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DEEPENING DISCIPLESHIP DURING CORPORATE WORSHIP  
AT REFRESHING RIVER OF GOD FELLOWSHIP IN  
EPHRATA, PENNSYLVANIA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by  
Dwayne Gene Martin  
May 2019

**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEEPENING DISCIPLESHIP DURING CORPORATE WORSHIP  
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## PREFACE

This project would not exist without the gentle, but firm, unction from the Holy Spirit. For the guidance and tender mercy of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I am grateful. Jesus saved my soul and shepherds me daily. Thank you, Lord.

Also, I thank my beautiful wife, Nancy, who has encouraged me continually. Nancy, your love and care gives me courage to tackle large tasks such as this project. Many thanks are due the leadership and gathered church of Refreshing River of God. Your love for God and each other is truly amazing, which I whole heartedly applaud.

The patience and expertise of my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Matthew Haste, formed and directed this project toward a successful completion. Thank you. Lastly, I appreciate the faculty and administration of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who instruct with a biblical standard, standing starkly against a largely humanistic backdrop of academia. For this I am grateful. Thank you.

Dwayne Martin

Ephrata, Pennsylvania

May 2019



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Author Timothy Jones supplies this project with a foundational definition of worship: “the attitude that arises when we recognize who God is and who we are.”<sup>1</sup> God reveals Himself through His Word. Pondering His Word increases understanding of who God is, which heightens the believer’s love and adoration of God. Recognizing God naturally causes Christians to surrender before Him in worship. Many worshippers at Refreshing River of God (RROG) report that they experience God during the worship time, but a deeper engagement with God is possible by increasing meditation on God’s Word.

#### **Context**

In association with Christ for the Nations Fellowship of Ministries and Churches (FMC) in Dallas, RROG began in November 2011, after three men spent a year seeking God together in prayer about starting a new church. Two of these men, along with a core group of people, were longing for a deeper relationship with God and with each other. Every Sunday morning, a group of ten to twenty adults arrange a small sound system, rows of folding chairs, and tubs of food in a small fire hall overlooking rural Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. RROG consists of a blend of excommunicates from the Amish and Mennonite churches, as well as Christians from diverse backgrounds and

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy P. Jones, *Rose Guide to End-Times Prophecy* (Torrance, CA: Rose, 2011), 82. Jones’ definition parallels other recent formulations on the subject in that all point to worship as a response to God. For example, see Mark Ashton, Timothy J. Keller, and R. Kent Hughes, *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); and John Stott and Timothy Dudley-Smith, *Authentic Christianity: From the Writings of John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995).

experiences. Members seek an informal, personal, and relaxed environment in which to experience God and to grow closer to each other.

The two driving forces at the inception of RROG were encountering God and experiencing deeper fellowship. Enjoying God and each other remains the center of all activities at RROG. Biblical preaching, extended times of worship, interpersonal ministries such as prayer and testimony, joyful and practical teaching, and fellowship during a meal are common practices found during the three and half hours spent together on most Sunday mornings. The context of this project is limited to the public worship ministry of the church. By common testimony, the worship ministry is powerful, impacting lives of people experiencing God's mercy and grace. Many testify that they become increasingly aware of God's immanent presence and are deeply affected by Him during the worship times. Such times typically consist of singing popular contemporary songs, as well as songs improvised at-the-moment, which often conclude in God-centered silence in His presence.

This experience of God's nearness is at the heart of RROG's purpose and underlies most of what the church does. However, any experience-driven church is susceptible to false winds of doctrine (Eph 4:14)<sup>2</sup> that tend to drive that church off solid theological foundations, especially when Scripture does not underlie one's experience. Gaining a greater knowledge of what God is like will cause the worshipper to become a more mature disciple of Christ. RROG's leadership can both remove the vulnerability to heresy and enable Christlikeness to increase within the congregation. The leadership team recognizes these opportunities and has an overall goal to increase the focus on Scripture in its ministries, including the worship ministry.

Because of the current focus of the leadership at RROG to incorporate more Scripture into all its ministries, there is a great opportunity for this project to lead the way toward meeting the church's goal. RROG is a relatively new church and making this

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<sup>2</sup>All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

change to its ministries is much less disruptive to accomplish while so small, rather than when it becomes larger. In addition, this project is timely because many attending RROG are currently struggling emotionally and physically. This project attempts to deepen their relationship with Christ, which will enable them to stand upon Scripture to overcome their current struggles.

### **Rationale**

In the ministry context of a worship pastor and with the concern for a deeper engagement with Scripture, this project seeks to ground the current experience-based worship in Scripture without diluting the richness already present during the Sunday service. A leader's directive to incorporate Scripture into its ministries, the opportunity for enhancement offered by the current size of the church, and the need of the individual congregants to bolster their faith are all markers that make the timing of this project imperative.

RROG leaders recognize their strengths and weaknesses and have directed ministry workers to balance the Spirit with the Bible. This project is in step with several other efforts to accomplish RROG leadership's directive, including the effort to start an adult Sunday school and weekly Bible studies when the church obtains a permanent facility. With this directive, a great opportunity exists to increase the congregations' Bible intake by using biblical meditation during corporate worship as a catalyst for spiritual growth.

The current size and milieu of RROG provides a greater potential for success. The smaller group offers the benefit of flexibility in making changes to the service. Additionally, the congregation's current positive attitude toward the worship ministry enables change to occur without much confrontation. For these reasons, making changes to the worship ministry now is advantageous over waiting until RROG grows.

Many people's faith will likely benefit greatly from the increased biblical intake provided by this project. By combining worship music with an increased focus on

Scripture, currently struggling congregants will gain a heart understanding that God loves them and that He provides for them even in the dark times of their lives. This project offers the congregants at RROG a practical means to overcome the issues of life.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to deepen discipleship during corporate worship at Refreshing River of God in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, by focusing on the marks of a disciple using public Scripture reading, God-centered silence, and biblical meditation.

### **Goals**

The following five goals guided this project:

1. The first goal was to develop a research instrument that measures changes in marks of a disciple.
2. The second goal assessed the current marks of a disciple among adult members of RROG.
3. The third goal was to develop an eight-week series of public Scripture readings and meditative reflections based on biblical marks of a disciple.
4. The fourth goal was to train the adult members at RROG in the practice of biblical meditation through a short-term teaching series.
5. The final goal was to increase marks of a disciple in the worshippers at RROG by incorporating meditation on the prepared selections into worship.

The following research methodology determined how these goals were evaluated and if they were achieved.

### **Research Methodology**

Five goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to develop a research instrument that measures changes in the marks of a disciple. The instrument, called the Marks of a Disciple Assessment (MDA), measured the essential characteristics of being a Christian disciple.<sup>3</sup> These marks include, but are not limited to,

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<sup>3</sup>Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979), 75. Lovelace's marks of a disciple distinguish spirituality based on union

awareness of the holiness of God, depth of sin, mission, prayer, and community. Each mark consists of a grouping of at least three questions, balancing of two opposing views of the mark.<sup>4</sup> A panel of two experts in theology and practical discipleship assisted in developing the MDA. A group of four Christians who are members of other churches pilot tested the MDA. The pilot provided feedback and opportunity to amend the MDA before finalization. This goal was successfully met when the expert panel approves the MDA.

The second goal assessed the current marks of a disciple among the adult worshippers of RROG. After the service, all adults attending the worship service were asked to complete the survey before leaving. Participants included a unique personal identification number on the survey. The pre-implementation assessment measured each participant's level of discipleship. This goal was successfully met when at least ten adults complete the MDA and the results compiled for a fuller analysis of the initial understanding of the marks of a disciple at RROG.

The third goal was to develop an eight-week series of public Scripture readings and meditative reflections. Each individual item in the series included one Scripture reading and a reflection about one mark of a disciple given during the worship service. The worship service concluded with time for the congregation to prayerfully meditate on the specific mark of a disciple during a period of silence. God-centered silence has been a typical part of the service before this project started. The intention of this project was to strengthen this time through training and practice in biblical meditation. Additionally, worshippers were encouraged to take the weekly meditative reflection home and use

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with Christ from spirituality based on self and provides a decidedly evangelical rubric to measure spiritual growth.

<sup>4</sup>See appendix 1. All research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

them as a tool for individual biblical meditation. A panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the series material to ensure it is biblically faithful and relevant to the worship ministry.<sup>5</sup> This goal was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion meet or exceed the sufficient level.

The fourth goal was to train the adult members at RROG on the practice of biblical meditation through a short-term teaching series. The training occurred during the Sunday morning service due to RROG's current meeting space limitations. Obviously, biblical meditation training precedes its use in corporate worship. The training class defined biblical meditation, presented multiple methods of biblical meditation, and provided time to practice each method for everyone attending the Sunday service. The training prepared the congregants to internalize Scripture by biblically practicing meditation. This goal was successfully met when at least ten adults completed a brief quiz on the definition and methods of meditation at the conclusion of the study.<sup>6</sup>

The last goal was to increase marks of a disciple in the worshippers at RROG by incorporating the prepared readings and reflections into worship during Sunday morning services. This occurred after the teaching series on biblical meditation was complete. All adult worshippers at RROG were encouraged to participate in this implementation. The content aspect of this goal was measured by re-administering the MDA to those worshippers who participated in the initial MDA within one week after the eight-week series completed. This goal was successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrates a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-implementation results. A *t*-test for dependent samples "involves a comparison of the means from each group of scores and focuses on the differences between the scores."<sup>7</sup> A

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<sup>5</sup>See appendix 2.

<sup>6</sup>See appendix 3.

<sup>7</sup>Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand

*t*-test of dependent samples is the appropriate test statistic for this project because the project involves a single group of the same subjects surveyed under two conditions.<sup>8</sup>

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms are used in this ministry project:

*Corporate worship.* *Corporate worship* refers to the time spent on Sunday morning gathered as a congregation for the purpose of adoring God. This is an expression of the broader call to worship defined above, particularly through prayer and singing.

*Marks of a disciple.* The *marks of a disciple* derive from Richard F. Lovelace's book *Dynamics of a Spiritual Life*. They include the awareness of God's holiness, awareness of personal sin, justification, sanctification, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, mission, prayer, and community.<sup>9</sup> The Marks of a Disciple Assessment focuses on Lovelace's secondary elements.

*Biblical meditation.* *Biblical meditation* is "deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer."<sup>10</sup> This term specifically refers to meditating on Scripture and is distinguished from the general use of the term meditation.

One limitation applies to this project. The accuracy of the pre- and post-implementation surveys was dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about evaluating their marks of a disciple. To mitigate this limitation, anonymity of the respondents' answers were secured by using a personal identification number instead of their names. The only delimitation to this project is that it was limited to

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Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 191.

<sup>8</sup>Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 189.

<sup>9</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 75.

<sup>10</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 46-47.

twenty-three weeks, which included instrument development, pre-assessment, series and training development, meditation instruction, and post-assessment.

### **Conclusion**

God has revealed Himself in His Word so that believers can grow in becoming like Christ. The following chapters describe the marks of a disciple, define meditation biblically, demonstrate a historical precedence of biblical meditation, and address issues using biblical meditation in corporate worship. Chapter 2 addresses the marks of a disciple and shows how Scripture depicts meditation, as well as instructs the worshipper to internalize God's truth. Chapter 3 reviews how meditation emerged from a Jewish context to a Christian context, examines the interplay of meditation and song, distinguishes biblical meditation from non-biblical meditation, and examines the impact of biblical meditation upon a busy society, which impacts the approach to corporate worship.



CHAPTER 2  
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR  
DEEPENING DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH  
BIBLICAL MEDITATION

This chapter contends that the practice of biblical meditation intensifies the characteristics of the Christian disciple. These marks include the disciple's awareness of sinfulness juxtaposed against God's holiness, union with Christ and His atoning work, as well as one's call into community, and authority to proclaim the gospel by meditating on Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Each characteristic discussed herein builds upon the prior characteristic, meaning the believer's view of his union with Christ is more brilliant after gaining a deeper awareness of his own sinfulness and God's holiness. The structure of this chapter follows this spiritual progression.

**Biblical Meditation Drives Scripture Deep  
into the Disciple's Mind and Heart**

This chapter defines *meditation* as described in Scripture before examining the numerous Christian characteristics enhanced by biblical meditation.

**What Is Biblical Meditation?**

Donald Whitney emphasizes a focus on Scripture during biblical meditation and defines the term as “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding,

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<sup>1</sup>The characteristics of Christian discipleship discussed here are based on Richard Lovelace's primary and secondary elements of discipleship in Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979), 75, 95-200.

application, and prayer.”<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer adds the idea that biblical meditation is practiced in communion with and in the presence of God:

Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.<sup>3</sup>

Each definition highlights different aspects of scriptural instruction about meditation.

### **Biblical Meditation in the Old Testament**

The term *meditation* is most densely used in Scripture by the Psalmist. The Psalmist’s conception of meditation is a continual activity practiced day and night to implant Yahweh’s truth deeper into the heart, and can be accomplished either by verbal muttering or by silent mulling (Pss 1:2; 49:3; 119:97). Hebrews meditated by repeatedly reading aloud selected texts so that scriptural truth would be ingrafted deep into their hearts.<sup>4</sup>

The Psalmist implants Yahweh’s truth into his heart by meditating in three ways, namely to please Yahweh by obeying His Word, as an anticipation of rescue by Yahweh from troubled times, and as an act of love, devotion, and praise to Yahweh. A biblical picture of meditation is developed by examining each of these aforementioned ways the Psalmist depicts meditation.

In the opening Psalm, the Psalmist pleases Yahweh (v. 6) by continually soliloquizing Yahweh’s instructions with delight (v. 2). Psalm 1:1-3 reveals several important features of biblical meditation that please Yahweh. First, the Psalmist’s

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<sup>2</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 46-47, Kindle.

<sup>3</sup>J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 22, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup>Peter Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture: Understanding Your Faith, Renewing Your Mind, Knowing Your God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 66.

meditation is a verbal recounting of the words of Yahweh. The Hebrew word *hāgāh*, meaning “to read in an undertone,” describes this method of meditation.<sup>5</sup> The Psalmist may be repeating Yahweh’s words over and over verbalizing or muttering with inarticulate or barely articulate audible sounds, which could have been normal practice during the times in which this verse was written.<sup>6</sup> This technique helped the Psalmist capture Yahweh’s words in his conscience mind and allow them to soak into his heart, just as rain soaks into and nourishes the soil.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the Psalmist’s phrase “day and night” is a literary device meaning constancy.<sup>8</sup> His constant meditation was not a once-a-day, morning-or-evening formula requiring a specific, quiet place like some Christian modern practitioners recommend.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the Psalmist’s meditation was a continual, integrated, and delightful engagement with God’s words intertwined with the noise of daily activities.<sup>10</sup> Michael Haykin agrees with integrating thoughts about God with daily activities, though he also recommends “carving out great chunks of time” for concentrated meditation.<sup>11</sup> For some, the inability to carve out time from an ultra-busy schedule stands as an excuse to fail to practice

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<sup>5</sup>Ludwig Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, CD-ROM (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000), 237.

<sup>6</sup>Gerald Henry Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 96.

<sup>7</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 51.

<sup>8</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, J. M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 139.

<sup>9</sup>Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 27-28, Kindle.

<sup>10</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 80.

<sup>11</sup>Michael A. G. Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2007), 66-67.

biblical meditation completely. The Psalmist integrates Yahweh's words into his life, rather than segregating them to a specific time and place.

Like the first chapter of Psalms, the first chapter of Joshua teaches believers about biblical meditation. Joshua 1:8 confirms Yahweh's pleasure when followers constantly meditate on His Word. Here Yahweh commands Joshua to "meditate on it day and night," which reinforces the two features noted above; namely, repetitive, verbal utterances and the constancy of biblical meditation. In addition to these two features, Joshua 1:8 directly connects meditation to behavior, "so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it," and behavior to results, "for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." The prosperity Yahweh promises here is in the context of His values and does not match the typical North American view of prosperity.<sup>12</sup> Biblical meditation does not guarantee physical wealth. Psalm 1 agrees with this teaching in Joshua 1:8, but in a more indirect and poetic way. Derek Kidner detects a broader theme developed in Psalm 1 and 2, namely, "whatever really shapes a man's thinking shapes his life."<sup>13</sup> The meditation of the Psalmist, recorded in Psalm 1:3, exemplifies Kidner's theme. By meditating on Torah, the Psalmist is driving Yahweh's instructions into his heart via his mind (v. 2), which finally works into the Psalmist's behavior (v. 3). Thus, God is pleased when believers meditate on His Word all the time, because it soaks into the heart and effects behavior.

The second way the Psalmist uses biblical meditation to implant Yahweh's truth into his heart is by anticipating rescue from troubled times. The Psalmist demonstrates how meditation bolsters his soul and heightens the anticipation of Yahweh's rescue in Psalm 77. The Psalmist is clearly disheartened, discouraged, and doubting (vv.

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<sup>12</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 48.

<sup>13</sup>Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2008), 64.

