982) of WCCM and M. Basil Pennington (1931-2005)

Both men were monks and both promoters of *centering prayer*. Main sought the use of mantras, stillness, and the closing of eyes. Pennington developed similar methods for reaching contemplation in the ladder of *lectio divina*.

Lesson 4 Handout, Part 2

Specifically looking at Puritan practices:

Martin Luther

John Calvin

Joseph Hall

Thomas Watson

John Owen and Spiritual Mindedness

Do you believe there might be greater benefit studying God’s word as opposed to simply emptying your mind or meditating on nature?

Analyze this quote by John Main: “In our meditation we begin to enter into this state by our renunciation of words, images, thoughts and even self-consciousness, everything which is in itself contingent, ephemeral, tangential” (28).

Why do you think there is so much stress to make spirituality process/attainment driven?

What in us causes that assumption or comparison of knowledge versus spirituality? What makes mystery and secrecy so attractive?

Note your questions or comments below for further clarification:

Guidebook Preface

The following guide is designed for the purpose of teaching the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation in a group setting. This guide will lead you to focus upon Scripture, specific attributes of God, pieces of doctrine, etc. The group setting is intended to allow for a measure of both accountability and community among those practicing in this format.

There are twenty-eight separate meditations. Week One is designed for you to meditate on Psalm 23 in its entirety using a prescribed system of meditation. Week Two follows the same prescription of Week One, only meditating on Psalm 130 in its entirety. Week Three will orient you to meditate on God's providence through the use of various scriptures. You will be prescribed a specific technique for meditation different than that of the previous two weeks. Week Four serves to focus attention on various subjects of God's works.

Week one will create a base for meditating in Scripture by using a familiar psalm to practice the modeled techniques.

Week two will utilize an unfamiliar psalm in order to hone the learned skills.

Week three will propose a more advanced technique of meditation that incorporates a particular point of doctrine, in this case God's providence, while focusing attention on Scripture.

Week four will look to the personal application, through meditation, of various doctrines concerning God's redemptive work.

Throughout these four weeks you will be asked to practice a variety of meditation techniques. The seven particular methods are noted as: hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, applying, and savoring. Following these seven groupings of method, another technique will be utilized; this is regarded as the spiral method (observed in figure A2).

The purpose of providing so many different methods is to elevate the understanding Christians, in general, have of meditation. By utilizing as much of the heart and mind as we can we will then be able to hone techniques for carrying out our Scripture reading with renewed joy and Spirit-led application.

Scripture is the root of all spiritual disciplines; without the testimony and revelation of God we are without authority. It is God's word that teaches and compels us to use biblical meditation to grow in God's gift of faith and to experience knowledge of our God in his very presence.

You will find after each single meditation there is provided a space for writing notes or journaling whatever may come to mind in the meditation process. The end of each journal section includes a place to record personal application. This is the vital portion of the meditation experience. The goal is to come to a succinct sentence or two of application from the experience that directly influences you for at least the rest of the day. The Puritan instruction for biblical meditation places application as the chief objective; without producing something from out of the experience, anticipating communion with God, meditation would be useless.

I pray this guidebook helps in the future; reminding you that true insight finds origin in the enlightening of the Spirit through the reading of God's Word. One verse that testifies to the objective mindset for meditation comes from 2 Corinthians 10:4-5: "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ."

May God richly bless you through the discipline of biblical meditation.

Guidebook Introduction

Biblical meditation is a spiritual discipline many Christians may practice without even realizing it. The term meditation is in fact found in the Bible numerous times. There are several different words for the experience of contemplating, considering, applying, and ingesting the Word of God. However, after the Beatles brought eastern mysticism, accompanied by transcendental meditation, to the limelight in the mid-20th century the topic of meditation continues to be thought of primarily through pagan and eastern mystical guise.¹ This should not be the case. Christian history proves biblical meditation is nothing new, but only newly misunderstood. We are called to dust off the practice handed down to us in the Bible, through the hands of the saints. Let us renew our biblical spiritual disciplines and rejuvenate the lost art of orthodox meditation!

What is most precious to see in the practice of biblical meditation is that Christians are not to remove themselves from the rational realm or to empty their minds of cognizance. Biblical meditation is actually a practice of sowing and reaping, privately or communally. All means of grace are truly means of worship and glory. Therefore, God instructs meditation to be a means of using the whole self to practice this discipline. Eastern meditation prescribes losing the self, the Bible prescribes utilizing the whole self. We meditate on specific things while in the presence of God.

The first step in discovering biblical meditation is to define what it is and what it is not. We do this by presenting a quick analysis of the process.

Take a moment to look at figure A1 (see above in appendix 2).