1-9), even to the point of meditating with *šiyah*, lamenting with “loud, enthusiastic, emotionally-laden speech” (v. 6).<sup>14</sup> After his emotional outburst (vv. 7-9), the Psalmist shifts his attention (v. 10) and remembers, meditates, and muses on Yahweh’s past deeds, wonders, and works (vv. 11-12).

The Psalmist meditates in two distinct senses when he writes, “I will meditate on all Your work and muse on Your deeds” (v. 12). Note the parallel between “meditate” (*hāgāh*) and “muse” (*šiyah*), which can both be translated “meditate.” The Psalmist meditates by both “muttering” (*hāgāh*) Yahweh’s deeds to himself and “with thanks and praise” (*šiyah*) for Yahweh’s work.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the verb “remember” (*zākar*) in verse 11 means “to call to mind.”<sup>16</sup> These three verbs, “remember,” “meditate,” and “muse,” form a progression of meditation. The progression begins with intentionally calling God’s wonders to mind, then verbally muttering God’s deeds, followed by heart–felt thanksgiving and praise for God’s work. The Psalmist uses this same triadic progression in Psalm 143:5, where again he meditates on Yahweh’s work, finding grace to combat his deep despair (v. 4).<sup>17</sup> In other words, the Psalmist intentionally implants Yahweh’s truth into his heart through this meditative progression during troubled times.

The third way the Psalmist uses biblical meditation to implant the truth about Yahweh into his heart is by offering devotion and praise. Psalm 48:9 indicates corporate worship included meditation on God’s love, where the Sons of Korah write, “Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love” (NIV). The Psalmist incorporates meditation into his praise and adoration of Yahweh when writing Psalm 104. The

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<sup>14</sup>Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1320.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 237, 1320.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>17</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 6, *Psalms 120-150* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1869), 336.

Psalmist expresses his lifelong devotion to Yahweh in verse 33: “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.” He continues his praise in verse 34 by adding, “Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; As for me, I shall be glad in the Lord.” The Hebrew word translated “meditation” here is *śiyah* and, in this context, means simply “praise.”<sup>18</sup> Leslie C. Allen agrees and notes that the Psalmist “offers his meditations as a sacrifice” and implicitly as a help to corporate worship.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, the Psalmist had meditative praise and devotion in mind when he wrote Psalm 145. During a string of devotional declarations, the Psalmist proclaims, “On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate.” In this context, the Hebrew word translated “meditate” means praising with a “loud, enthusiastic, emotionally-laden speech.”<sup>20</sup> The Psalmist also employs meditation as an expression of devotion and praise to Yahweh in Psalm 19:14 and Psalm 4:4. All of the references to the word *meditate* in Psalm 119 mean “to meditate with thanks and praise” (vv. 15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148).<sup>21</sup>

The biblical view of meditation in the Old Testament is characterized as continual for knowing and pleasing God with obedience, as anticipation of God’s help, and as an act of worship before God. The Psalmist’s helpful pattern of meditation is to first intentionally remember God’s wonders, then vocalize God’s deeds, and lastly, offer thanks and praise for God’s work.

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<sup>18</sup>Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1321.

<sup>19</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 48.

<sup>20</sup>Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1320.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

## **Biblical Meditation in the New Testament**

The number of direct references to the term *meditation* in the New Testament is much fewer than the number of references in the Old Testament. In Luke 21:14 (cf. Mark 13:11), Jesus instructs his disciples not to premeditate their legal defense when taken before their accusers.<sup>22</sup> Paul instructs Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4:15, to “meditate” (NKJV) or “take pains with” (NASB) (*melatao*) the doing of ministry despite his youthful inexperience.<sup>23</sup> Mary “pondered” (*sumballō*) all the events of the birth of Jesus in her heart (Luke 2:19).<sup>24</sup> Concluding his letter, the apostle Paul instructs the Philippians to “meditate” (NKJV) (*logízomai*) or “to give careful thought to a matter, think (about), consider, ponder, let one’s mind dwell on” (Phil 4:8).<sup>25</sup>

Although the number of references to *meditation* in the New Testament are fewer, they provide valuable insights into the definition and practice of biblical meditation for the believer living under the New Covenant (Jer 31:33-34; 2 Cor 3:2-3). In Philippians 4:8–9, Paul’s admonition to meditate reflects the meditative theme found in Psalms 1:2 and Joshua 1:8, that is pleasing God by obeying His Word. However, Paul does not envision meditating on Torah here, but rather Paul instructs believers to dwell on all that is Christ, which leads to changes in their attitude and behavior.<sup>26</sup>

With the incarnation of Christ and the coming of the new covenant, biblical meditation expanded beyond the Old Testament understanding to encompass the

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<sup>22</sup>Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 872.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 627.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 956.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 598.

<sup>26</sup>David E. Garland, *Philippians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 253-54.

fulfillment of God's promise to write His laws on the believer's heart.<sup>27</sup> Biblical meditation now includes concepts of "putting on Christ" as the new man and the living Torah (Eph 4:20-24, Col 3:10) and "renewing the mind" for transformation to Christ (Rom 12:2). Also, the Holy Spirit takes center stage in the practice of biblical meditation. His role in biblical meditation is not as a spotlighted star, but instead as an illuminating narrator, reminding believers of Jesus' words (John 14:26) and disclosing the riches of Jesus to the pondering believer (John 16:13-4).<sup>28</sup>

Biblical meditation is depicted in Scripture as continual deep thinking upon Christ as disclosed by the Holy Spirit, accomplished either with or without verbal sound. Following the Psalmist pattern, biblical meditation does not need to be confined to a preset time of day or performed in a subdued manner in a quiet place. It can be enjoyed continually and with much vocal force pouring forth the issues of the heart to God. Scripture identifies the purpose of biblical meditation as understanding and obeying God for His pleasure, increasing faith by remembering God's prior work, and simply worshipping and adoring God. The Psalmist practices a helpful triadic meditative progression of intentionally calling God's wonders to mind, verbally muttering God's deeds, and praising God for His work. The ultimate result of driving Scriptures, as well as Christ as the living Word, deep into the disciple's mind and heart, through biblical meditation, is that it heightens union with Christ and transforms them into Christ's likeness in both attitude and behavior (2 Cor 3:18).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Robert H. Mounce, *John*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 368.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 589.

<sup>29</sup>Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Biblical Study from Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 74-75.



## **Biblical Meditation Fosters a Growing Awareness of God's Holiness and One's Own Sinfulness**

With an understanding of Scripture's view of meditation, the remainder of this chapter will consider how biblical meditation deepens the marks of a Christian disciple as defined by Lovelace.<sup>30</sup> One mark of a Christian disciple enhanced by the practice of biblical meditation is the growing awareness of the need for God's grace. Increasing the awareness of God's holiness and of the believer's sinfulness is a prerequisite to developing any other Christian characteristic within the disciple.<sup>31</sup> James Wilhoit postulates, "The grace of God that affects us (grace as God's transforming and healing power) generally does not exceed our perceived need for grace."<sup>32</sup> The gap between believers' perception of God's holiness and perception of their sinfulness determines the amount of perceived grace needed, which Wilhoit labels the God-Human gap (see figure 1).<sup>33</sup> He notes that the believer's self-justification and spiritual blindness erroneously constrict the God-Human gap, which proportionally constricts the perceived need for Christ's atoning work on the cross (see figure 2).<sup>34</sup> The current trend of the believer's apathy toward sin and the believer's view of God as exclusively benevolent combine to shrink the God-Human gap and reduce the perceived need for God's grace.

Lovelace points to the man-centered trend in contemporary churches and argues that the advanced phase of "anthropocentric religion" alleviates, in many believer's minds, the need for God the Father, as well as God the Son.<sup>35</sup> Haykin adds that a spirituality

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<sup>30</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 75.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 81-82.

<sup>32</sup>Jim Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 106.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 107-8.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 106-7.

<sup>35</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 85.

centered on self is the “prime characteristic of pagan culture throughout history.”<sup>36</sup> Christlikeness is diminished, and the God-Human gap obstructed, when sin is perceived tame and God the Father perceived as exclusively loving. One way to expand the believer’s obstructed God-Human gap is by meditating upon the Scripture’s view of God’s holiness and its view of sin.<sup>37</sup>

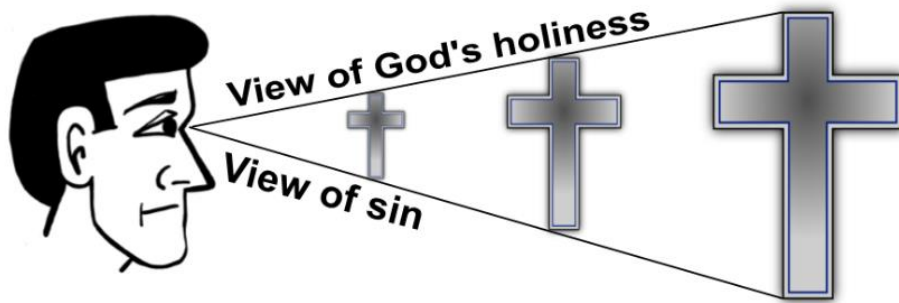


Figure 1. The God-Human Gap

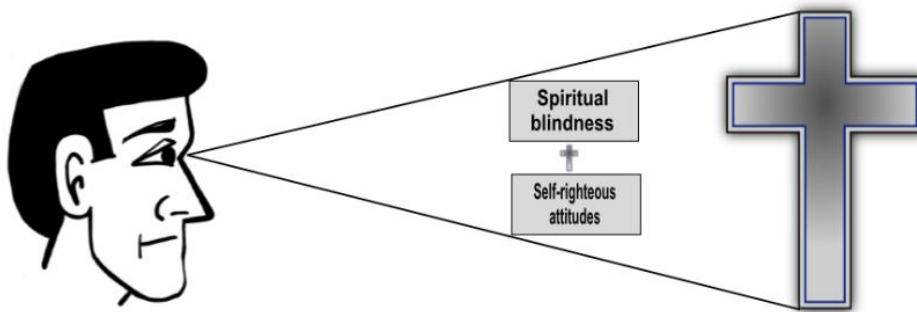


Figure 2. Constricted Need for Grace

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<sup>36</sup>Haykin, *God Who Draws Near*, 11.

<sup>37</sup>Figure 1 is based on concepts in Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 109. Figure 2 is based on concepts in Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 107.

## Biblical View of God's Holiness

The term *holy* involves separation or set-apart-ness.<sup>38</sup> Haykin describes holiness by dividing everything into two categories; the first contains everything created, including man, who depends on something or someone else, and the second contains the uncreated One, who upon which every member in the first category depends.<sup>39</sup> God is holy in a category of His own. Tozer points out that God does not adapt to a standard, He is the standard.<sup>40</sup> God's holiness is absolute, without degree, and cannot be imparted to an unholy creation.<sup>41</sup> How can man be holy? Scripture reveals that a relative holiness is imparted to the believer through Christ's redeeming work on the cross.<sup>42</sup>

An awestruck Isaiah saw God's holiness and His glory in the shaking, smoke-filled temple where six-winged seraphim cried aloud "Holy, Holy, Holy." The triple repetition denotes special weight on God's absolute holiness (Isa 6:1-7; John 12:41).<sup>43</sup> Scripture never repeats another attribute of God three times except the term "holy," thus raising its importance to a third degree in the ancient Hebrew mind.<sup>44</sup> In *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto describes Isaiah's experiences as "numinous," which is expressed concisely in the Latin phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.<sup>45</sup> In other words, Isaiah

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<sup>38</sup>Richard F. Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life: A Guidebook for Spiritual Growth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 21.

<sup>39</sup>Haykin, *God Who Draws Near*, 12.

<sup>40</sup>A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life*, Special gift for Insight for Living ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 165.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 166-67.

<sup>43</sup>John A. Martin, *Isaiah*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 1045.

<sup>44</sup>R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1998), 24-26, Kindle.

<sup>45</sup>Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), locs. 162, 434, 502, 874, Kindle.

experienced “the unfathomable Mystery before whom we are awestruck and stand trembling, yet find ourselves inexorably drawn into relationship, attracted and fascinated in ways we cannot fully explain.”<sup>46</sup> Isaiah responded to the deeply felt holiness of God by recognizing his sinfulness and called God’s anathema upon himself by crying “woe.”<sup>47</sup> God imputed His holiness to Isaiah by cleansing him with burning coal taken from God’s sacrificial altar.<sup>48</sup>

The Isaiah 6 passage shows that not only is God set apart, but in addition, He can make anything or anyone holy by proclaiming them so.<sup>49</sup> God imparts His holiness to all true Christian believers, even though the sanctification process is never complete (1 Pet 1:15-16; 1 Cor 1:30).<sup>50</sup> The apostle Paul calls believers saints or holy ones not because of purity, but because when God looks at saints He sees Christ’s righteousness (1 Cor 1:2; Rom 1:7).<sup>51</sup>

The God-Human gap begins to widen and the believer’s awareness of God’s holiness is deepened when the believer meditates on the reality of God’s holiness and His holiness imparted to them through Christ. Because of this meditation, the believer’s attitude transforms from arrogance and spiritual elitism to thanksgiving, humility, and love.

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<sup>46</sup>J. Edward Culpepper, “Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans,” First Baptist Huntsville Blind Faith, October 20, 2010, accessed September 1, 2017, <http://www.fbchsv2.org/blindfaith/2010/10/20/mysterium-tremendum-et-fascinans/>.

<sup>47</sup>Sproul, *Holiness of God*, 28.

<sup>48</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 20 (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1999), 82.

<sup>49</sup>J. Rodman Williams, “Holiness,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 562-63.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 563.

<sup>51</sup>Sproul, *Holiness of God*, 157-58, 165.

## **Biblical View of Sin**

The God-Human gap will only partially widen by meditating on the reality of God's holiness as revealed in Scripture. The gap will widen fully when a truthful and biblical view of believers' sin accompanies their perception of God's holiness. Haykin notes this dependency when he writes, "It is only on the basis of a proper view of God, that the believer can attain a true estimation of himself."<sup>52</sup> However, the normal inclination of humans, even for many believers, is to hold an improper view of God. Many believers aim to be autonomous from God, which leads to voluntarily gravitating toward darkness and unknowingly repressing the truth.<sup>53</sup> Lovelace rightly depicts believers' view of God and self as being mirrorless, not seeing their true sinfulness, and suffering from tunnel vision, blinded from God and supernatural reality.<sup>54</sup> This unbiblical view of self and God results in the creation of imaginary gods that justify believers' beliefs and replace the reality of God with their own reality.<sup>55</sup> Displacing God with any object, with any person, or even with one's own subjective ideas, Erickson contends, defines sin and is ultimately rooted in not believing that God is who He says He is.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, the understanding of sin in the greater church has eroded in the past two centuries and has been redefined as "conscience, voluntary acts of transgression against known laws."<sup>57</sup> Many have essentially rationalized away the ingrained nature of sin described in Scripture, and instead focused solely on external acts.<sup>58</sup> Packer laments

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<sup>52</sup>Haykin, *God Who Draws Near*, 15.

<sup>53</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 88, 90.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>56</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 513, 530, Kindle.

<sup>57</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 88.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

that the clearly marked highway to holiness, as described in Scripture and traveled by the historical church, is now washed out and needs to be rebuilt.<sup>59</sup> The church's deliberate demotion of sin coincides with a general denial of evil spiritual forces, which has, as Erickson observes, "Reduced all of the evil in the world to naturalistically explainable causes."<sup>60</sup>

Scripture portrays the nature of sin in two general ways, namely as being discrete acts and as being pervasively integrated within the human disposition.<sup>61</sup> The Old Testament speaks of sin at three different levels: external acts, which were condemned by the prophets; internal sins of thought and intention; and spiritual sickness found in the heart, such as those spoken by the Psalmist, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (Jer 17:9; Ps 51, Ezek 11:19).<sup>62</sup> In the NT, sin is portrayed as integrated into the human nature and less as discrete acts.<sup>63</sup> For example, Jesus made it clear that the attitude in the heart equates to the sinful act, even when no external act occurred (Matt 5: 21-22; 12: 33-35; Luke 6: 43-45; Matt 15: 18-19).<sup>64</sup>

Meditation on biblical teaching about God's holiness, human need, and redemption through Jesus is the truth the Holy Spirit uses to counter the downward trend and shatter the "sphere of darkness" encasing the church.<sup>65</sup> Joel Beeke concurs and notes that, in the past, deep biblical meditation empowered the church to detach from sin and

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<sup>59</sup>J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 13, Kindle.

<sup>60</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 818.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 569, 571.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 569-70.

<sup>63</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 90.

<sup>64</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 571.

<sup>65</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 90-91.

attach to neighbors and to God.<sup>66</sup> David Saxton teaches that the believer who repeatedly meditates on heaven develops a desire to be holy as God is holy.<sup>67</sup>

Meditating on Scripture begins rebuilding the highway to holiness. Jesus taught believers that staying in His Word will bring knowledge of truth, which frees them from sin (John 8:31-32). While in his struggle, the Psalmist beseeched Yahweh to send out truth and light, which he viewed as a beacon leading him to Yahweh's abode, resulting in worship (Ps 43:3-4). Peter implores the church to transform into holiness because God is holy (1 Pet 1:14-16). Meditating on the truth found in God's Word, especially passages demonstrating God's otherness (i.e., Isa 6; Job 39-42; Isa 40; Luke 9:28-36), increases the God-Human gap, frees the disciple from sin, and enables believers to enjoy their union with Christ.

### **Biblical Meditation Deepens One's Awareness of Christ's Atoning Work and Union with Believers**

A growing awareness of God's holiness and the corresponding increase in the awareness of personal sinfulness leads the believer to understand the desperate need for Christ's atoning work and His unification with them. Packer describes the result of this two-fold work of Christ as producing devotion, meaning "taking God's moral law as our rule," and producing assimilation, as taking "God's incarnate Son as our model."<sup>68</sup> Growing in the awareness of Christ's atoning work and His imparted holiness, found in union with Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is the means by which the believer enters into the wonderful and awesome presence of God.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 73.

<sup>67</sup>David W. Saxton, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015), loc. 1810, Kindle.

<sup>68</sup>Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 18.

<sup>69</sup>Ann Spangler, *Praying the Attributes of God: A Daily Guide to Experiencing His Greatness* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2013), 251.

## **Meditating on Christ's Atoning Work**

The two theological concepts of justification and sanctification describe much of Christ's atoning work. Lovelace defines justification as "the acceptance of believers as righteous in the sight of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ accounted to them," distinguishing it from sanctification, which he sees as "progress in actual holiness expressed in their lives."<sup>70</sup>

The relationship between justification and sanctification often becomes jumbled in the believer's mind. Progressively growing in the likeness of Jesus (sanctification) first requires a right standing with God and to be in His favor (justification).<sup>71</sup> So, justification is a prerequisite sanctification. Believers who replace justification with works (sanctification), are fighting a battle that has already been won and the basis for overcoming sin is removed.<sup>72</sup> Conversely, believers who think themselves sinless, finding no need for sanctification when God pronounces them justified, experience "cheap grace" and are deceived (1 John 1:8).<sup>73</sup>

Believers become theologically unbalanced when they ignore either justification or sanctification, but meditating upon Scripture concerning the role and relationship of justification and sanctification re-balances the truth in their minds. Piper points to Romans 8:3-4 as a pertinent passage portraying justification (v. 3) as distinct and preceding sanctification, noting that verse 4 says "*in us (not just for us).*"<sup>74</sup> Erickson agrees and notes that justification removes the eternal consequences of sin, but not the temporal

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<sup>70</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 98.

<sup>71</sup>John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), loc. 733, Kindle.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, loc. 744.

<sup>73</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 102.

<sup>74</sup>Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, loc. 1242.



residue of sin or the need for sanctification.<sup>75</sup> Erickson calls justification a unilateral act of God who restores the newly converted to a state of righteousness, having nothing to do with the believer's actions (Rom 6:23; Eph 2: 8-9).<sup>76</sup>

Few believers correctly understand God's gift of justification (Rom 6:23; Rom 8:32-34; Eph 2:8-9).<sup>77</sup> Some believers think they are holier than they actually are and simply under-value Christ's gift of justification.<sup>78</sup> Some of these people may assume they are justified, but in reality are not. Other believers acknowledge Christ's justifying work, but incorrectly think that the sanctification process adds to their justification.<sup>79</sup> These believers think their works somehow increase their justification. Meditation helps the believer sense the thankfulness for and appreciation of Christ's justifying work without adding to justification with works of sanctification. For example, thinking deeply on Paul's admonition to the Ephesians (Eph 2:8-9) delimits works from justification found in Christ's atoning work.<sup>80</sup>

However, meditating on God's gift of justification may offend the believer's hopes of paying Christ to make things even.<sup>81</sup> Though, the very presence of this offense indicates the lack of understanding of believers' depth of their sinfulness, since they still think they are in some way equal with Christ and actually have something to offer Him in return for His justification. Piper labels the believer's attempt to repay God as the "debtor's

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<sup>75</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 890-91.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 883, 885, 887.

<sup>77</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 101.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup>William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 70.

<sup>81</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 887.

ethic,” which traps the believer into a pit of works or obedience as repayment, nullifying Christ’s atoning work.<sup>82</sup> The apostle Paul clearly teaches that justification is a gift and the believer who meditates on passages like Romans 8:32-34, which includes “will He not also with Him freely give us all things,” will deepen understanding of justification and accept Christ’s unilateral, atoning work.

Like justification, sanctification is a grace given by God based on the believer’s union with Christ, and requires faith.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, successfully progressing toward Christlikeness requires changes from the inside empowered by the Holy Spirit and is usually not successful unless attempted under His power.<sup>84</sup> Many believers attempt to live Christlike in their own strength without the enablement of the Holy Spirit, fighting a battle they already lost.<sup>85</sup> Lovelace calls this level of understanding “heteronomy,” a term borrowed from Kant, and occurs when one does not fully embrace a law with their heart, but reluctantly submits to it.<sup>86</sup> Meditating on passages such as Romans 6 or 2 Peter 1:3 deepens believers’ awareness of biblical sanctification, which leads them to realize that progressing toward Christlikeness depends upon the Holy Spirit. Lovelace notes that when this deeper understanding is reached, the believer acknowledges the theonomous reality that “the restraining law must be perceived as God’s will and accepted from the heart because of repentant submission to him”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995), 32-33.

<sup>83</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 114-16.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 130-31.

<sup>85</sup>Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, loc. 744.

<sup>86</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 112.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

## **Meditating on Union with Christ**

The power to overcome sin, or to be just in God’s sight, does not occur by the believer’s willpower, but the power to overcome resides in the present reality of the believer’s union with Christ.<sup>88</sup> Based on Hebrews 6:5, 1 Corinthians 10:11, and 1 Corinthians 15:23–28, John Jefferson Davis points to the “already” presence of the Holy Spirit and God’s kingdom, found in the inaugurated eschatological tension of “already, not yet,” as the Triune God’s “real, intimate presence” with believers.<sup>89</sup> C. S. Lewis calls this new ontological reality transformative “from being creatures of God to being sons of God.”<sup>90</sup> Davis contends that in this real union with Christ, the believer’s biblical meditation is not done as a “stranger to Christ,” but as “a real-time experience of communion with the living Christ.”<sup>91</sup>

Davis’ contention of an ontological union with Christ, made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit, interprets Paul’s often used phrase “in Christ” is “not merely an ethical category,” but is an ontological spiritual reality.<sup>92</sup> Louis Smedes agrees with Davis and notes that Christ’s union with believers is a “whole new reality” going far beyond the essential fact of the believer’s experience.<sup>93</sup> Indeed it is difficult to side step the “new creation” interpretation of Paul’s understanding of union with Christ as he expressed it in a plethora of verses, including 2 Corinthians 5:17, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature”; Galatians 6:15, “neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>89</sup>John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), locs. 422, 486, Kindle.

<sup>90</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 220.

<sup>91</sup>Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, loc. 726.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., loc. 750.

<sup>93</sup>Lewis B. Smedes, *Union with Christ: A Biblical View of the New Life in Jesus Christ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 59.

new creation”; Galatians 2:20, “no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”; and 1 Corinthians 15:22, “in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”<sup>94</sup>

Erickson cautions that union with Christ is not simply metaphysical (i.e., pantheistic or mystical as in losing individual identity), or sympathetic (i.e., sharing similar ideas and interests), or sacramental (i.e., taking the Lord’s Supper).<sup>95</sup> Rather, union with Christ means that the believer is legally righteous by Christ’s atoning work, bonded to Christ by the Holy Spirit, and receives Christ’s vitality.<sup>96</sup> Lovelace parallels Erickson’s view with practical application of union with Christ. The classical mystic’s Triple Way of spiritual progress is conceived of as a ladder beginning on the bottom rung with soul cleansing, progressing up one rung to illumination of the mind, and concluding on the highest rung obtaining union with god.<sup>97</sup> Lovelace reverses this order and teaches believers that the biblical way is to claim union with Christ by faith, followed by the Holy Spirit’s illumination, which leads to cleansing through sanctification.<sup>98</sup> As believers engage Scripture in biblical meditation, they commune with the triune God who is present in believers and deepens their awareness of their union with Christ.<sup>99</sup>

### **Biblical Meditation Deepens One’s Awareness of the Place of Christian Fellowship and Community**

Believers who deepen their awareness for Christ’s atoning work and His union with them soon find a need for Christian fellowship and community. This need is more of

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<sup>94</sup>David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 286-87.

<sup>95</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 878-80.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 881.

<sup>97</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 19.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup>Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, loc. 468.

a God-given craving and longing for real spiritual relationship with other believers who are also united with Christ, that is to be connected with something greater than themselves.<sup>100</sup> This craved relationship is not satisfied by surface conversation, such as those about a favored sport team or favored brand of car, but rather the craving is satisfied only by a spiritual conversation focused on their relationship with Christ.<sup>101</sup> The apostle John wrote, “What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). From this passage, Gary Burge notes a triangular relationship consisting of “my life in fellowship with Christ, your life in fellowship with Christ, and my life in fellowship with yours.”<sup>102</sup>

Union with Christ glues believers to Christ, but also to each other.<sup>103</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer cautions believers not to view Christian community as anything beyond Christ’s work done within the believer’s heart.<sup>104</sup> Building community upon fanciful thoughts of emotionalism or social ideals is not Christian community.<sup>105</sup> Understanding this community as a spiritually organic common life in Christ far surpasses the simple understanding of Christian community as a group of individuals with common goals and purposes.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 147, Kindle.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>102</sup>Gary M. Burge, *The Letters of John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 55.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), loc. 9, Kindle.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Jerry Bridges, *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), loc. 108, Kindle.

Scripture describes Christian fellowship as maintaining both horizontal and vertical relationships. The Greek word most often translated “fellowship” in the New Testament is *koinonia*, referring to the believer’s spiritual bond with Jesus (1 Cor 1:9; Phil 3:10) and a spiritual bond with other believers (1 John 1:3; Acts 2:42).<sup>107</sup> *Koinonia* within the spiritual bond of Christian community offers the believer nourishment from a full banquet of rich food instead of the fast-food offered by surface socializing experienced by most people in both the Christian and the non-Christian world.<sup>108</sup> Lovelace notes that individualistic Christianity is like a diver whose air hose connects to the source of oxygen, but is unaffected by any other diver’s air supply.<sup>109</sup> The apostle Paul’s body metaphor, recorded in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, refutes individualistic Christianity. Paul depicts Christian community as an integrated, unified, and caring body of Christ, utilizing their Holy Spirit given gifts to benefit other members of the body. A second refutation of individualistic Christianity is Jesus’ new commandment to “love one another, even as I have loved you” (John 13:34-35). Loving one another with Christ’s covenantal love is a mark of a true Christian disciple, who intentionally disregards the worthiness of the recipient.<sup>110</sup>

Further debunking individualistic Christianity, Don McMinn observes a repetitive word pattern in Scripture. The pattern begins with an action verb, such as “love,” followed by the phrase “one another.”<sup>111</sup> Another example of this pattern is “Comfort one another” found in 2 Corinthians 1:4. Grammarians call this pattern a reciprocal pronoun, which means, “I am to act a certain way toward you and you should act the same way

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<sup>107</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*, 149.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>109</sup>Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 168.

<sup>110</sup>Mounce, *John*, 557.

<sup>111</sup>Don McMinn, *Love One Another: 20 Practical Lessons* (Dallas: iPlace, 2012), loc. 76, Kindle.

toward me.”<sup>112</sup> Thirty–six phrases taken together, including action verbs such as accept, encourage, and comfort, teach believers how Christian love should operate in community.<sup>113</sup>

Certainly, living in a physically close Christian community where the “one anothers” flow fluidly is a great privilege. Physical interaction with other believers represents the presence of the Triune God that often lacks in virtual interactions over television or social media (Matt 18:20). Addressing the fallen church in Nazi Germany, Bonhoeffer calls the ability to gather physically around God’s Word in the visible community of believers a grace of God and “a source of incomparable joy and strength.”<sup>114</sup> Bonhoeffer realized that the gift of physical fellowship could easily be replaced by Christian loneliness.<sup>115</sup> His experience among the compromised church reminds believers today to savor the preciousness of living life together in Christ.

The example of heavenly Christian community stresses the importance of Christian life together. In John 14:2, Jesus pointed to the permanent eternal state of Christian community when he spoke of preparing dwelling places or rooms for His believers in the Father’s house. Following Hebrew patriarchal culture, Jesus, as the Father’s son, is accepting His bride as members of the household to live with Him in the Father’s house.<sup>116</sup> By His atoning work and union with believers, Jesus prepared a way for Christians to live in fellowship among His community, which is far more fulfilling than

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<sup>112</sup>McMinn, *Love One Another*, loc. 76.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., loc. 142.

<sup>114</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 2-3.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>116</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 488-89.

any lonely and isolated mansion on a hilltop.<sup>117</sup> Fellowship with Christ and His family satisfies the believer's deepest craving, that is being loved and loving others.

Worshipping God together is a unifying event in Christian community. The New Testament reconfigures acceptable worship from liturgical temple worship to worship stemming from union with Christ and within Christian community. The apostle Peter describes true Christian community as a "spiritual house" built with "living stones" to offer up acceptable sacrifices to God as His priests because of our union with Christ (1 Pet 2:5). The community of believers is God's spiritual dwelling place.<sup>118</sup> The Christian community, as God's new temple, is the fulfilled archetype of the old Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>119</sup> In John 4:23–24, Jesus distinctly describes acceptable worship, not as the Temple worship in Jerusalem or worship on the Samaritan mountain Gerizim, but worship "in spirit and truth," meaning genuine spiritual relationship with God and others, as well as worship in the truth of Christ's atoning work.<sup>120</sup> John 4:24, together with Paul's teachings in Romans 12:1 and Philippians 3:3, shows that God is not looking for liturgy or "temple service," but instead, "service engendered by the Spirit that is independent of any physical temple," where worship is motivated by a true spiritual relationship with Christ and Christian community, which Peter calls a "spiritual house."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Colin G. Kruse, *John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 292.

<sup>118</sup>J. Daryl Charles, *1 Peter*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 316.

<sup>119</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 105.

<sup>120</sup>Mounce, *John*, 413.

<sup>121</sup>Garland, *Philippians*, 236.



Mulling meditatively on the many passages describing Christian fellowship and community, such as 1 John 1:3, 1 Peter 2:5, Matthew 18:20, John 13:34-35, and John 4:24, deepens the believer's awareness of their role and function within Christian community.

### **Biblical Meditation Cultivates Deeper Awareness of and Motivation to Proclaim the Gospel to the World**

Scripture teaches that Christian community is not isolated from the unbelieving world, but rather is a tool for evangelism (1 Pet 2:9). During Hitler's increasing oppression in the 1930s, Bonhoeffer bravely wrote "Christians, too, belong not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the midst of enemies."<sup>122</sup> Based on His authority and their unity with Him, Jesus commanded the Christian community,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28:18-20)

Making disciples is every Christian's mission and not just for the clergy or those possessing the evangelistic spiritual gift.<sup>123</sup> The apostle Peter declared the Christian community's mission in 1 Peter 2:9. Peter reminds the Christian community first of their identity and authority as "a royal priesthood," "Holy nation," and "people for God's own possession," and second of their mission, which is to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you." David Bosch drives this point when he concludes his seminal work by situating missions in community: "It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world."<sup>124</sup> Ruth Myers agrees with Bosch's mission-starts-with-community point and adds that the believer's identity, the *being*, including identity in community, precedes the *doing* of missions.<sup>125</sup> Jesus' master plan for

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<sup>122</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 1.

<sup>123</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 121.

<sup>124</sup>David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed., American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 514, Kindle.

<sup>125</sup>Ruth A. Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's People*,

evangelism, according to Robert Coleman, was to impart Himself within His disciples by modeling the Christian life in such a way to convince the disciples of His identity as God.<sup>126</sup> Coleman adds that, for the disciples, “Knowledge was gained by association before it was understood by explanation.”<sup>127</sup> Coleman notes that mission begins by having “his life in us by the Spirit.”<sup>128</sup>

Meditating on biblical passages proclaiming Christ’s excellencies, as well as passages describing the positive results of proclaiming the gospel, builds confidence and changes a believer’s fear of witnessing into a desire to share experience with others (Matt 10:40; John 13:20; Mark 6:7). Whitney contends that fear of sharing the gospel may be rooted in the belief that the eternal life of another depends on the quality of the gospel presentation.<sup>129</sup> Saxton adds that meditating on the reality of hell increases the seriousness of witnessing within the believer and motivates action (Matt 10:28; Luke 16:19-31).<sup>130</sup> Indeed, proclaiming the gospel is serious and eternal destinies are at stake, however, the believer is called to proclaim that Jesus’ atoning work and is not condemned if the message is rejected. Luke 10:16 teaches that the result of proclaiming the gospel is the work of God, for “the one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me.” Just like the newly-healed blind man in John 9, who encountered Jesus and stood up against the blind Pharisees, meditating believers gain confidence upon discovering that their responsibility is simply

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*Going Out in God’s Name*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), loc. 240, Kindle.