Both meditation and study of a particular text must begin with deep, anticipatory reading. That is not to say a person cannot increase in knowledge without anticipatory reading, but such study will not be fruitful (glorifying God) without faith. Deep reading is the reading of God's Word with desire to know God. It is reading for the purpose of glorifying God. This type of reading comes from a heart after God. God gifts faith so his children may begin to know and continue in desire to know the Triune God.

¹Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation* (1979; repr., Vancouver: Regent College Pub., 2002), 7.

Beginning with deep reading, reading for the sake of reflecting, the Christian then makes a decision to either study the text or meditate on the text. The path from deep reading to meditation is a generalized personal path. The reader has likely come to the text with a problem or issue in mind already, posed the answer upon the Word, and began meditating on the Word with this question still clogging the heart. This is not a dangerous practice in itself, but it can pose risks. The meditator is bringing his own water to the well.

What is prescribed in this guidebook is the second path. The Christian reads God's Word, pursuing the text as it stands, seeking to not blemish the text with preconceived assumptions or personal baggage, and proceeding with an increased knowledge, guided by the Spirit to a moment of meditation. You may remember the words Jesus prayed for us, "sanctify them with the truth, Your word is truth" (John 17:17). We recall who it is within us that sanctifies: none other than God the Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the third person of the trinity.

When I stumbled into this spiritual discipline I was surprised to find the most thorough and passionate manuals and studies on the topic of biblical meditation came from the Puritan era. Treatises and sermons abound for this means of grace. Puritan Thomas Watson (1620-1686) writes,

Without meditation the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost; meditation imprints and fastens a truth in the mind . . . like the engraving of letters in gold or marble which endure.²

Influenced by the Puritan prescriptions for meditation and compelled by Puritan concern for piety, I have found biblical meditation to be of the utmost importance for spiritual growth and holy living. Puritan biblical meditation stipulates dependence and reliance upon Scripture as the sole infallible rule of faith and practice.

We hold the Bible to be the divine authority over us, particularly when we come to practice meditation. Likewise, we open our hearts and minds to God in prayer prior to and after our experience of meditation. As we enter these set-aside moments, or even those occasional spontaneous moments throughout the day, we must remember meditation is meant to be an exercise in "chewing the cud," a phrase Thomas Watson borrows from Martin Luther to describe the process; it is a pulling out of biblical truths for the purpose of personal application. Application is what sets meditation apart from textual study.

The Puritans spoke of a three-step process perpetually at work in the believer. Today we call this progressive sanctification. The believer is gifted knowledge by God, our faith; faith is effectual, meaning that it produces something inside of the Christian as a means to transform or renew the mind. Knowledge-based faith is the first step, afterwards comes affection. The Christian's heart is stirred to desire, love, and to glory in God. These stirred affections are the second step. What follows knowledge and affection is practice, or

²Thomas Watson, "A Christian on the Mount," in *Select Discourses on Important and Interesting Subjects* (Glasgow: Blackie, Fullarton, & Co., 1829), 238-39.

application. The Puritans called such outward demonstration of faith our piety, the third and illustrative step of progressive sanctification.

Meditation is the means wherein we focus on this three-step process. We do not aim at enlightenment as do those practicing eastern mystic traditions, rather, we rationally pursue the revelation of God already given (Scripture) and, by faith and God's grace, our affections are stirred as we apply God's truths to our lives. The phrase "chewing the cud" is just one way to describe the experience. The grass is provided and it is assured sustenance to the cattle. The cattle ruminates (another word for meditate) and thereby absorb as much nutrients as they possibly can in order to flourish in their meadow. Glen Scorgie notes, meditation is an internal dialogue that "creates a context in which it is more possible to develop creative connections between the text and the reader's own life and immediate context."³ God's word is the necessary means to grow in our spiritual lives; it is not what we bring to the text, but our submission to the text that progresses our sanctification. Just as we pursue meditation through our practice of prayer, we simultaneously pursue prayer because of our meditations. We allow our minds to continue upon our meditations, stirring our affections through the day. English Puritan William Gurnall (1617-1679) writes of continued meditation:

Meditation is prayer's handmaid to wait on it, both before and after the performance of supplication. It is as the plough before the sower, to prepare the heart for the duty of prayer; and as the harrow after the sower, to cover the seed, when 'tis sown. As the hopper feeds the mill with grist, so does meditation supply the heart with matter for prayer.⁴

If we are meditating on Scripture in order to pray more faithfully, and to keep our minds attentive to our presence with and knowledge of God, then we must use this time of meditation to likewise be a fuel for the actions of our daily lives. In this way, not only does Scripture become a means for prayer, but so does all of our life's experiences. Applying Scripture to meditate in prayer aids in bringing such Scripture into "our going out and our coming in."