<sup>126</sup>Robert Emerson Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993), 69-70, 85-86, Kindle.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>129</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 123.

<sup>130</sup>Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan*, loc. 1824.

to share and release the results to the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Rom 1:16; Luke 10:16).<sup>131</sup> Therefore, internalizing these passages by meditating on them causes the believer to be freed from performance anxiety and, in that freedom, motivates them to action.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter established that Scripture speaks of meditation as understanding God's Word demonstrated by obedience to Him, a reminder of God's past deeds which builds faith, and as an act of devotion and worship to God. Specifically, the Psalmist meditates by intentionally remembering God's prior acts, verbalizing these prior deeds, and praising God for His work. Biblical meditation is continuous, verbal or non-verbal, and sometimes involves emotions.

Biblical meditation deepens the Christian disciples' awareness of their need for God's grace by better understanding the gulf between God's holiness and human sinfulness. Building on the increased need for God's grace, believers' continued biblical meditation deepens awareness of Christ's atoning work and their union with Him. After acquiring this deeper understanding, further biblical meditation deepens the believer's awareness of their roll in Christian community and their ability to witness to the non-Christian community. The spiritual progression of these Christian characteristics leads Christian disciples toward greater conformity to the image of Christ in their attitudes and behaviors.

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<sup>131</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 122, 124.

CHAPTER 3  
REVIEW OF CHRISTIAN PRACTICES OF BIBLICAL  
MEDITATION TO FOSTER GROWING  
DISCIPLESHIP

As chapter 2 discussed, Scripture teaches that meditating on God’s Word propels the Christian believer toward Christlikeness. This chapter adds to the understanding of biblical meditation gained in chapter 2 by examining historical and practical issues involved with meditating biblically. After a brief historical review of biblical meditation, this chapter addresses three practical issues concerning biblical meditation in the context of this project: the role of singing the Psalms in biblical meditation, distinguishing biblical meditation from other alternate forms, and overcoming distractions embraced by the culture and carried into the corporate worship service.

**Christians Have Long Used Biblical Meditation  
as a Way to Grow in Discipleship**

Biblical meditation is not new. It is not the same as the new fad recently popularized by New Age mystics. Christian believers need not fear or avoid meditating biblically. Historical precedence confirms the practice of biblical meditation in the believer’s life. Christians have been meditating on God’s Word throughout church history. The following three post-biblical examples demonstrate the teaching and practice of biblical meditation in the early church, the Reformation, and the Puritan era. The goal of this section is to validate the integrity and importance of biblical meditation in the lives of contemporary Christian disciples.

**Biblical Meditation in the Early Church**

Chapter 2 reviewed the practice of meditating on God’s words and deeds in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jews and first-century Christians

pondered God's words and deeds with the intention of adapting their lives in obedience to God's Word.<sup>1</sup> In addition, early Catholic monks, Reformers, and Puritans provide three historical examples of how biblical meditation can promote the pursuit of Christlikeness.

An early example of biblical meditation in church history can be seen in its use by third and fourth century monks who practiced asceticism in the Palestinian and Egyptian deserts. In *The Word in the Desert*, Douglas Burton-Christie notes a "strong Jewish influence" in their practices and adds two important observations about the monks' meditations.<sup>2</sup> First, Scripture was the central object of the monks' meditation.<sup>3</sup> As explained later in this section, this was not always the case in later meditative practices. The early monks bit off a few verses of Scripture, chewed on them for a time, and let God's Word digest in their minds and then in their hearts.<sup>4</sup> Meditating on Scripture was so important to the monk that, without it, the monks feared losing sight of God and lose experiencing His very presence.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the monks meditated not on some external object, but on God's Word for the purpose of responding personally to Scripture.<sup>6</sup>

Burton-Christie's second relevant point is that the monks' meditations were predominately verbal and unlike today's stereotypical image of a monk silently reflecting on one or two words.<sup>7</sup> Monk meditation was physical and could be heard and seen, repeating phrases with moving lips and barely audible sound until the truth of God's Word

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), locs. 1054, 1062, Kindle.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest of Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 39.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 122-23.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>5</sup>Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, loc. 1072, Kindle.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., loc. 1092, Kindle.

<sup>7</sup>Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 123.

was internalized.<sup>8</sup> Internalizing Scripture enabled the monks to conquer their struggle against temptation and build up, as Burton-Christie calls it, a “healing reservoir of thoughts,” continually replenishing their reserves of which to draw upon during future struggles.<sup>9</sup>

Even though the early monks in the desert correctly focused on Scripture during meditation, over time the practice of meditation became more mechanical and less substantive. Meditation was codified into a form by Benedict of Nursia (480–547) called *The Rule of St. Benedict*, which ordered the monk’s spiritual life.<sup>10</sup> In the twelfth century, Guigo II formalized Benedict’s *Lectio Divina* into an ascent of four stages; namely, reading Scripture, meditation upon the text, prayer, and contemplation in God’s presence.<sup>11</sup>

Guigo II’s book *The Ladder of Monks* described these four stages as rungs of a ladder where the monk ascends toward God by progressing through each stage.<sup>12</sup> Guigo’s ladder offered the believer a path to ascend, ending in the presence of God during the, somewhat mystical, contemplation stage.<sup>13</sup> Guigo describes the ecstasy a believer experiences in this stage: “Bodily instincts are so entirely consumed and absorbed by the soul that the flesh no longer fights against the spirit, and the person becomes spiritual in

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<sup>8</sup>Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 123.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>10</sup>Jim Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: Formatio/IVP, 2012), loc. 154, Kindle.

<sup>11</sup>Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 84-85, Kindle.

<sup>12</sup>Guigo II the Carthusian and Sr Pascale–Dominique Nau, *The Ladder of Monks* (San Sebastian, Spain: Sr. PascaleDominique Nau, 2013), loc. 84, Kindle.

<sup>13</sup>Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, loc. 1127, Kindle.

every respect.”<sup>14</sup> Like the other former stages, the meditation stage simply became a means and precursor to get to contemplation.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously, Guigo based this concept on Jacob’s ladder found in Genesis 28:10-17. Edmund Clowney exposes the fallacy of Guigo’s allegorical ladder by noting that “Jacob never climbed the ladder,” but, instead, God came down and stood beside Jacob.<sup>16</sup> The direction of man ascending to God suggested by Guigo foreshadows future non-biblical meditation, which asserts that, by the human effort, the seeker can become a god.<sup>17</sup>

### **Biblical Meditation in the Reformation**

The meditative practices and teachings of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) serve as a second example of biblical meditation in church history. Luther rejected Guigo’s contemplation stage and replaced it with a temptation stage, claiming that spiritual conflict unleashed by Satan occurs right after the believer grows in and is occupied with God’s Word via biblical meditation.<sup>18</sup> As well, Luther rearranged the order of the Catholic’s *Lectio Divina* to reading, prayer, meditation, and temptation, with emphasis on meditation, as demonstrated in his treatise *A Simple Way to Pray*.<sup>19</sup> In this work, Luther instructs believers to read or recall scripture, such as verses from the Lord’s prayer, pray the text, then to meditate on the text, with special instruction to

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<sup>14</sup>Carthusian and Nau, *The Ladder of Monks*, loc. 166, Kindle.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., loc. 227, Kindle.

<sup>16</sup>Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 61. The NASB note for the words “above it” in v. 13 suggests that the Hebrew word could have been rendered “beside him.”

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>18</sup>John W. Kleinig, “The Kindred Heart: Luther on Meditation,” *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 20, nos. 2/3 (August 1986): 147.

<sup>19</sup>Martin Luther, *Devotional Writings II, Luther’s Works*, vol. 43, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Gustav K. Wiencke, trans. Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 190.

abandon any method of prayer when the Holy Spirit begins to preach.<sup>20</sup> In his commentary on Psalm 1, Luther inclined meditation toward the gospel, teaching that meditation starts on the inside with a kindled desire for Christ.<sup>21</sup> Luther's gospel orientation brings value to meditation because, as John Kleinig explains, "meditation is thus in itself of no great value spiritually. It derives its benefit from its object."<sup>22</sup> Meditating on the gospel brings added spiritual value to the practice. In addition, Luther's methods opened the practice of meditation to the common churchman, as opposed to the exclusivity of the Catholic meditative method found in segregated monasteries. The priesthood in the monasteries now applied to all believers, releasing them all to meditate on the good news of the gospel and kindle their desire for Christ.

Luther's reorientation of biblical meditation toward the gospel of Jesus Christ was picked up and formalized by John Calvin. Calvin applied the biblical language of Romans 8:30 to the traditional Catholic "Three Way" model of purgation, illumination, and union, changing this progression to justification, sanctification, and glorification.<sup>23</sup> In Calvin's progression, which was adopted later by the Puritans, a believer starts their spiritual journey with union, which is acquired by justification in Christ at conversion.<sup>24</sup> Julie Canlis notes Calvin's emphasis on the gospel and adds that Calvin's "ladder is Christ" and is a "deeper and deeper burrowing into Christ" where, by nature of their union,

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<sup>20</sup>Luther, *Devotional Writings II*, 194-95, 198.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms III, Luther's Works*, vol. 14, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), loc. 5156, Kindle.

<sup>22</sup>Kleinig, "The Kindred Heart," 145.

<sup>23</sup>James M. Houston, "Spirituality," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell and Daniel J. Treier, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 838.

<sup>24</sup>Gordon S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion: Its Place in the Development of Christian Piety* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 102.



Christ's ascent is the believer's ascent.<sup>25</sup> Also, Calvin agrees with Luther that biblical meditation is not coerced or forced, but the desire to do biblical meditation originates from the believer's love for God and His Word.<sup>26</sup> Calvin holds high the duty of every believer to meditate on God's Word and points to the intentional and prominent positioning of Psalm 1 as a preface to all other Psalms as his proof.<sup>27</sup>

### **Puritan Biblical Meditation**

A final example of biblical meditation in church history is found in the strong advocacy and practice of the Puritans. The Puritans agree with Luther and Calvin about attracting the Holy Spirit with prayer and meditation. Richard Baxter adds that the believer should continue meditating on God's Word until the heart is warmed in the same way one stands by a fire long enough to be thoroughly warmed.<sup>28</sup> Thomas Manton contends that a heart defect prevents the believer from meditating, when he argues, "Delight will set the mind a-work, for we are apt to muse and pause upon that which is pleasing to us. Why are not holy thoughts as natural and as kindly to us as carnal? The defect is in the heart."<sup>29</sup>

In addition to hindering the Holy Spirit, the believer's cold heart toward biblical meditation may grieve God. John Flavel motivates his readers by pointedly observing that if the believer does not meditate on God's deeds, then God is defrauded, slighted, and

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<sup>25</sup>Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), loc. 573, Kindle.

<sup>26</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. Janes Anderson (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 1:4-5.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:1.

<sup>28</sup>Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (Apollo, PA: Ichthus Publications, 2016), loc. 4637, Kindle.

<sup>29</sup>Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton: With Memoir of the Author*, vol. 6 (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 138.

disrespected.<sup>30</sup> As well, Flavel strongly argues that God is robbed of praise by the believer's lack of meditation.<sup>31</sup> Contemporary writer Joel Beeke agrees with the Puritans and adds that biblical meditation lubricates, as oil does an engine, all the other spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, reading, hearing sermons, as well as love for God and others.<sup>32</sup>

The Puritans used biblical meditation to both invigorate their spiritual lives and to change their attitudes and behaviors to further their Christlikeness. Manton offers this statement to support this contention:

Meditation is not to store the head with notions, but to better the heart. We meditate of God that we may love him and fear him; of sin, that we may abhor it; of hell, that we may avoid it; of heaven, that we may pursue it. Still the end is practical, to quicken us to greater diligence and care in the heavenly life.<sup>33</sup>

According to Flavel, meditation on God's truth changes the believer's soul: "Practical meditation is the inculcation or whetting of a known truth upon the soul."<sup>34</sup> Gordon Wakefield notes the desire of Puritan meditation to live Scripture in their common daily life, where a bed reminds the believer of their grave when lying down and their future resurrection when rising.<sup>35</sup>

Historically, biblical meditation propelled believers toward Christlikeness. The early church argued that Christian meditation should be focused on Scripture, be verbalized to speed internalization of God's Word, and be incorporated into a daily regimen. After the medieval Catholics drifted from this foundation, Luther and Calvin reoriented biblical meditation on the gospel of Christ, listened for the preaching of the Holy Spirit, and

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<sup>30</sup>John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence* (Zeeland, MI: Reformed Church, 2010), locs. 1282, 1292, Kindle.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., loc. 1277, Kindle.

<sup>32</sup>Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Biblical Study from Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 75.

<sup>33</sup>Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, 144.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>35</sup>Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 85.

kindled their hearts with prayer and meditation. The Puritans taught of the vital need for biblical meditation, warned of the defective heart that opposes biblical meditation, and connected a growing spiritual life to an improved attitudes and behaviors. Having laid the historical foundation of biblical meditation, the remaining sections address three issues pertinent to the context of this project.

### **Singing the Psalter Is an Enduring Practice of Christian Worship That Fosters Meditation**

Chapter 2 taught that one of the ways the Psalmist sacrificed to Yahweh was by meditating on His love during temple worship (Pss 48:9; 104:33-4; 145:5; 19:14; 4:4). The book of Psalms was the hymnal for Israel's worship and was used throughout Christian history as a source for prayer.<sup>36</sup> This section addresses the first of three issues of biblical meditation by examining and validating the role song plays in biblical meditation in both corporate worship and in personal piety.

Music has power. No matter the style, music moves the human heart and mind. Song connects a message, usually in lyrical form, to an emotion, thus enhancing memory.<sup>37</sup> Enhancing memory, through emotional association to God's truths, occurs during times of corporate worship, which can be recalled during personal meditation later.<sup>38</sup> Clowney directly associates song with meditation: "Song not only provides unity in praise and opens emotional richness in worship, it also helps us with our scriptural meditations."<sup>39</sup> History exemplifies the practice of biblical meditation coupled with the power of song.

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<sup>36</sup>Don Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope, 1993), 137.

<sup>37</sup>Jennifer Phelps Ollikainen, "Intersections between Music Therapy and Worship," *Cross Accent* 23, no. 2 (2015): 31.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>39</sup>Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 24.

Historically, prayers and Scripture, including the book of Psalms, were chanted in a unique manner, with a few notes in a simple melody, which distinguished God's Word from common daily life during Jewish synagogue worship.<sup>40</sup> Some of the psalms are written meditations sung and best experienced in the same meditative mood as they were written.<sup>41</sup> Logically, new Jewish believers in Christ carried synagogue practices into the churches of their new faith, continuing the chanting of the psalms.<sup>42</sup> In a later example, the desert fathers intermingled a psalm with their meditations in the songs.<sup>43</sup>

Luther and Calvin recognized the power of music, but moved in opposite directions concerning the use of the psalms in worship.<sup>44</sup> Luther reversed the long-held practice of clergy-only singing in Latin by encouraging congregational singing and added common German songs with sparse harmonies to the psalms sung in corporate worship.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Calvin thought music a distraction from focusing on God's words, which, in his mind, were the only words worthy of singing.<sup>46</sup> Calvin considered human-invented elements of worship a form of idolatry, including hymns.<sup>47</sup> Calvin's psalms-only stance was adopted by the Anglicans, while the Anabaptists followed Luther's lead

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<sup>40</sup>Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music: From Gregorian Chant to Black Gospel: An Authoritative Illustrated Guide to All the Major Traditions of Music for Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 22-23.

<sup>41</sup>Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 19.

<sup>42</sup>Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 142.

<sup>43</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, J. M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 184.

<sup>44</sup>Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, 81-82.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>46</sup>Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 193-94.

<sup>47</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), loc. 592, Kindle.

and incorporated human-written hymns.<sup>48</sup> Donald Hustad points out that Calvin’s view, based on missing information from the writings of the early church, suffered a disconnect from the apostle Paul’s “hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19) to the Christian songs sung in the early church.<sup>49</sup> Hustad conjectures that the early church, in addition to the apostle Paul, “understood that human words were also worthy to be the vehicle of God’s praise!”<sup>50</sup>

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) argued that singing the Psalms exclusively did not permit worshippers to consider the gospel during corporate worship. Like the apostle Paul and the early church, Watts wanted churches to sing hymns and spiritual songs, along with the Psalms, in their corporate worship. Watts initiated a gradual transition from psalm-singing to a hymn-only repertoire, which many churches still use today.<sup>51</sup> In Watts’ day, clergy were more interested in enlightened reasoning and philosophy than in Christ’s redemptive work.<sup>52</sup> Mike Cospers describes Watts’ view: “Christian worship should be a meditation on the gospel.”<sup>53</sup> Watts merged praise with meditation by joining gospel truths to memorable melodies into hymns, which raised believer’s emotions and passions toward Christ.<sup>54</sup> For example, Watts’ song *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* is a meditation on the cross of Christ set to music.<sup>55</sup> The endurance of this hymn, and many other of Watts’

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<sup>48</sup>Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 450.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>52</sup>Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Thought* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), loc. 356, Kindle.

<sup>53</sup>Mike Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church’s Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 171, Kindle.

<sup>54</sup>Beynon, *Isaac Watts*, loc. 2296, Kindle.

<sup>55</sup>McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 67-68, Kindle.

Scripture-laden hymns, demonstrates the validity of singing meditations to help believers ponder God's truth and the legitimacy of singing hymns, as well as the Psalms, during corporate worship.

Focusing the believer's mind on the gospel during corporate worship allows the believer to express praise and thanks to God. The believer's lack of gospel focus during corporate worship is what motivated Watts.<sup>56</sup> Mindlessly singing the psalms, as Watts observed in his day, did not allow Christian believers to meditate on or engage the New Testament doctrines, such as Jesus' redemptive work on the cross or the significance of the Lord's supper.<sup>57</sup> This mindlessness and indifference is why Watts argued against singing only the Psalms and why he published "Christianized" psalms by paraphrasing them in his hymns.<sup>58</sup>

Songs sung during corporate worship equip believers to sing their meditations during personal devotions. Whitney encourages believers to give "tangible expression to your meditation," which can be done by singing the meditation.<sup>59</sup> Whitney stands on solid biblical ground since ancient Hebrews sang their meditations that were recorded in the Psalms.<sup>60</sup> A practical example of song as a form of personal biblical meditation is found in the devotional life of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards explains his experience of meditating on 1 Timothy 1:17: "I kept saying, and as it were singing over these words of Scripture to myself; and went to prayer, to pray to God that I might enjoy him; and prayed in a manner

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<sup>56</sup>Beynon, *Isaac Watts*, loc. 2127, Kindle.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, loc. 2080, Kindle.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, locs. 2103, 2118, 2126, Kindle.

<sup>59</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 62, Kindle.

<sup>60</sup>Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 19.

quite different from what I used to do; with a new sort of affection.”<sup>61</sup> Edwards habitually sang his meditations while walking alone in the woods conversing with God.<sup>62</sup>

What happens if the richness of personal biblical meditation, like Edwards experienced, is applied to a corporate worship setting? One way to introduce meditative praise into corporate worship is to sing the Psalms. Robert Godfrey concludes his book by calling churches to re-engage the Psalter during corporate worship.<sup>63</sup> Godfrey notes that singing the Psalms is a perfect balance between “the objective truth about God with subjective response to God” and that by singing God’s inspired words “we can be sure to please Him in their content and form.”<sup>64</sup> Corporately and meditatively singing Scripture could revitalize a congregation. Clowney predicts a dramatic transformation of corporate praise when churches understand the “meditative nature of their praise together,” calling for the recovery of corporate meditative praise, which Clowney claims will spark a renaissance of “fresh songs of praise” and “hymns of thanksgiving.”<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, corporate meditative praise can be found in the psalms as denoted by the word *Selah* found repeatedly throughout the book. Bob Kauflin speculates that the term *Selah* might mean a “musical interlude for meditation or reflection.”<sup>66</sup> From his inductive study, Charles Briggs believes that the term indicated a doxology or lifting up

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<sup>61</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 284, Kindle.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>63</sup>W. Robert Godfrey, *Learning to Love the Psalms* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2017), 256, Kindle.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>65</sup>Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 81.

<sup>66</sup>Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 102, Kindle.

of voices in praise.<sup>67</sup> Norman Snaith associates *Selah* to an ancient tradition, recorded in the Mishnah, where a trumpet blast interrupted a section of a psalm sung in the Second Temple.<sup>68</sup> The worshippers would prostrate themselves in prayer at the trumpet signal.<sup>69</sup> William Plumer notes that, whatever the specific meaning of the term, “it is designed to fix the minds of the godly on the matter,” effectively meditating on the text just sung.<sup>70</sup> So, the term *Selah* could have been a signal to the congregation to “pause, and calmly think of that” as annotated in the Amplified Bible (Ps 48:8). In other words, *Selah* could have meant to stop and meditate on God’s truth just sung.

Clowney has no doubt that song is “the most common form” of Christian group meditation.<sup>71</sup> The group meditation in song, as Clowney notes, “Can be immensely enriched” when coupled with time to reflect on Scriptures underlying the lyric.<sup>72</sup> Clowney envisions great benefits to all believers when Christian musicians transform Scriptures and meditations into musical song.<sup>73</sup>

This section presented historical and biblical evidence that singing fosters biblical meditation both in the believer’s personal worship and in corporate worship. Employing the intrinsic power of song to enable memory and express love for God places a responsibility upon worship leaders, in the corporate setting, and individual believers,

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<sup>67</sup>Charles A. Briggs, “An Inductive Study of Selah,” *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 18 (1899): 142.

<sup>68</sup>Norman Henry Snaith, “Selah,” *Vetus Testamentum* 2, no. 1 (January 1952): 43.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>William S. Plumer, *Psalms*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 21.

<sup>71</sup>Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 96.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 95.



in the personal setting, to employ, what Whitney calls, “biblically saturated songs.”<sup>74</sup> Singing both the Psalms and hymns, as well as spiritual songs, enables the human heart to embrace God through biblical meditation.

### **Christians in Many Generations Have Found It Necessary to Distinguish Biblical Meditation from Competing Alternatives**

In chapter 2, biblical meditation was defined as “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”<sup>75</sup> Addressing the second of three issues examined in this chapter, this section examines what distinguishes biblical understanding of meditation from some alternative understandings of meditation. These alternatives include meditation practiced in Catholicism, Quakerism, and several popular secular forms derived from Hinduism and Buddhism.

#### **Catholic Meditation versus Biblical Meditation**

The historical review of meditation in the last section noted the general direction of pre-Reformation meditation progression starting with self-cleansing (purgation) and ending with union with God (contemplation). Additionally, the second section noted the alterations by the Reformers to this progression, which grounded the journey in the believer’s union with Christ, brought by justification at conversion, and ending with their glorification in Heaven. This change in progression highlights a fundamental difference between Catholic meditation and biblical meditation. Scripture teaches believers to meditate on God’s Word, but Catholic practice is to meditate mostly on church tradition.

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<sup>74</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 105.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 46-47.

Luther, in his commentary on Psalm 1, rightly points out that some “jurists” meditate day and night on the law created by men, which he calls “various doctrines of men and traditions of the elders,” instead of meditating on the law of the Lord.<sup>76</sup> Luther rebukes those who “chatter day and night about natural things,” such as opinions of men, money, and church rank, and think themselves holy and prudent, but instead “they die in their ungodliness” because they do not meditate on God’s law.<sup>77</sup> Luther tied the object of meditation to the desire of the priests heart and personally struggled with kindling his heart toward God’s law, until he found the gospel of Jesus as a supernatural gift that kindles desire for God.<sup>78</sup>

The Catholic’s traditional concept of spiritually ascending a ladder toward God cannot be found in the New Testament or in the writings of the apostolic fathers.<sup>79</sup> Donald Bloesch contends that the apostles and early church writers “could not conceive the Christian life in terms of progress toward a goal because they believed that the goal had already been reached.”<sup>80</sup> In their minds, why would a progression toward God be needed when the consummation of the long-awaited eschatological event became present before them when their eyes see Jesus?<sup>81</sup> The apostles did not progress to union with Christ, they started with it, which is acquired by faith. In a similar way, Beeke notes that most Puritans repeatedly distanced themselves from bogus spiritualities, which led to contemplation

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<sup>76</sup>Martin Luther, *First Lectures on the Psalms, Psalms 1-75, Luther’s Works*, vol. 10, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974), loc. 444, Kindle.

<sup>77</sup>Luther, *Selected Psalms: III*, loc. 5166.

<sup>78</sup>Kleinig, “The Kindred Heart,” 145.

<sup>79</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2007), locs. 210-14, Kindle.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, locs. 210-14.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

without action or imaginative thought instead of biblical content.<sup>82</sup> However, choosing experience over Scripture befell even some Puritans, namely the Quakers.

### **Quaker Meditation versus Biblical Meditation**

Pennsylvania, the state of this project, was founded by a Quaker named William Penn, who granted safety to persecuted religious groups, such as the Mennonites and Amish, who permeate the culture surrounding this project.<sup>83</sup> The immanence of the Quaker influence upon the locale of this project and the prominence Quakers have with meditation necessitates an evaluation of Quaker meditation compared to the biblical review of meditation accomplished in chapter 2.

Like many denominations over the years, Quakers today have diverged in their beliefs and practices.<sup>84</sup> The image that commonly comes to mind is a church full of Quakers silently meditating, waiting for divine direction for the morning sermon.<sup>85</sup> Although this is still practiced, it is not universal in Quakerism as some meetings follow a preset order of worship similar to the order of service found in other evangelical denominations.<sup>86</sup> Despite this diversity, Carol Dale Spencer finds commonality: “The basis of all Quaker spirituality is a direct, unmediated experience of God.”<sup>87</sup>

This common belief places Quakerism in the same category with mysticism, which seeks revelation via direct, spiritual communication involving emotional evidence

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<sup>82</sup>Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 74.

<sup>83</sup>Michael Birkel, “Penn, William (1644–1718),” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 663.

<sup>84</sup>Carole Dale Spencer, “Quaker Spirituality,” in Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 704.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

and rejects Scripture as the source of God's Word.<sup>88</sup> Peter Adam cites the Quaker view of direct communication with God instead of through Scripture as one of the main differences between Puritans and Quakerism.<sup>89</sup> Spencer adds, "Quakers believed revelation was not closed nor confined to Scripture, but Scripture was the touchstone of truth and would confirm all direct, personal inspiration."<sup>90</sup> The Quakers believe the ultimate authority does not reside in Scripture, but instead emanates from an inner light that lives inside each individual.<sup>91</sup> Obviously, Scripture speaks of an indwelling Holy Spirit for believers, but also warns believers not to add to God's Word (1 Cor 3:16; Prov 30:5-6; Rev 22:18-19). The inner light doctrine of the Quakers does not align with Scripture.

Meditation focused on anything but Scripture is not biblical meditation. As shown in chapter 2, the Psalmist clearly meditates on God's law and discovers God's truth through His law (Pss 1:2; 119:97; 119:15-16). When Scripture and God, as revealed by His Word, is not the object of an individual's meditation, then those who meditate essentially create their own God. John Calvin notes, "God is only rightly served when his law is obeyed. It is not left to every man to frame a system of religion according to his own judgment, but the standard of godliness is to be taken from the Word of God."<sup>92</sup> Quaker meditation, stripped of scriptural authority, lies closer to eastern meditation than biblical meditation.

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<sup>88</sup>Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 195, 201.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>90</sup>Spencer, "Quaker Spirituality," 705.

<sup>91</sup>James E. Johnson, "Friends, Religious Society of," in Elwell and Treier, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 332.

<sup>92</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:4.

## **Meditation from Eastern Religions versus Biblical Meditation**

Typically, the term *meditation* invokes images of mantras, candles, sitting cross-legged, incense, and lights dimmed in most believers' minds. Magazines falsely depict meditation as only based on Hinduism and Buddhism, and rarely, if ever, portray it based on biblical principles.<sup>93</sup> However, Christian meditation has been influential since “the first days of the Church,” according to Elmer Towns.<sup>94</sup> Christians today simply do not take much time to ponder Christ.<sup>95</sup> As shown in chapter 1, it is altogether proper for believers to meditate on Scripture. Overcoming the prevalent perception about meditation and the believer's accompanying fear, by understanding the differences between non-biblical and biblical meditation, will go a long way to restoring the lost discipline of biblical meditation to the church.

In *Christian Meditation*, Clowney masterfully details the differences between meditation derived from eastern religions and meditation derived from Scripture. One of these differences is that of ultimate goal. The ultimate goal of eastern meditation, such as Transcendental Meditation, Hari Krishna's teachings, and Yoga, is to become a god, while the goal of biblical meditation is to know God.<sup>96</sup> Practitioners of eastern meditation teach the individual to neutralize the rational mind and to let the intuitive arise by focusing attention on an object for a long time or repeating a short, verbal phrase.<sup>97</sup> Quite the opposite, Christian meditation practitioners teach believers to maintain personal identity

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<sup>93</sup>Elmer L. Towns, *Biblical Meditation for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 21.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 9.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 38.

by focusing on the indwelt spiritual presence of Jesus Christ, who was previously invited to come into their lives by faith at conversion.<sup>98</sup>

The Christian meditative experience encounters a Wholly Other, which was initiated by the Other, who reaches down from Heaven to encounter His creation.<sup>99</sup> Contrast that encounter with the experience of the eastern meditative mystic who only attains an inward state of mind by his own initiation.<sup>100</sup> Christian meditation deepens a relationship with a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ by pondering truth of God in His presence, while eastern meditation offers no personal relationship to deepen.<sup>101</sup> Christian meditation moves believers outside of themselves, instead of becoming ingrown by self-examination.

A spirituality built on eastern religion is as false as the underlying religion and is not biblical meditation. The validity of the two forms of meditation is exclusively and directly tied to the authority of its source. When a person accepts Jesus' statement of exclusivity recorded in John 14:6, then he must then reject the gods created in Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>102</sup> Towns strongly states, "Their gods are not true and their desire to become one with God through meditation is wrongly based; it is false."<sup>103</sup> Since there is no god but Jesus, the conclusion must be that those seeking to become god are actually inviting demons into their lives. Since believers are instructed to "abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess 5:22), Eastern meditation, which is essentially worshipping other

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<sup>98</sup>Towns, *Biblical Meditation for Spiritual Breakthrough*, 273.

<sup>99</sup>Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 15.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 43, 46.

<sup>102</sup>Towns, *Biblical Meditation for Spiritual Breakthrough*, 271.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

gods, should be rejected and avoided outright, including any form of the Hindu practice of yoga, along with its derivative Transcendental Meditation.<sup>104</sup>

This section examined some alternatives to biblical meditation and highlighted some major differences between the two understandings of meditation. Biblical meditation is not a man-made method used to ascend and attain union with God, as some Catholics do, nor is it a way to replace Scripture with direct revelation from God, as some Quakers do, nor is it a way to completely bypass Scripture and the God of Scripture to unify with an idol, as all non-Christian meditators do. Perhaps Luther characterized biblical meditation best when he said, “We should adapt and adjust our minds and feelings so that they are in accord with the sense of the psalms.”<sup>105</sup> Adapting oneself to Scripture, to live in the truth, is the goal of biblical meditation.

### **Focused Meditation in a Distracted Society and Its Impact upon Current Worship Culture**

In chapter 2, biblical meditation is characterized as the believer’s continual, day and night, delight in God’s Word, not a chore guiltily fulfilled by a quick glimpse at a verse before rushing into the day. This section examines the negative impact of busyness and distraction upon the believer’s spiritual progress, followed by a proposed solution of intentional biblical meditation.

### **Distraction: The Enemy of Biblical Meditation**

Overly-busy believers, distracted from attending to their relationship with God, impede their spiritual growth and Christlikeness. Busyness can choke the spiritual life out of the believer. In the parable of the sower, Jesus speaks of “the worry of the world”

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<sup>104</sup>Ronald Enroth, “Transcendental Meditation,” in Elwell and Treier, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 893.

<sup>105</sup>Luther, *Selected Psalms: III*, loc. 5379, Kindle.

making God’s Word unfruitful (Matt 13:22). Kevin DeYoung agrees and sternly warns busyness puts “our souls at risk” and lets “our spiritual lives slip away.”<sup>106</sup> DeYoung pointedly calls for eradication of busyness: “Busyness is like sin: kill it, or it will be killing you.”<sup>107</sup>

New technology brings new capabilities and distractions. Smartphones are a perfect example of new capabilities birthing new distractions. David Murray attributes “digital technology,” including smartphones, as “one of the greatest impediments to a life spent in communion with God.”<sup>108</sup> In a recent survey of 8,000 readers of the *Desiring God* blog, 73 percent were more likely to read emails or social media before attending to any spiritual disciplines during their morning routines.<sup>109</sup> Murray notes a physical reaction, releasing good-feeling chemicals to the brain, from sounds the phone makes, “turning us into beep—and pingaholics.”<sup>110</sup> Additionally, some believers actually wear their busyness as a badge of honor, elevating their importance, in their own minds, above others just because they are busier.<sup>111</sup> Tony Reinke reasons that people actually want and desire to be distracted as a way to escape from reconciling with the reality of eternity.<sup>112</sup>

That insistence and desire for distraction, or amusement, carries over from

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<sup>106</sup>Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book about a (Really) Big Problem* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), loc. 242, Kindle.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, loc. 263.

<sup>108</sup>David P. Murray, *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), loc. 1375, Kindle.

<sup>109</sup>Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 6, Kindle.