While the Puritans offer a plethora of methods to garner attention to the text, I offer in figure A2 a modern visualization of what meditation might look like using much of the same principles of men like Thomas Watson. The Spiral shows the position of the Word as the center of the experience. (See figure A2 above in appendix A2.)

The purpose of the spiral is to give some understanding as to what is happening in the mind when we approach the center, the text of Scripture. It is not with blindness that we come to the text, but with anticipation of the Word to actually *do* something to us. Anticipation is

³Glen A. Scorgie, "Hermeneutics and the Meditative Use of Scripture: The Case for a Baptized Imagination," *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 277.

⁴William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, ed. John Campbell (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 714.

key to understanding meditation. Anticipation involves an acknowledgment that God is sovereign, not me. I do not bring expectant answers, I bring anticipated transformation. “How will you change me?” “Of all the things I do not know, what light will you place in me today?” Such questions do not seek to subordinate the Scripture in this spiritual discipline. Rather, we explore with humility the gifted revelation of God’s heart and mind.

The Spiral offers five coordinates, leading both from and toward the center. These positions serve as a tunnel where each point may reference another or serve as its own autonomous place. For instance, I may choose to rest on an attribute of God and pass-by any historical inquiry. As with Figure A1, I may start with myself and then enter the tunnel leading to the text, beginning with self-analysis, reflecting on a passage and moving to meditation. No method is necessarily wrong, however, the practitioner must be constrained by Scripture. It is my position that these two figures and the following guide will best orient the Christian to meditate according to Scripture’s prescription.

The coordinates are defined in the following way:

1. *Deep Reading*: A deep reading of the Scripture, noting the mood, emotions, purpose of the narrator. Reciting the text a number of times or pausing on certain phrases. Praying the text as it offers doctrine, worship, etc.
2. *Historical Inquiry*: Utilizing a commentary, textual notes in the Bible, or knowledge the practitioner already has concerning the passage. Exploring the context of the Scripture, the author and place surrounding the Scripture. Considering what the first readers, or audience, may have experienced. Seeking the original intentions of the text as well as the modern intentions from God. Considering how the Scripture relates to Christ or the Covenant of Grace.
3. *Attributes of God*: The more strictly theological pursuit of meditation. This is the fulcrum or hinge of the spiral as it moves further from the text and closer to the person. Here the Christian begins processing the Scripture and asking questions of what the text describes of God. What do we learn of who God is and what are the implications of the doctrines or descriptions outlined? What prescriptions do we find concerning the attributes?
4. *Wonders of Creation*: Here we consider the role of God in creation; his creative works, gifts, and decrees.
5. *Self-Analysis*: This is the personal application coordinate. The practitioner examines the self. If beginning at this point, the practitioner may observe a conviction spurning the experience of meditation. Taking inventory of deficiencies, sin, temperament, etc. We note our inferiority, our redemption, our position in reference to God according to the Word of God. What pertains to me? How might I be changed by the Word, what might I put into practice? What must I omit and condemn in my life? How might I

teach the doctrines I have come to understand in my experience with God's Word in his presence?

The Spiral is meant to hone our practice of looking to the text first and foremost, rather than pursuing what we expect of God. A contrite heart knows better to rely on self-assessment first. I do not self-medicate in any other realm of my physical life, so why would I do so with my eternal life? The Spiral is something to keep in mind as we look to the seven practices of the biblical meditation method. Outlined below are seven ways to handle a text of Scripture for the purpose of experiencing transformation. These are not rigid rules, but simply a means to relate the text in new ways, breaking from distraction or boredom. We will use these seven senses throughout the guidebook. Though a person meditating is advised only one, or perhaps two, of these practices in a given session.

1. Hearing the Word
2. Seeing the Word
3. Smelling the Word
4. Tasting the Word
5. Touching the Word
6. Applying the Word
7. Savoring the Word

Each of these phrases serves as a way to group techniques we will practice. The practitioner may find one technique is better and more associated with his or her personality. However, the purpose of the guidebook is to utilize each technique, even those that may not be found personally attractive. I will briefly touch on what these phrases mean:

Hearing the Word: Techniques involving recitation, memorization, emphasizing particular words and phrases, pausing, praying, or speaking/reading different translations or languages.

Seeing the Word: Techniques where the Christian explores the synonyms and antonyms of the text, writing out or rephrasing the passage, creating a word of picture, collecting as many words as relate to the passage, mind mapping the Scripture.

Smelling the Word: As a bloodhound pursues a scent, so the techniques here involve pursuing a principle or doctrine from the passage. The practitioner observes specific insights and meanings from the text, asking how the text relates to Christ and/or the covenant of grace, and collecting the various attributes of God found in the Scripture.

Tasting the Word: Through these techniques the meditator visualizes a scenario from out of the passage or doctrine. The practitioner will ask theological questions of the text, determining what causes the necessity of the passage's doctrines or descriptions, what completes the passage's purpose. The person meditating will chew or ruminate on personal issues of faith related to the text. Through such techniques the practitioner will taste the meaty substance of the doctrines espoused.

Touching the Word: The techniques of relentless asking. What other passages are connected to this one? As the *Baptist Confession of 1689* attests, Scripture's only infallible interpretation is when Scripture interprets itself. What answer is provided and how might I phrase its question? How does the Spirit intersect with me and this text? Where else in the Bible is the idea presented here? As though the text and principles were brail, we feel and consider the shape of this text and how it relates further the objective of the Gospel.

Applying the Word: The next two techniques are not necessarily human senses, but techniques that cause the will to be changed in some way while approaching the text. To apply the word is to explore what application is provided to the author, the audience of the original writing, and what further application may be rendered to the practitioner. How might this text be taught to others? What various ways is the text and its principles relatable today? How can I give others to experience this truth? The techniques offered through this group pertain specifically to application.

Savoring the Word: Though not conventionally related to the other human senses, these are the techniques I associate most with the general act of worship. The practitioner asks in what ways the glory of God, and his attributes, is displayed. What is worshipful or glorious of the passage? Techniques in this grouping ask the meditator to analyze what has already been learned or drawn from the Scripture or what he/she has gained from the experience. The text may be read again or may be prayed through at the end of the experience.

The guide will present each group of techniques individually, though personal meditation will inevitably transform according to the habits and personality with which God has blessed each individual. This manual will guide you through a specific structure. No matter a provided structure, the meditator must always begin and end biblical meditation with prayer as that is the biblical model for communion with God; prayer is the expression and blessed instrument for our union. It is our objective not to simply find emotional catharsis, nor increased knowledge, but to find our communion with God with Spirit-inquired application to live holier unto God, with him, for him, to his glory. Prayer is not meant to bring about vigor or fervency, it is not to be longwinded or the first step in any sort of enlightening, but simply a preface to our time in communion with God. All this in mind, we close with a prayer from the Puritan pastor Joseph Hall:

that the course of our meditation may be guided aright and blessed; that all distractions may be avoided, our judgment enlightened, our inventions quickened, our wills rectified, our affections whetted to heavenly things, our hearts enlarged to God-ward, our devotion enkindled: so that we may find our corruptions abated, our graces thriven, our souls and lives every way bettered by this exercise.⁵

GUIDEBOOK WEEK TWO

Meditating Through Psalm 130:1-8

This week we explore a new-to-you psalm that is not so familiar as Psalm 23. Psalm 130 is a short, yet compelling, poem of redemption. While we meditate on this text we will use the same techniques as the first week, however we will seek to dig a bit deeper in our meditations as we grow accustomed to this biblical spiritual discipline. The verses of this psalm are at first glance simplistic, but at further rumination, they provide a wealth of theology.

The techniques used during this week will be more abstract and possibly more demanding of your time as compared with the previous week. That is the nature of this guide; to aid you in becoming established practitioners of biblical meditation. By the end of the week you will be quite familiar with the different methods for gleaning God's Word. With this in mind, prepare ahead for your meditations by reading this short psalm in its entirety before the week begins.

Each day prepare your mind to wander in God's presence, led by God's own revelation. At this point you may be starting to pick up on particular patterns of your mind and specific tendencies for distraction. It may be advisable to record these moments so that you become aware and prepared to consider ways to move past those tendencies. Biblical meditation provides texts of scripture that can be continual signposts for your mind to get back into gear. As Psalm 1 sings, the one who meditates is like a tree planted by water; you will bring forth fruit and prosper because of your nearness to the infinite well of God's blessing, God's revelation.

Day One:

Hearing the Word

Psalm 130:1

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!”

⁵Joseph Hall, “The Art of Divine Meditation,” in *Works of the Right Reverend Joseph Hall*, vol. 6 (Oxford: University Press, 1863), 60.

Take this text and write it out in a specific pattern. Shape it into a particular design. This is a very simple verse to memorize and recite; in Hebrew it is only three words. The first word is one you may easily recognize; it comes from the root *amok*. The poet is using the word for water, deep water. From the bottom of a deep place. The meditator may ask, “Whose are these depths?”

The second word is the past tense “have I cried to you” or “called to you.” *Qara* simply means to call, yell, state aloud. The picture is easy to conjure in your head, perhaps from a deep well someone is calling out. You may visualize Peter crying to Jesus as he sinks into the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:30).

Pause on these two thoughts of phrase before coming to the direction of the whole verse: “O LORD!” Take a moment and read the second chapter of Jonah and see how it relates both to this verse and to your place before the throne of grace.