<sup>110</sup>Murray, *Reset*, loc. 1349.

<sup>111</sup>DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*, loc. 121, Kindle.

<sup>112</sup>Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*, 46.



secular society into the worship services of many churches.<sup>113</sup> The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word *muse* as to “be absorbed in thought,” logically, the opposite term *amuse*, as in *amusement*, would then mean to not think.<sup>114</sup> In his social commentary first published in 1985, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Neil Postman argues that technology, television in Postman’s day, actually comes preconfigured to change society, reframing all areas of social life, including religious worship, as entertainment and “has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience.”<sup>115</sup> Postman’s assertions that society is predisposed to view all experiences as entertainment, applies to the worship services of many churches. For example, there is the story of one middle-aged, out-of-work, worship leader whose job application was rejected by a church because he was not entertaining enough. A. W. Tozer warns against the church becoming a Christian theater, where the audience gazes upon performers, instead of gazing at Christ deep in adoring worship.<sup>116</sup> How does one get believers, who are embedded in a society that values entertainment and distraction, to slow down long enough to meditate on Scripture?

### **Intentional Biblical Meditation**

One solution to the problem of distracted, impeded spiritual growth is intentional biblical meditation. Martin Luther notes that people “chatter” about many things during their day, but “they do not meditate on the Law of the Lord.”<sup>117</sup> Jim Wilhoit and Evan

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<sup>113</sup>A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship? A Call to True Worship*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 2006), loc. 1189, Kindle.

<sup>114</sup>Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., “Muse,” in *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>115</sup>Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 2006), locs. 1499, 2553, Kindle.

<sup>116</sup>Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?*, locs. 994, 1202.

<sup>117</sup>Luther, *Selected Psalms: III*, loc. 5166, Kindle.

Howard call this mind-chatter, which is the things people spend much of their time thinking about, “automatic” meditation.<sup>118</sup> For example, the one who worries is, in effect, meditating on doubt and on God’s perceived inability to provide.<sup>119</sup>

Automatic meditation occurs naturally, without much effort. No one intentionally sets aside time to worry; it happens naturally. Intentional meditation, on the other hand, takes effort and is purposeful and, with time and practice, changes automatic meditation into biblical meditation.<sup>120</sup> Practicing intentional biblical meditation takes effort to overcome busyness and distraction. Believers must intentionally turn off their phone, computer, and TV and intentionally focus on God’s Word in preparation for biblical meditation. Commenting on Psalm 1, John Calvin notes the impossibility of the believer meditating biblically “who has not first withdrawn and separated himself from the society of the ungodly.”<sup>121</sup> DeYoung agrees with Wilhoit and Howard by stressing intentional meditation at Jesus’ feet, either personally or corporately, must be a priority in the same way Mary intentionally chose “the good portion” while busy Martha chose the distraction of making Jesus’ lunch (Luke 10:48-42).<sup>122</sup> Keeping first things first should be the believer’s first priority.

However, the believer cannot muster his will to meditate biblically in his own strength. The believer’s desire to meditate biblically arises proportionally to his surrender to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. DeYoung concludes that priorities will only change when the believer acknowledges that “hearing from God is our good portion.”<sup>123</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>118</sup>Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, loc. 750, Kindle.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., loc. 744, Kindle.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., loc. 750, Kindle.

<sup>121</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:2.

<sup>122</sup>DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*, loc. 1265, Kindle.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., loc. 1292, Kindle.

experiencing God during biblical meditation causes re-prioritization; a turning away from distractions and choosing to spend time with God. Murray suggests communing with God by “link[ing] regular daily habits with prayer or meditation,” pondering a Bible verse while standing in line at the grocery store, or praying while stopped at a traffic light.<sup>124</sup>

Corporate worship is an excellent environment to practice biblical meditation. As Clowney notes, singing songs focused on God is “the most common form of Christian meditation together.”<sup>125</sup> Since biblical meditation during corporate worship already exists, it is easily expanded to include meditation during corporate prayer.<sup>126</sup> Meditating corporately during prayer and worship serves as a didactic demonstration of how to meditate biblically during personal devotions. Biblical meditation fits naturally with corporate worship since the focus is already, or should be, on God, and the Holy Spirit is already operating in the midst of the congregation, as promised in Matthew 18:20. Wilhoit and Howard note that Scripture assumes the believer both worships and meditates, but instead it concerns itself with the object of that worship and meditation.<sup>127</sup> Both worship and meditation focus on God for the purpose of becoming more like God. Perhaps Hustad said it best when he concluded, “The service of worship then is a rehearsal in becoming godly.”<sup>128</sup> The same could be said of biblical meditation.

This section has identified distractions, produced by busyness, as a deterrent to meditating biblically and an inhibitor of spiritual growth. Intentional biblical meditation overcomes these distractions to propel the believer toward Christlikeness. Demonstrating

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<sup>124</sup>Murray, *Reset*, loc. 2318.

<sup>125</sup>Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 96.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

<sup>127</sup>Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, loc. 740, Kindle.

<sup>128</sup>Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 118.

biblical meditation during corporate worship is one powerful way to teach believers how to meditate during their own personal time with God.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter validated the integrity and importance of biblical meditation historically, established the appropriateness of singing Psalms and hymns alongside practicing corporate biblical meditation, identified the only form of meditation acceptable to God as biblical meditation, and suggested ways to overcome society's pervasive distractions by intentionally meditating on Scripture, which can be demonstrated and explained during corporate worship.

Christians over the centuries have practiced biblical meditation to spur spiritual growth in Christlikeness, demonstrating that the practice is valid for modern believers to embrace without the fear of condoning alternate, unscriptural forms, such as the new age movement. Singing the Psalms, as well as hymns, enhances the practice of biblical meditation by "impress[ing] these words of mine on your heart and on your soul" via musical memory (Deut 11:18). Likewise, biblical meditation requires the believer to conform to God's words and to avoid the temptation of inventing religious practices aimed at conforming God to fit man's thinking, as done by many people enamored with alternative forms of meditation. Lastly, intentionally laying aside the distractions offered by their surrounding culture, believers grow to be like Christ when they surrender to God's Word during biblical meditation, which can be didactically demonstrated during corporate worship.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this chapter is to detail and describe the work undertaken to accomplish the five goals of this project at Refreshing River of God in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. The five goals support the purpose of this project, which was to deepen discipleship during corporate worship by focusing on specific marks of a disciple. The project began on April 1, 2018, and concluded on August 5, 2018. The details of this project implementation are grouped into four chronologically sequential phases; namely, the preparation phase, the teaching phase, the implementation phase, and the evaluation phase. The first three phases are discussed in this chapter and the last phase is detailed in chapter 5.

#### **Preparation (Weeks 1-6)**

The first phase of this project was a six-week period of preparation, which began on April 1, 2018, and ended on May 13, 2018. This phase included the tasks of creating, approving, and piloting the Marks of a Disciple Assessment (MDA), creating the curriculum for the meditation classes, and creating and approving a series of eight Scripture readings and meditative reflections used during corporate worship.

#### **Week 1**

During week 1, the initial MDA was created, invitations to the two-member expert panel were sent, and six believers that did not attend RROG were identified for the pilot test. Both Donald Whitney and Matthew Haste agreed to serve on the panel to oversee the creation and give approval to the MDA. Also, during week 1, six non-RROG believers agreed to participate in the pilot test of the MDA.

The MDA was designed to assess seven marks of a disciple derived from Richard Lovelace’s book *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. Lovelace identifies a list of beliefs and behaviors that characterize a Christian disciple according to Scripture and categorized these marks into three groups, which he labels as preconditions of renewal, primary elements of renewal, and secondary elements of renewal.<sup>1</sup> The MDA included a set of statements representing marks from all three of Lovelace’s categories. Seven of Lovelace’s marks were targeted, including the holiness of God, the depth of sin, justification, sanctification, evangelism, prayer, and community. Table 1 shows the number of statements pertaining to each mark and category. The seven marks selected fit best with the practical mindset of most congregants at RROG and were the most easily incorporated in the worship context. Also, the number of marks was limited to seven to keep the total number of statements on the MDA below twenty-five. The MDA was designed to be comprehensive enough to measure overall discipleship while limiting the number of statements to avoid overtaxing the congregation.

Table 1. Categories of the MDA statements

| Category     | Marks           | # of Questions |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Precondition | Holiness of God | 3              |
| Precondition | Depth of Sin    | 3              |
| Primary      | Justification   | 3              |
| Primary      | Sanctification  | 3              |
| Secondary    | Evangelism      | 4              |
| Secondary    | Prayer          | 4              |
| Secondary    | Community       | 4              |

The statements on the MDA measured both beliefs and behaviors. The statements in the precondition and primary categories focused more on the congregants’ beliefs than the statements associated with the secondary categories, which included more

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<sup>1</sup>Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979), 75.

statements measuring the congregants' behavior. The statements were based on Scripture and on Lovelace's view of each mark. Also, many congregants at RROG grew up in a works-based religious system, which views salvation largely based on one's behavior. Therefore, some of the statements on the MDA were crafted with this background in mind in order to measure the extent of these unbiblical beliefs.

#### **Week 2 through 4**

Weeks 2 through 4 were spent honing the statements on the MDA to introduce the proper amount of nuance to allow for more responses in the center of the six-response Likert scale. The six possible responses included strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), disagree somewhat (DS), agree somewhat (AS), agree (A) and, strongly agree (SA). There was a fair amount of revision to many statements to balance nuance with clarity. The goal was to keep the possibility of misinterpretation of the statements to a minimum, while at the same time providing the believer with enough subtlety where a more centered response was possible. For example, one of the original statements read, "Effective prayer does not require faith," with a desired response of strongly disagree. The panel identified any response to this question as too obvious for a typical Bible-believing Christian. A more nuanced question, based on Matthew 6:7-8, replaced the old question: "I believe my prayers are most effective when I pray the longest about a topic," with a desired response of strongly disagree.

Care was taken to phrase the statements in a way that the desired response was not always the same. For example, the desired response for question number 14, "Evangelism should be left primarily to pastors and others in vocational ministry," was strongly disagree. Each of the seven marks had a least one question where the desired response was strongly disagree. Varying the desired response was intended to cause the believer to pause and consider each question and prevented them from moving thoughtlessly through the survey.

## Week 5

During week 5, the panel approved the MDA, the pilot test of the MDA was prepared and distributed to six non-RROG participants, and work began on creating the curriculum for the four-week meditation class. The MDA was approved on May 1, 2018, after several rounds of discussion and revisions to reach its final twenty-four-question form.<sup>2</sup>

To prepare the MDA to administer to the pilot group and the RROG congregation, the statements of the MDA were sorted in random order to reduce the chance that two statements pertaining to the same mark were in sequential order. The pilot test participants consisted of mature believers who attended various other, non-RROG churches in the local area. The participants held similar common cultural and religious backgrounds to many members of RROG. The testers' maturity and similarity were helpful because the pilot testing could be trusted to identify any misunderstanding of any question.

In addition to creating the pilot test in week 5, work began on creating a biblical meditation class, which was given to the congregation at RROG. Obviously, practicing biblical meditation during corporate worship required congregants to understand the basics of biblical meditation. The class entailed four classes taught on biblical meditation during four consecutive Sunday morning services.<sup>3</sup> The content of the first class focused on the definition, Christian distinction, history, and biblical practice of meditation. Emphasis was put on the appropriateness of Christians practicing meditation biblically. This emphasis was stressed by reviewing biblical examples of meditating on God's law and his deeds, including the Psalmic meditative practice of "remember," "meditate," and "muse" or praise, as discussed in chapter 2.

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup>See appendix 4.



The content of biblical meditation class 2 through 4 focused on two specific methods of biblical meditation per class, based on Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. The course design included time to review the prior week's lesson, describe each method, and practice each method for at least ten minutes. The practice time was expected to be accompanied by soft piano music to allow the congregation to practice meditating in an environment as close to a real corporate meditative event as possible. Additionally, the passages selected for these practice sessions correspond with passages selected in the meditation and reflection handouts that the congregation would encounter during the meditation phase later in the project. Lastly, two short answer questions were designed to measure the congregation's basic understanding of biblical meditation and was administered after the last class.<sup>4</sup>

## **Week 6**

As detailed, the curriculum for the biblical meditation classes was completed during week 6. In addition, the six pilot MDAs were returned during this week and the writing of the eight meditation and reflection handouts began. When reviewed, the responses to the pilot MDA were compared to the desired responses and noted when a pilot response went in an opposite direction from the desired response. Any question that had two or more responses in the opposite direction from the desired responses was flagged for further investigation.

For example, question 13 on the pilot MDA read, "The Holy Spirit is solely responsible when I share the gospel." The desired response was strongly agree. However, two out of six respondents to question 13 disagreed, which is in the opposite direction from the desired response. Interviews were held with select members of the pilot test group to determine the cause of their response. The purpose of the interview was to

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<sup>4</sup>See appendix 3.

distinguish if the respondent misunderstood the question or if they simply held contrary beliefs.

Based on these interviews and a closer review of the statements, slight changes were made to statements 13 and 6, but statements 19 and 22 remained the same. The word “always” was removed from question 6, changing the question from “When I sin, even in a small way, I am always quick to ask Jesus to forgive me” to “When I sin, even in a small way, I am quick to ask Jesus to forgive me.” This change placed the focus of the question on asking forgiveness for small sins, instead of focusing on how quick one is in asking forgiveness. Additionally, the word “verbally” was added to question 13, changing it from “the Holy Spirit is solely responsible for the results when I share the gospel,” to “The Holy Spirit is solely responsible for the results when I verbally share the gospel.” In the minds of two testers, this subtle addition clarified a distinction between witnessing nonverbally, where the results are based on behaviors, and witnessing verbally, where the results are based on the Holy Spirit. Pilot testing the MDA proved helpful in viewing each question from many more angles.

During week 6, the meditation and reflection handouts were started.<sup>5</sup> The handouts were designed to extend the congregants’ meditations beyond the Sunday morning service, continuing their meditations at home. Each week focused attention on one of the seven marks of a disciple by meditating on a pertinent Scripture verse. The Scripture verse printed on each handout corresponded with the verse projected on the wall and used for meditation during corporate worship. The responses from the pilot tests drove the focus of each week’s reflective meditation, which drove the selection of the pertinent Scripture verse. If the responses from the pilot test indicated that help was needed in understanding a certain area of the mark, then a verse would be selected that addressed the misunderstanding of that area.

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<sup>5</sup>See appendix 5.

For example, statements 1, 2, and 3 on the MDA probe various aspects about the holiness of God, namely its connection with God's justice and the believer's union and equality with God. If, for example, the scores from the pilot MDA showed that the respondents struggled to understand inequality with God, then a Scripture verse was selected to address this misunderstanding and the meditation and reflection handout commented on the biblical reason humans are unequal with God.

This same strategy was also employed after the initial MDA was taken by attendees of RROG's Sunday morning worship service. The misunderstandings found in the initial MDA informed the focus of each week's meditative time during the corporate worship and required a tweak to week 1's meditation and reflection handout.

In week 7, the eight meditation and reflection handouts were completed. They were emailed to a two-person panel for approval, consisting of the current senior pastor of RROG and a retired former pastor of another church. The panel members were chosen for their insight and familiarity with the congregation at RROG. The panel approved the eight handouts in week 8 with a 95 percent rating using the rubric in appendix 2 as the evaluation criterion.

### **Teaching (Weeks 7-10)**

Weeks 7 through 10, starting on May 13, 2018, and ending on June 3, 2018, constitutes the teaching phase of the project and supported the overall project by equipping the congregants at RROG with the ability to meditate biblically. The tasks accomplished during this phase were teaching RROG attenders about biblical meditation, finishing and approving the meditation and reflection handouts, and administering a quiz during the final class.

#### **Week 7**

As described above, the first week of teaching biblical meditation focused on answering questions about the nature of biblical meditation, such as, what does the Bible

say about meditation, and how do believers practice biblical meditation? The two definitions presented were from Whitney: “Deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”<sup>6</sup> Whitney notes that biblical meditation can either start with biblical text applied to life or with a life situation brought to Scripture. This bi-directional feature was emphasized. For a second opinion, J. I. Packer’s definition of biblical meditation was discussed.<sup>7</sup> Whitney’s definition, however, was primary and was reviewed at the beginning of all four meditation classes.

Biblical meditation is almost completely opposite of non-biblical meditation as discussed in chapter 3 of the project. Table 2 was presented to distinguish the two forms of meditation.

Table 2. Biblical meditation versus alternatives

| Biblical Meditation            | Alternatives               |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Fill mind with God’s Word      | Empty the mind             |
| Personality maintained         | Lose identity              |
| Know God                       | Become a god               |
| Desire to live life biblically | Live only for self         |
| Based on God’s instructions    | Based on church traditions |
| Embrace Scripture              | Circumvent Scripture       |

A short biblical review of meditation followed, including scriptural teaching about continually meditating “day and night,” meditation as an audible muttering, and meditation as repeatedly pondering God’s words (Ps 1:1-3). Psalms 48:9 and 104:33-34 support the idea of meditating on God during corporate worship and singing praise parallels biblical meditation. As detailed in chapter 2, Psalms 77:11–12 and 143:5 form the Psalmic meditative pattern, Joshua 1:8 teaches that the purpose of biblical meditation

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<sup>6</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. and updated ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 46-47, Kindle.