Jonah 2:1-10

“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying,

“I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.

For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’

The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains.

I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.

When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!”

And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.”

With Jonah’s poem of salvation fresh in your mind, meditate on the three words described at the beginning. What events in your life echo as you ponder God’s

salvific work? What do we learn of God’s nature as we reflect on this opening verse to Psalm 130? What is praiseworthy and what is applied to us through this text?

Day Two:

Seeing the Word

Psalm 130:2

“O LORD, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my plea for mercy!”

Notice the words used in the verse. List the antonyms and synonyms for a couple of the words. Why are the particular words chosen? What is specific or clarified in these two sentences.

Rephrase the second movement of the verse: “Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my plea for mercy.” Perhaps write out the text backwards. This means not only rephrasing the text, but thinking through the structure of why it is written. Because I trust God, He assures me I can call out to Him and receive mercy, I know by nature of who He is, God has ears that are attentive to the shrill of my plea. Just as the lambs know the Shepherd’s voice, so too, the Shepherd knows every bleat of my heart. Try writing out the verse “backwards” and draw attention to your heart as to why you might select certain words or make certain connections in the text; the Spirit is speaking with you through the process.

You may choose to mind-map the verse. Mind-mapping is the technique of drawing words, ideas, pictures, emotions together in your mind and connecting how all those things join with one another. This is a difficult exercise to begin to practice, but it is a worthwhile exercise in exploring how your own mind best collects details and observations. Simply write out a word or phrase from the text onto a blank piece of paper and then scribble all the ideas that flourish as you meditate on the word. Group all of these ideas into somewhat organized branches from the center. Watch as you begin to delve deeper into your mind and into God’s Word.

Recall the original phrase you rewrote concerning this verse. Why do we call for mercy? Stephen Yuille encourages Christians to consider God’s two ways of loving: unconditional and conditional. God always loves His saints (unconditional), but His conditional love is “his delight in the holiness in us;” the progressive growth of our transformation of our hearts into the image of His Son.⁶ God desires for us to reflect Him and when we place distractions in our hearts that take away from our delight in His glory

⁶J. Stephen Yuille, *Longing for Home: A Journey through the Psalms of Ascent* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2015), 110.

it inevitably causes friction in our lives. Acknowledgment of God's love is what causes the poet to cry out as a sinner in need of this holiness to be manifest.

Why mercy? Consider what words you may choose to add after the word mercy. Mercy because . . . in my life. Mercy for the [fill in the blank] I have or have not done. Things like this allow for us to rejoice in the hope of our God's attentive ears. His ears would not be so attentive if He did not truly have sovereign power over sin, guilt, doubt, or fear.

You may also pray, adding in your application: "Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my plea for"

Day Three:

Smelling the Word

Psalm 130:3-4

"If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared."

How does this word refer to Christ? Puritan John Owen had much to say about this topic, writing nearly 230 pages on verse four alone.⁷ Ponder the sins forgiven and unforgiven. Consider all past, future, and present temptations. Think over the sinfulness of sin and our propensity to make light of repentance and our own sin. God the just judge is the one who declares what is sin and what its punishment must be. If I mark my own sin I can always justify myself, but God is the one who marks iniquity. Sinfulness is death. I could not stand if I were to receive the eternal wrath of God. Yet I am undone, for with my God there is forgiveness!

Justice is the language of someone standing before a judge in the court of law. The poet says we cannot stand. There is no justice because we are undeserving of a non-guilty plea. Justice would mean being condemned to wrath. Therefore, my hope can only come from my iniquities (sins) NOT being counted upon me. This is a hope realized in the very next verse. . . "but with you there is forgiveness."

Benjamin Keach writes, "God does not accept as true satisfaction for sin any justice except what is infinite, because sin is an infinite offence."⁸ Our obedience comes from a new heart given to us, therefore there is no work we could ever hope to do that would resolve our offences. Our justice comes from an infinite source of grace and our redemption is only made possible by the satisfaction of a perfectly infinite sacrifice. Thus we praise with Keach saying, "We hold forth Christ to be our whole Savior."

⁷John Owen, "A Practical Exposition upon Psalm CXXX" in *Works of John Owen*, vol. 6, *Temptation and Sin* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991).

⁸Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of Justification* (1692; repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 81, 89.

Ponder the relationship of sin and of forgiveness. Firstly, meditate on sin and what it does. Only then do we have a proper place to rejoice in forgiveness and ransomed life. Consider the depths of your sin, from where the inclination comes to think of yourself before others, to harbor anger and hostility toward others, to not ruminate on God's revelation or give praise to Him for the gifts He has given you, even the trees, plants, animals. Take your sin and temptations into your minds, recall all you possibly can...and then relinquish it to the forgiveness found in Jesus Christ. You are justified once and for all. The trial is sure, the gavel struck the very nails of the cross.

Is not such forgiveness awe-inspiring? Surely the power of such a judge is to be feared. Consider what the text does *not* say? Apply both what the text *is* and what it is *not*. Consider unbelievers. Consider the attributes of God to be found in the text. How would you describe God to God using only this text? Realize such an exercise is both prayer and meditation in His presence. His Spirit hastens you to learn who He is.

Day Four:

Tasting the Word

Psalm 130:5

"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope."

In our meditation on verses three and four we focused on forgiveness and redemption. We can begin acknowledging this doctrine and focus on it as we move into today's verses. What does this passage have to do with the doctrine found in the prior verse?

What causes the things happening in the verse? We see that patience, waiting, and hope are all caused by something, so consider just what that something is.

What is the purpose of the things that are happening in the verse? What is the point of waiting and why should I wait?

What completes the objectives found in the verse? I realize I am to wait and my waiting is designed by God so I might learn to trust Him and grow in my patience, but I must also recognize there is a hope to be realized in my waiting. Soon the wait is over, the hope will be fulfilled. What does the fulfillment look like? All questions now thoroughly thought through, what is the objective of the verse, what is completed by the doctrine given here?

Consider why the poet uses the particular language, what is significant about "wait" or "word"?

Take other certain doctrines or attributes of God in the context (from all of Ps 130) and relate how your insight mingles with this specific verse. How does the rest of Psalm 130 press the emphasis of verse five? What is significant of the use of "word"? Why can we hope in God's Word? Imagine the poet is living in the New Testament era or even in our own era. Why would the writer speak of hoping *only* in God's Word? What is

the alternative? How can we apply this waiting and hoping to our Bible reading this week?

Ruminating over your personal faith. Concentrate on finding those things about yourself that may challenge this verse and its doctrines. Use Scripture to test you and press you, taste both the good, and “not presently” good, flavors. Chew the cud, especially if it causes conflict in your heart. Are you a patient person? If not, then delve into what keeps your heart anxious. What emotional responses are triggered as you ponder the verse.

For further meditation: Hope is placed in the LORD’s revelation of himself, what the LORD reveals of himself is for the purpose of our careful waiting upon Him. What does it look like for God to reveal Himself to us? John Owen writes the Word is God expressing His grace to us so we can receive knowledge of “His mind and His will.”⁹ Owen continues, “In these things we learn all that we truly and solidly know of God; that is, we know Him in and by His Word,” we learn who God is by the promises only He is capable of making about Himself. This He gives to us, He chooses to display the glory of who He is by our communion with Him through His revealed Word.

Ruminating on God’s revelation of himself in this Word before you close in prayer.

Day Five:

Touching the Word

Psalm 130:6

“My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.”

What question is being addressed in this passage? What is the “human element” of the text, how do you describe it? That is, what is human and relatable to me from this text. Are there times where I am really eager for something? Are there moments (maybe even right now) where I am growing impatient with the Lord’s will for His glory? Like Moses, is my heart pleading “show me Your glory?”

What is the divine element in the text? You might ask, what does this verse have to do with the Gospel? Like the book of Esther, it seems at first that only the human element exists here, but why does the Spirit push me to consider this verse? Must there be something of God in this text?

How do the human elements and the divine elements relate to one another? What other answers are being given in this text?

⁹Owen, “A Practical Exposition upon Psalm CXXX,” 638.

What in me requires the expressions found in the text; those questions and answers just identified. Give consideration to how the rest of our canon uses the term “watchmen.” I have chosen three particular verses, these highlighting the term in a positive sense. You may choose to study and ask questions related to a different word or phrase, but these instances will help ground this method of meditation for you.

Think about what these watchmen do, why they do it, but most importantly, why God uses them for his glory and what purposed end result God has in mind by their use.

Isaiah 62:6-7 “On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set **watchmen**; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.”

Jeremiah 31:6 “For there shall be a day when **watchmen** will call in the hill country of Ephraim: ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.’”

Micah 7:4 “The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of your **watchmen**, of your punishment, has come; now their confusion is at hand.”

How does the insight from other Scriptures help or hinder our understanding of what the LORD is speaking through this verse? It is obvious there is a certain and relevant importance for the phrase to be repeated, especially given the consideration Hebrew poetry places a great deal of emphasis on repetition or saying the same thing in numerous ways. Why *more than* watchmen wait for the sun to beam across the horizon? Why do they seek the dawn? We meditate on the why both in the physical reality as well as in the spiritual reality?

Day Six:

Applying the Word

Psalm 130:7

“O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.”

What is the application of the author? What is the application intended for the audience of this poem?