<sup>7</sup>J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 22, Kindle.

is to obey God, and Philippians 4:8 teaches believers to meditate on God's nature because He is worthy.

After reviewing biblical evidence of Christian meditation, the class examined the historical use of biblical meditation in the believer's life. The historical review started with the desert fathers, noting how the monks verbally repeated Scripture verses until the truth in the verse was understood. Next the review noted how Luther and Calvin reformed the faulty Catholic meditative practices by re-orienting the starting point of a believer's meditation to the gospel of Christ rooted in their union with Christ. Following this discussion, the historical review touched on Puritan biblical meditation and Thomas Manton's focus on the impact of meditation on the believer's heart and not the mind.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the review noted John Flavel's strong statement that neglecting biblical meditation dishonors and robs God.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, the class discovered the biblical support for intermingling worship and biblical meditation. The class learned that Hebrew corporate worship included *Selah* moments, which were noted in the Psalter, their hymnal. At the end of the class, the concluding statement stressed that meditating on God's Word when in His presence during corporate worship propels the believer toward Jesus' likeness.

### **Weeks 8 to 10**

The last three weeks of the biblical meditation class, classes 2 through 4, were spent rehearsing six methods of biblical meditation.<sup>10</sup> These classes were a practical step in preparation for meditating biblically during the singing portion of corporate worship.

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 6:138.

<sup>9</sup>John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence* (Zeeland, MI: Reformed Church, 2010), locs. 1282, 1292, Kindle.

<sup>10</sup>The six methods of biblical meditation taught in class are were (1) emphasize different words in the text, (2) imagine an illustration or picture in your mind that explains the text, (3) create an artistic expression of the text, (4) pray through the text, (5) think about how the text points to the law or the gospel, and (6) ask Philippians 4:8 questions of the text.

Each meditative method was first taught for about fifteen minutes and then practiced for about ten minutes. Two meditative methods were taught each week.

The second class focused on practicing biblical meditation by emphasizing different words in the text and by imagining an illustration or picture in one's mind that explains the text. For example, meditating on Revelation 22:13 by emphasizing each word would result in repeating the verse 5 times with this emphasis:

1. *I* am Alpha and Omega
2. I *am* Alpha and Omega
3. I am *Alpha* and Omega
4. I am Alpha *and* Omega
5. I am Alpha and *Omega*

The third class was designed to meditate by creating an artistic expression of the text and by praying through the text. An artistic expression could be a drawing, painting, poem, or some other artistic expression. Whitney's *Praying the Bible* provided the content for teaching the congregation how to practice praying the Bible during biblical meditation.

The two meditation methods selected for the last class were meditating by thinking about how the text points to the law or the gospel and by asking Philippians 4:8 questions of the text. For example, when meditating using the Philippians 4:8 method, the believer ponders the verse to search for whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and worthy of praise.

These six meditative methods were selected with their practical usefulness during corporate worship in mind. A short quiz was given after the last class to assess the congregation's grasp of these meditative methods. There were ten to eleven regular adult attenders in each of the four classes.

### **Implementation (Weeks 11-21)**

The meditation phase of this project began on June 10, 2018 with the administration of the initial MDA, and was completed on August 5, 2018, with the final administration of the MDA. The last week, week 21, was spent analyzing the results, which are detailed in chapter 5. The initial project timeline placed the administration of the final MDA on August 12, 2018, a week after the last corporate meditation; however, an adjustment was needed because the building used by RROG was closed on August 12 and August 19. All surveys were completed on August 5, except for two absentee surveys, which were returned after August 5 from congregants who were not at the August 5 service.

As stated, eight meditation and reflection handouts were created to specifically address shortcomings in the congregation's understanding of one of the seven marks of a disciple. Each Sunday the applicable handout was given to each congregant at the beginning of the corporate worship service. At a prescribed point during the series of songs in the corporate worship service, I prayed and led the congregation through a time of meditation on the verse printed at the top of the handout. In addition, the verse was projected on the wall for easy reference. The congregation spent approximately ten minutes pondering the pertinent verse each Sunday, which ended when we moved on to the next song.

One Sunday, July 8, brought some distraction as a medical helicopter landed just outside of the fire hall. Prior to the start of service, a fireman entered and requested all the cars be moved from the parking lot as the lot would be needed to land a helicopter. The whole service was focused on prayer for the person being transported via the helicopter. I tried to focus the congregation's attention on the pertinent verse, but it was difficult as many were already deep in concern and prayer for the patient. I am not sure how much pondering on sanctification occurred during this Sunday.

At the end of each service, I encouraged the congregation to take the handout home and continue meditating on the applicable verse and mark. Several people

commented on their interaction with the handouts while meditating at home, and some congregants even requested the handouts for the weeks they missed the service. From these comments, it appears the handouts were read and pondered to some extent. However, it is naïve to think that every RROG member meditated at home as requested.

Each week I spent time meditating on the selected verse, especially how the verse taught believers to be more Christ-like. I wanted to be thoroughly saturated with the truth in the selected verse and the mark it supported that my prayer and encouragement given during corporate worship would flow from a heart filled with God's Word. The prayer and encouragement given must not appear rote but must be natural and full of love and grace for the congregation. I wanted this project to teach me something about leading others in worship, especially in heart preparation. Meditating on God's Word made me more prepared to help others enjoy the truth of God.

The initial MDA was administered during the Sunday service at RROG on June 10, 2018, to nineteen people. Guest ministers attended RROG during the initial administration of the MDA and several visitors took the MDA alongside regular attenders. Of the nineteen participants who took the initial MDA, only eleven were paired to the final MDA administered at the end of the project. Plenty of time was given to take the initial MDA despite the presence of the guest ministers. There was no pressure or distraction present when the congregation took the initial MDA.

The final MDA was given on August 5. Due to the scheduled shutdown of RROG's facilities for the following two Sundays, the MDA was administered during the same service as the last meditation. Therefore, the congregation did not have time to meditate at home on the last mark. A notable minister was present at this service and the senior pastor wanted to make more time for the guest minister by requesting that the congregation begin the survey during the five-minute break and finish during the lunch that followed the morning service. This caused some distraction while the congregation was completing the MDA and may have caused some congregants to rush through it.



## **Conclusion**

This chapter detailed the research methodology used in a thorough attempt to accomplish the project's five goals. The preparation phase produced all the materials needed for this project, including the MDA, meditation class curriculum, a plan for meditations, and handouts to aid the congregation in continuing the meditative process at home. Care was taken to coordinate the needs of the congregation with the focus of the meditations.

The teaching phase gave the congregation tools to meditate biblically and effectively. The curriculum began by teaching about biblical meditation and ended by teaching about how to meditate biblically. The bulk of class time was spent practicing biblical meditation. This phase prepared the congregation to meditate according to biblical standards during corporate worship on Sunday mornings.

During the implementation phase of this project, the congregation's focus was directed to specific verses that taught them how to be more Christ-like. The specific verses used during times of directed meditation were selected to address specific needs of the congregation as determined by the responses and interviews of the pilot testers and the responses from the initial MDA. Also, the meditation and reflection handouts reflected the same results of the analysis of the pilot tester responses and the initial MDA responses.

In summary, the meditation classes equipped the congregation for the project's implementation, which focused the congregation on Scriptures and meditations tied to the results of the MDA pilot testing and the responses of the initial MDA to deepen discipleship in the lives of people attending Refreshing River of God services.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This concluding chapter evaluates several aspects of the project, which transpired at Refreshing River of God between April 1, 2018, and August 5, 2018. The following evaluation of this project includes an assessment of the accomplishment of the project's purpose and an appraisal of its goals. This assessment is followed by an examination of the project's strengths and weaknesses with recommended improvements of the project when repeated. Lastly, this chapter offers some theological and personal reflections to complete a thorough evaluation.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to increase the marks of a disciple in worshippers at Refreshing River of God in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, by employing the spiritual disciplines of biblical meditation, God-centered silence, and Scripture reading during corporate worship.

Three underlying premises support the purpose and rationale of this project. The first premise was to align the worship ministry at RROG with the congregation's and leadership's overall direction to focus more on Scripture. A second premise foundational to this project was the concept that focusing on God's Word stimulates worshippers to understand and know more about God, which, in turn, increases worshippers' adoration of God, which then impacts their desire to change their attitudes and behaviors to be more Christlike. In other words, focusing on God's Word causes worshipper's beliefs and behaviors to become more like Jesus. A third premise of the project's purpose was that the God-focused environment of corporate worship is most conducive to meditating on Scripture, which increases the effectiveness of implanting Scripture in the congregations'

heart. This premise is based on the idea that corporate worship, a congregation in God's presence, can be spiritually formative (Heb 2:12) and uniquely suited for pondering God's Word. Psalm 48:9 validates this premise by recording the ancient Hebrews' practice of meditating on Yahweh's love in His presence during their temple worship.

The desired result of this project was not to simply begin in the direction of formative worship only to return to "normal" after the project is complete, but rather to use this project as an impetus toward incorporating various spiritual disciplines into corporate worship. Of course, combining various spiritual disciplines with corporate worship may be implemented differently in varying church contexts, but the goal should be to do so as fluidly and non-disruptively as possible in each church that undertakes this process. Corporate worship by itself is spiritually formative, but potentially increases in effectiveness when combined with other spiritual disciplines, such as meditation, silence, or public Scripture reading. The hope of this project, then, was to begin a process at RROG that would result in increased Christlikeness within the congregation as the technique is continued beyond the project. According to that benchmark, the purpose of this project was achieved, although in a limited way.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

Five goals supported the overall objective of this project. Goals 1 through 4 were successfully achieved. The fifth goal was not achieved. What follows is an evaluation of each goal with an explanation of the factors contributing to its outcome.

#### **Goal 1**

The first goal of this project was to create a research instrument to measure the marks of a disciple. Since no instrument existed that measured discipleship utilizing Richard Lovelace's categories, I created one specific to his categories and specifically tailored to the current church context. The Marks of a Disciple Assessment (MDA) is the

result of the effort to complete this goal and was based on a six-point Likert scale.<sup>1</sup> As detailed in chapter 4, the MDA was designed to assess both beliefs and behaviors of the respondents on a fairly broad spectrum of topics. A two-member expert panel reviewed, recommended alterations, and eventually approved the MDA. The panel supplied the needed credibility to the instrument. Statement wording was scrutinized to strike a balance between clarity and enough vagueness to stimulate thought. The MDA was then tested by six non-RROG believers, which brought further insight into the phrasing of the statements on the MDA. In the creation phase and testing phase much care was taken to successfully construct an instrument that was clear and valid in measuring the selected marks of a disciple. This goal was successfully accomplished on May 1, 2018, when the expert panel approved the MDA.

## **Goal 2**

The second goal of this project was to assess the current marks of a disciple in RROG's adult members. The MDA was administered on June 10, 2018, to nineteen adults attending the Sunday morning service.

One potential concern of this project was that the scores of the initial MDA would be too high to allow for any discipleship growth. However, this concern never materialized. The results of the initial MDA allowed for the potential of a significant statistical difference between the initial and the final MDA.

This evaluation compared the highest score possible, which was 144, with the scores of the initial MDA of the eleven participants that were later paired with the final MDA. The initial scores of the unpaired MDAs were ignored, since the participants did not regularly attend RROG or did not wish to participate in this project after the initial MDA was administered. Scoring was done by assigning a value to each point of the six-point Likert scale. Values were assigned to questions that had a desired response of

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<sup>1</sup>See appendix 1.

strongly-disagree (SD) in the opposite direction than the questions that had the desired responses of strongly-agree. Table 3 details the valuation method employed for each question on the MDA.

Table 3. Valuation method

| Question | Desired Response | Valuation         |
|----------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1        | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 2        | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |
| 3        | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 4        | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 5        | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |
| 6        | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 7        | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 8        | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |
| 9        | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 10       | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 11       | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |
| 12       | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |
| 13       | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 14       | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |
| 15       | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 16       | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 17       | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 18       | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 19       | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |
| 20       | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |
| 21       | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 22       | SA               | SD = 1 ... SA = 6 |
| 23       | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |
| 24       | SD               | SA = 1 ... SD = 6 |

If each participant responded perfectly on the final MDA, then the significant statistical difference would be  $t_{(10)} = 5.69, p = .0001$ . Although it was improbable that all eleven participants would score a perfect 144 on the final MDA, this evaluation of the initial MDA scores shows that there was room for improvement and that the participants are not perfect disciples.

The evaluation of the results of the initial MDA continued by looking for the categories and questions that had the greatest potential for improvement. Table 4 details the potential improvement when comparing the initial MDA scores with perfect scores that may be reported on the final MDA. The category with the greatest potential for improvement for these eleven participants was evangelism, followed closely by community. These participants seemed to understand the depth of their sin, as this category showed the least potential for improvement. An evaluation of the questions shows questions 8 (justification), 19 (prayer), and 21 (community) showed the greatest potential for improvement and question 18 (prayer) showed the least potential for improvement.

Table 4. Potential improvement by category

| Category        | Potential Improvement Score<br>(higher value = greater potential improvement) |
|-----------------|---|
| Evangelism      | 54  |
| Community       | 53  |
| Prayer          | 42  |
| Justification   | 40  |
| Holiness of God | 36  |
| Sanctification  | 36  |
| Depth of Sin    | 24  |

This evaluation of the initial MDA responses shows that there was potential to achieve goal 5 successfully and pointed out the areas of discipleship that needed the most improvement. Goal 2 was successfully accomplished when the nineteen adult members completed the MDA on June 10, 2018.

### **Goal 3**

Goal 3 was to develop eight handouts discussing the selected verses that enabled participants to meditate on the mark of a disciple at home. The handouts enabled the congregants of RROG to continue meditating on Scriptures specifically selected to address the biggest need based on an analysis of both the pilot test results and initial MDA

responses. In other words, meditating on the Scripture and corresponding reflections presented in these handouts directed the congregant to the desired response in the final MDA. One handout was given to each congregant attending the Sunday service at RROG prior to the beginning of the service. Having the handout allowed the congregants to prepare for the corporate meditation to come during the service. In addition, several congregants requested copies of the meditation and reflection handouts for prior services they missed. At the end of most services, a reminder was given to the congregation to take the handouts home and to spend time pondering their contents. It is not known how many people actually meditated at home.

A two-person panel reviewed the eight handouts for their biblical faithfulness and relevance to RROG's ministry. This goal was successfully achieved when the two-person panel approved the reflection and meditation handouts with a score greater than 90 percent using the rubric in appendix 2 as the evaluation criteria.

#### **Goal 4**

Goal 4 was to train the congregation at RROG to meditate biblically in preparation for subsequent times of corporate meditation during Sunday morning services. To complete this goal, a series of four short training sessions on the practice of biblical meditation was conducted.<sup>2</sup> By individual comments, the congregation embraced this teaching and looked forward to the meditation time to come. The first of the four sessions focused on information about biblical meditation, as detailed in chapter 4. The congregation practiced several methods of biblical meditation during the remaining three sessions.

The congregation received information and practice on biblical meditation that gave them a foundation for meditating biblically during future services. A quiz was administered, consisting of two open-ended questions, on June 3, 2018, at the close of the

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix 4.

last session, to evaluate the congregation's understanding of basic biblical meditation. The respondents agreed that biblical meditation is simply thinking about God's Word deeply. Most respondents' preferred method of biblical meditation was to visualize a picture that explains the text. A few preferred the method of repeating the biblical phrase while emphasizing a different word with each iteration.

There was no accurate means to determine if the people who took the quiz were the same people who took the MDA. The respondents identified themselves on the quiz with their names, but only with an anonymous unique ID on the MDA.. It is impossible to determine the amount of impact that the biblical meditation class had on the responses on the MDA. However, informal observation indicates that the majority of those who took the quiz also attended at least one of the Sunday services where the MDA was administered. Despite the inability of measuring the class's impact on the outcome of the last goal, this goal was successfully accomplished on June 3, 2018, when eleven adults completed a short quiz indicating a basic understanding of at least one method of biblical meditation and a basic definition of biblical meditation.<sup>3</sup>

## **Goal 5**

Goal 5 was to increase the marks of a disciple by guiding the congregation in biblical meditation on select Scriptures during RROG's worship services. This goal was measured by comparing responses from the initial and the final MDA. The initial MDA was administered on June 10, 2018, and the final MDA was administered on August 5, 2018.