If I categorize several of the applicable points, then I can ask directly about them. I circle, “Hope in the LORD,” “steadfast love,” and “plentiful redemption.” These are directives called for by the author. I am called to hope in the LORD. I am then given distinct traits for which I am to hope; steadfast love and plentiful redemption. This means there is a cause in me that must be fulfilled. I am someone in desperate need of a loyal savior, whose love will affect me in a way that produces hope. I am someone in desperate

need of plentiful redemption, not just regular redemption, but plentiful redemption. From what am I redeemed? How does a person who is steadfastly loved act day by day? Is my worship of God growing more fruitful based on my increasing understanding of redemption?

Through learning the many ways I can garner application from this text, how might I go away and teach this verse to someone else? Teaching is an incredible learning method for the educator. We are not only called to redemption, but called to be teachers who disciple others to come to redemption and further sanctification. Therefore, consider this meditation as a means to be equipped to go and teach the truths you find to a family member, a fellow believer, a child, or even an unbeliever.

After utilizing the application method, take some time and go through some of the other techniques (Hearing, Seeing, Smelling, Tasting, Touching) and observe whether the text is more or less fruitful depending on the different exercises of technique.

Day Seven:

Savoring the Word

Psalm 130:8

“And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

The poet personifies the nation so the reader may call himself/herself as part of the redeemed church. All iniquities are pardoned, all of God’s saints are perfectly redeemed. Surely there is something in this text on which we can meditate and bring forth praise to God. Consider all the ways you are currently redeemed, or consider how you will fully realize redemption in the New Eden. Why does God redeem?

For an optional exercise, you may choose to re-read and meditate on the whole of Psalm 130 in poetic restructuring:¹⁰

Lord to thee I make my moan,
 When dangers me oppress:
I call, I sigh, plain and groan
 Trusting to find release.
Hear now O Lord my request,
 For it is full due time:
And let thine cares aye be pressed
 Unto this prayer *of* mine.

¹⁰T. Sternhold, W. Whittingham, J. Hopkins, *The Whole Book of Psalms, Collected into English Metre* (London: John Daye, 1584), 364-66.

O Lord our God if thou may,
Our sins and them peruse:
Who shall then escape and say,
‘I can myself excuse’?
But Lord thou art merciful,
And turn to us thy grace:
That we with hearts most careful,
Should fear before thy face.

In God I put my whole trust,
My soul waits on his will:
For his promise is most sust [sustained, complete],
And I hope therein still.
My soul to God hath regard,
Wishing for him alway:
More than they that watch and ward,
To see the dawning day.

Let Israel then boldly,
In the Lord put his trust:
He is that God of mercy,
That his deliver must.
For his it is that must save,
Israel from his sin:
And all such as surely have,
Their confidence in him.

What do I now know of this text that has been impressed upon me by the Spirit? List the multiple attributes of God witnessed in the poem. What makes God glorious based solely on these verses and my experience in them?

After savoring this week’s verse, how can you live differently or see yourself and others newly, because of this experience?

APPENDIX 3
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The Curriculum Evaluation Rubric was distributed to a panel of professionals who assessed the biblical meditation curriculum and the devotional guide. The rubric critiqued the following areas: theological competency, historical competency (not for the devotional), practical application methods of meditation, and overall clarity.

Table A1. Curriculum evaluation rubric

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Theological Competencies:					
Curriculum is Scripture-based.					
Curriculum is understandable to laity.					
Curriculum raises interest in the role of sanctification.					
Devotional is theologically sound.					
Historical Competencies:					
Curriculum presents adequate history of meditation.					
Curriculum explains why some forms of meditation are inappropriate.					
Curriculum gives concise but valuable insight to all practices.					
Application:					
Curriculum demonstrates a necessity of meditation as a spiritual discipline.					
Curriculum presents useful knowledge for practice of meditation.					
Devotional provides ample methods for practice of meditation.					
Clarity:					
Curriculum is well suited for allotted time.					
Curriculum is replicable for laity.					
Devotional is user-friendly.					

APPENDIX 4
BIBLICAL MEDITATION INVENTORY
POST-SURVEY

This post-survey was given with the clause that participants must have participated fully in the obligations of the teaching and devotional sessions. It is identical to the pre-survey in every way except for the requirements that must be met prior to completion and the exclusion of the questions related to spiritual disciplines practice.

BIBLICAL MEDITATION INVENTORY
POST-SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to explain the current practices and perceptions of biblical meditation in your spiritual disciplines practice. This research is being conducted by Chris Osterbrock for the purpose of a research project pertaining to biblical spirituality. In this research, you will be asked several questions regarding your personal and individual perceptions of current and future biblical meditation practices. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this inventory, or checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate I do not agree to participate

Directions: Answer the descriptions below by circling or placing a mark on the appropriate option. The answer should align with your current practice and not with what you assume to be the ideal response. The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,
AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

Perception of Biblical Meditation:

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I frequently consult God's Word in my decision-making. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I have been formally instructed in the personal spiritual discipline of biblical meditation. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I am often conscious of how God's Word changes my thinking. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I reflect on God's Word in my prayer life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I am frequently convicted of sin and led to Repentance through my personal intake of Scripture. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I often find myself contemplating God's activity in creation during my day. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

7. I have a hard time keeping my concentration when reading Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. I could explain to someone else how to use the Bible for meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. I prefer to be spontaneous in my devotional practices and don't like a fixed method.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. Biblical meditation is an important and useful spiritual discipline for ALL Christians.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. I have some knowledge of how meditation has been practiced in Christian history.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. I am often aware of the Holy Spirit's work in me as I am reading or meditating on Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I could define and explain biblical meditation to another Christian.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I am confident in my ability to use multiple methods for meditating on God's Word and God's Works.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. I have a basic understanding of sanctification.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Frequency and Practice of Biblical Meditation:

Directions: Answer the following questions according to the frequency (amount of times) you practice each item by circling the appropriate number.

	Times per average week					
16. I read and meditate on Scripture	0	1	2	3	4	5+
17. I share experiences of my spiritual life with others	0	1	2	3	4	5+
18. I spend more than three minutes meditating on a specific verse or Christian doctrine	0	1	2	3	4	5+
19. I write (in my Bible, a journal, notebook, etc.) something related to my faith, my spiritual walk,	0	1	2	3	4	5+

or a topic of Christian doctrine

20. I pray for more than three minutes at a time 0 1 2 3 4 5+

APPENDIX 5
BIBLICAL MEDITATION INTERVIEW
PROTOCOL

This interview protocol was given with the clause that participants must have participated fully in the obligations required of the teaching and devotional sessions. It served to provide qualitative data concerning the participants' knowledge and practice of biblical meditation that will supplement the data collected through the pre- and post-survey instruments.

BIBLICAL MEDITATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to explain the current practices and perceptions of biblical meditation in your spiritual disciplines practice. This research is being conducted by Chris Osterbrock for the purpose of a research project pertaining to biblical spirituality. In this research, you will be asked several questions regarding your personal and individual perceptions of current and future biblical meditation practices. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this interview, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate I do not agree to participate

Time of Interview: _____ Date: _____ Place: _____

Interviewee Pin Number: _____ Frequency of Meditation during Course: _____
_____ %

Course and Curriculum:

1. How did the course material change your understanding of spiritual discipline?
2. Were there lessons you would change? Explain how they might be changed.
3. What information stuck in your mind positively? Or negatively?
4. Did the information grow your desire to practice meditation?
5. Was there a correlation between the lectures and your practice of the discipline?

Personal Practice:

6. What patterns in your daily life did you find most challenging for your meditation?
7. What elements might you add to or subtract from your daily routine to encourage biblical meditation?
8. Did you grow in your faith through the experience of this course? How?
9. Was the guidebook helpful to you? How might you change or alter the guide to be of greater use or ease in the experience?

Fellowship:

10. In what ways do you think biblical meditation in the lives of individual church members could be encouraged or helped by our church?
11. Did you experience growth in your inclination to worship with others through this course? Please elaborate.

12. How is the experience of biblical meditation helped or hindered when practiced in isolation versus in a community group?

Further Questions:

13. Do you recall anything from the surveys for which you would like to give feedback, word differently, or change?
14. Is the practice more suited to seasoned Christians, new believers, or does it matter?
15. Any comments or testimony from your experience you would like to share?

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING BIBLICAL MEDITATION AT MOUNT WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH IN CINCINNATI, OHIO

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Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Matthew D. Haste

This ministry project was designed to teach biblical meditation at Mount Washington Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. The purpose of this instruction was to increase knowledge and enhance the practice of a particular spiritual discipline among the members of this church. Chapter 1 explains the context, rationale, purpose, goals, and methodology of the project. Chapter 2 describes the biblical understanding and basis for instruction of the practice of meditation through the exegesis of the following passages: Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1, Psalm 8:3-4, Psalm 77, Psalm 119, Proverbs 6:6-8, Luke 12:24-28, Philippians 4:7-9, and Colossians 3:1-17. Chapter 3 explains the church's historical understanding and instruction of the practice of meditation by briefly analyzing Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern era thought on the subject. The chapter also includes an overview of the theological precedent for biblical meditation in a Christian's progressive sanctification. Chapter 4 details the production, implementation, and analysis of results for the ministry project. Chapter 5 evaluates the ministry project's success, and also areas that could be improved for future implementation.

VITA

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B.A., Cincinnati Christian University, 2011

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