This goal was not successfully accomplished because a one-tailed, paired *t*-test for dependent samples ( $t_{(10)} = 0.31, p = .3828$ ) failed to demonstrate a positive statistically significant difference in the marks of a disciple measured by the results of the initial and final MDAs. One possible factor in this unsuccessful goal is inconsistent attendance. The

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<sup>3</sup>See appendix 3.



results of the paired MDA responses indicate an overall decrease of six points in the marks of a disciple. As shown in table 5, three participants, Auke10, Fraz01, and Hels03, showed a strong 27-point decrease, which overwhelmed the combined 21-point increase posted by the remaining eight respondents. Excluding the results from Auke10, Fraz01, and Hels03 would demonstrate a statistical difference ( $t(7) = 3.72, p = .0037$ ) from the remaining eight participants and would cause this goal to have been successfully accomplished.

Table 5. Results of the paired MDA responses

| IDs         | Initial MDA | Final MDA | Difference |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Auke10      | 113         | 101       | -12        |
| Balt26      | 130         | 136       | 6          |
| Beil14      | 115         | 115       | 0          |
| Esh28       | 96          | 98        | 2          |
| Fraz01      | 112         | 102       | -10        |
| Hels03      | 120         | 115       | -5         |
| Iffe25      | 134         | 135       | 1          |
| Kauf04      | 129         | 130       | 1          |
| Lutz25      | 110         | 114       | 4          |
| Smit20      | 124         | 127       | 3          |
| Smit81      | 116         | 120       | 4          |
| Grand Total | 1299        | 1293      | -6         |

Due to anonymity, it is impossible to know if Auke10, Fraz01, or Hels03 attended RROG services consistently between June 17, 2018, and August 5, 2018. However, a record of attendees during this period of corporate meditation shows that five congregants attended RROG during this period only 50 percent or fewer of the services. These five congregants may or may not be one of these three participants with decreased scores.

Inconsistent attendance would mean the participants did not meditate in the service or at home, which means they did not receive the opportunity to increase the specific marks of a disciple featured on the Sundays of absence. The scores for Auke10 decreased by 12 points, with a 4-point drop from questions in the sanctification category

and a 5-point drop from questions in the community category. Fraz01 had a total reduction of 10 points and followed a similar pattern as Auke10 with reduced scores in the sanctification category of 5 points and 3 points in the community category. The reduction in scores for the combined categories of sanctification and community accounted for 75 percent (9 of 12 points) reduction in Auke10's scores and a reduction of 80 percent (8 of 10) in Fraz01's scores. Interestingly, the reduction in scores for both Auke10 and Fraz01 may correspond to a husband and wife couple who missed both Sundays where sanctification and community were the focus. Likewise, 4 of the 5-point drop in Hels03's scores can be attributed to the categories of the holiness of God and prayer. Two worshippers missed both Sundays where these two categories were pondered. This correlation seems plausible, if not provable.

Although inconclusive, inconsistent attendance could explain some of the reasons for not increasing the scores. However, there may be additional factors that influenced the dramatic decrease in scores for Auke10, Fraz01, and Hels03. As mentioned, the environment was not very conducive for taking the final MDA on the Sunday morning service of August 5, 2018, at RROG. A missionary was speaking at RROG that morning and the senior pastor at RROG spontaneously, but politely, turned the service over to the missionary after only ten minutes after beginning the final MDA. The pastor suggested the survey be completed during lunch after the service, which inadvertently deemphasized the importance of the survey. This could have caused some participants to feel rushed or unfocused when completing the MDA after the service.

In addition, three participants were not present at RROG on August 5, 2018, and mailed their final MDA. These three participants were traveling; one participant was out of the country, and two were on vacation in the mountains. The absences may have distracted these participants while taking the final MDA.

Another area to examine when looking for reasons that this goal was unsuccessful is the possibility of misunderstood questions on the MDA. As shown in

table 6, which shows the results by question number, the responses to question 19 dropped by 7 points, which is the largest drop of all the questions. Question 19, “Most of my prayer time is spent asking God for help” had a desired response of strongly-disagree and measures a participant’s behavior instead of their beliefs. Questions that measure behavior instead of belief can fluctuate based on the participants’ current life experience. For example, a participant may be in a crisis in his life and truthfully spend most of his prayer time asking God for help and, thus, respond to question 19 as strongly-agree. However, after the crisis is over, that same participant may not be asking God for help during their prayer time and respond accordingly. A better approach to statement 19 would be to test the participant’s belief about what should occur during prayer. For example, rephrasing the statement as “Most of my prayer time should be spent asking God for help” may have removed this anomaly.

Table 6. Difference in MDA scores by question number

| Question | Initial | Final | Difference |
|----------|---------|-------|------------|
| 1        | 62      | 62    | 0          |
| 2        | 50      | 50    | 0          |
| 3        | 50      | 47    | -3         |
| 4        | 60      | 61    | 1          |
| 5        | 57      | 60    | 3          |
| 6        | 57      | 56    | -1         |
| 7        | 57      | 60    | 3          |
| 8        | 43      | 46    | 3          |
| 9        | 58      | 56    | -2         |
| 10       | 48      | 47    | -1         |
| 11       | 53      | 50    | -3         |
| 12       | 61      | 59    | -2         |
| 13       | 51      | 51    | 0          |
| 14       | 58      | 57    | -1         |
| 15       | 51      | 54    | 3          |
| 16       | 50      | 50    | 0          |
| 17       | 59      | 64    | 5          |
| 18       | 64      | 63    | -1         |
| 19       | 43      | 36    | -7         |
| 20       | 56      | 57    | 1          |
| 21       | 42      | 42    | 0          |
| 22       | 48      | 48    | 0          |
| 23       | 60      | 60    | 0          |
| 24       | 61      | 57    | -4         |

In hindsight, some additional statements on the MDA could have been misunderstood by participants. For example, many participants selected strongly-disagree instead of the desired strongly-agree for statement 3, “Christians are united with Christ, but never equal with Him.” A misinterpretation could occur for some participants who think either we are actually equal with Christ, or we are not united with Christ. Or the participants may not understand what is meant by the term *equal*. *Equal* could be interpreted as identical to Christ or simply similar to Christ. In any case, this statement could have been misunderstood.

Table 7 shows the difference in scores between the initial MDA and the final MDA grouped by category. Sanctification dropped by 6 points, which is the largest point decrease of all the categories. One reason that this category had the largest point drop could be the medical emergency that caused a medical helicopter to land just outside the church windows on July 8, 2018. Sanctification was the mark of a disciple for this Sunday. The congregation focused their prayers toward the patient being transferred and was very distracted. I doubt much meditation on sanctification occurred that day.

Table 7. Difference in MDA scores by category

| Category        | Difference |
|-----------------|------------|
| Justification   | 4          |
| Depth of Sin    | 3          |
| Evangelism      | 2          |
| Prayer          | -2         |
| Holiness of God | -3         |
| Community       | -4         |
| Sanctification  | -6         |

additionally, the scores for community dropped 4 points. Community was the focus of the last Sunday of the project. Because RROG was closed the following two Sundays, the final MDA needed to be administrated on the same Sunday that the congregation pondered the mark of community. This meant that there was no opportunity

for the congregation to meditate on community during the week. Thus, questions concerning the mark of community potentially did not receive the same attention as the other categories and could be part of the reason that the scores did not rise.

### **Strengths of the Project**

One of the most significant strengths of this project was the impact it had on the participants. The project kindled a desire in the participants to meditate on God's Word. This increased desire is evidenced in various comments several participants made over the course of the project, which expressed gratitude and enthusiasm for learning how to meditate biblically and anticipated further growth in their discipleship. Specifically, multiple participants expressed delight in the meditation and reflection handouts. A few even sought to get prior handouts for missed Sundays. The senior pastor was most supportive and expressed his gratitude for this project and for the guided meditation, which he began to practice more fully at home. Several worshippers noted that they were able to sense God's presence better and several others felt they were better prepared to receive God's Word during the sermon. One worshipper commented that meditating with others was better than meditating alone.

A second strength of this project was the identification of areas of Christian beliefs that need further explanation. Table 4 shows that this congregation needs further teaching on evangelism and biblical community but understands their depth of sin fairly well. Even though finding gaps in the congregation's beliefs was not a goal of this project, the information is valuable in directing the content of future teaching from the pastoral staff.

The third strength of this project is the impact it had on me. First, the project germinated personal thoughts about how corporate worship could be viewed as a corporate spiritual discipline. The term *formative worship* may be helpful in describing the disciple-making element of corporate worship. *Formative worship* focuses the attention of the congregation on Christ more intentionally with the aim of changing belief, which leads to

an eventual change in behavior. Formative worship is becoming more Christlike by pondering God's Word in corporate worship setting.

This project also caused me to realize a need to increase spiritual preparation by personal biblical meditation. The goal of this kind of spiritual preparation is to fill up with God's Word by meditating biblically so that comments made while leading worship will spill out from a deep, personal understanding of his Word. This kind of preparation is not memorization for the purpose of spitting it out verbatim, but rather a biblical intake that soaks to the heart that when squeezed will pour out God's words, soaking that comes from much biblical meditation.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

Despite the strengths of this project, there are several weaknesses. First, there was a disconnect between the theological language used in the MDA and the daily language of many participants. Education is not valued in RROG's surrounding culture and many times it is framed as counter-intuitive to faith. In fact, among the Amish and Mennonite culture, which is the background of some at RROG, a sixth-grade education is acceptable. The educational level of many participants is below the high school senior level.

The MDA used terms that the congregation may not have been familiar with, which may have caused uncertainty of what a question meant. For example, question 3 used the theological phrase "united with Christ," which for many was the first time they had heard of the phrase. Better care should have been given to adapt the language of the survey to the local context.

Second, this project attempted to inspire and measure changes in both beliefs and behaviors over a broad spectrum of Christian life in a short amount of time.<sup>4</sup> Eight

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<sup>4</sup>Questions 6, 15, 16, 17, and 24, over 20 percent of the questions on the MDA, measured behaviors.

weeks is a short time for a participant to gain enough understanding to change first beliefs and then to transfer those new beliefs into new behaviors. The possibility of success would have increased if the eight weeks had been focused on one or two categories, such as the holiness of God and the depth of one's sin. Narrowing the scope of this project would have shown more effectively the impact of meditating on Scripture during corporate worship upon the believer's discipleship.

Third, this project had many moving parts that made it too complicated. It was too presumptuous to give participants a new tool and then expect them to use that tool effectively without allowing them to gain familiarity with it. The scope was too broad and not just in trying to influence too many marks of a disciple, but also in the amount of change imposed on the congregation. One assumption was that the congregation would adopt biblical meditation in corporate worship because they already practiced God-centered silence during the worship service. However, the congregation was accustomed to being quiet and attentive to the Holy Spirit without any limitations. To the congregation, this project asked them to concentrate their thoughts on something specific, which was contrary to their habit and may have felt confining.

The fourth issue is the unpredictability of the public corporate worship setting. Distractions, such as visiting missionaries and landing helicopters, are simply uncontrollable and unpredictable. Adding flexibility in the project schedule to re-apply specific categories during the following Sunday would have helped to counter the effects of distractions.

Fifth, the inability to correlate attendance directly to the participants' responses to specific questions hampered the evaluation of the fifth goal and success of the project. If the project design included the participants to sign an attendance sheet with their ID, then I would have known if differences in the two MDA scores were caused by missing treatments on specific categories or by changes in the participants' beliefs. If attendance data were obtained, then an evaluation including only responses where the participant

was present at RROG could be done. By eliminating responses where the participant did not receive treatment of that category, the fifth goal may have been achieved.

### **Recommended Improvements**

Based on these weaknesses, this project needs some improvements if it is to be repeated. First, the MDA needs to adapt to the language of the target audience. This change may not be possible if the target audience is not known or properly understood. If possible, the language used in the MDA should closely match the language of the participants, even if this means translating theological terms to explanations of the concept behind the terms.

In addition, the MDA should be adjusted to only measure beliefs, instead of both beliefs and behaviors. Typically, beliefs change before behaviors change. One may believe they should be “quick to ask Jesus to forgive [them]” when they sin, but in practice they do not ask for forgiveness (statement 6). Their belief precedes their behavior. Thus, measuring a believer’s change in belief would take less time than measuring a change to both beliefs and behaviors. Statement 6 could be rephrased “When I sin, even in a small way, I *know I should be* quick to ask Jesus to forgive me.” Adjusting the statements on the MDA to target only beliefs will increase the likelihood of observing a statistical difference in a repeated project implementation.

Third, this project should be narrowed to measure just a few marks of a disciple instead of seven. Generally, believers need to hear a concept multiple time before they understand their need to change their beliefs. I suggest selecting several marks of a disciple that naturally relate to each other. For example, the holiness of God pairs well with the depth of sin and justification fits with sanctification. Narrowing the project to one of these two pairings would increase the possibility of obtaining a successful outcome.

Fourth, the design of the project should include tracking attendance of the participants during the treatments of each category. By tracking who was present for which application of specific categories, the project could have determined if a change in a specific MDA question was caused by missing a specific Sunday where that category was



covered or by an actual change in participants' beliefs. Tracking attendance by ID would have made the evaluation of the results more accurate and the determination of success more provable.

Additionally, the project should allow much more time for participants to practice and become familiar with biblical meditation. Instead of four weeks as allowed in this project, results would be better if four extra weeks were added to allow for practicing of biblical meditation. Perhaps the project should start by only accepting participants who are already familiar with biblical meditation. This starting point may not be practical but would certainly simplify and narrow the overall scope of the project.

### **Theological Reflections**

Even though not all the project goals were achieved, the theological foundations supporting this project remain solid. The Hebrews meditated on God's attributes while worshipping in the Temple. In Psalm 48:9, the Psalmist wrote, "We have thought on Your lovingkindness, O God, In the midst of Your temple," which places meditation in the corporate worship service as a means of worship. The Hebrews reflected on God's love for them, which deepened their love for Him.

Jesus stated that the Father seeks worshippers who worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). God actually looks for believers who worship Him with a spiritual connection and in light of God's revealed truth in Jesus Christ. Truth enters a person's heart when he meditates on the truth of God's words. Meditation on God's truth is location free, as Jesus points out in John 4:21, including the Sunday morning corporate worship service. Jesus did not disqualify worshipping in Jerusalem or on the mountain (John 4:20), but simply pointed to the location where true worship occurs: in the believer's heart and mind.

Just as the ancient Hebrews did in their Temple, contemporary believers are biblically sound when they ponder the truth of God's lovingkindness in their hearts. The apostle Peter described the community of believers as "living stones" being built together

as a spiritual house (1 Pet 2:4-5). In this house, believers should ponder not only God's lovingkindness but also God's attributes. God is worthy of one's meditations and His people should ponder His character. Focusing on who God is by corporately meditating on His attributes with other believers in a corporate setting not only grows the individual believer's Christlikeness, but also builds the spiritual house described by the apostle Peter.

### **Personal Reflections**

The experience of creating and implementing this project has been excellent preparation for any future projects undertaken by the RROG leadership team. This project supplied practical experience in proposal creation, research methodology, writing skills, and instrument creation. The project has served RROG well by pointing out weak areas of discipleship in the beliefs and behaviors of the congregation. The church leadership can plan future teachings based on the findings of this project.

The concept of meditating during corporate worship has provoked my thinking on corporate worship as a spiritual discipline. Not much has been written specifically about employing corporate worship as a tool to increase discipleship in the congregants.<sup>5</sup> It follows though that being gathered in God's presence with His people and pondering His written words would drive His values deeper within the believer's heart and eventually cause behavioral changes.

Corporate worship specifically has a unique role in creating an atmosphere conducive to pondering God's words. Music is much more than entertainment. It is a tool used by God to inspire His people to become more like Jesus. Music acts as a syringe that delivers the medicine of God's Word deep within a believer's heart. The term *formative corporate worship* encapsulates this concept and best describes how I think about the role

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<sup>5</sup>Some examples are G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008); Mike Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); James K. A Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); and James K. A Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

and function of corporate worship over the past few years. As the concept of formative corporate worship develops more fully, God may direct me to write down these thoughts in a book to help other worship ministries develop disciples during corporate worship.

In addition, this project helped me understand the importance of preparing spiritually to lead corporate worship. Preparing to lead corporate worship goes beyond stilted liturgical formulations and includes practicing personal meditation that allows God's Word to soak deep in my heart. With a heart full of God's Word, I am prepared to minister from the overflow that comes when focusing on God during corporate worship. Filling my mind and heart with His words during the week, through many spiritual disciplines, especially biblical meditation, is the most effective way to lead people to recognize who God is, which in turn kindles the attitude of worship to arise in the hearts of the congregants.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter evaluated many aspects of this project, including the achievement of the project's purpose and the accomplishment of each of the five goals. Following this assessment, this chapter offered several strengths and weaknesses, recommended improvements, and reflected theologically and personally on the results of the project. Even though not all the goals were met, this project offered substantial positive byproducts that will benefit both the RROG congregation and me.

There are several opportunities for further study. One opportunity is to study the impact that meditative worship has on the role of a worship pastor. Combining multiple spiritual disciplines, including meditation, during corporate worship may change how a worship pastor views his role in the church. A second opportunity to conduct further study concerns the impact that meditating on God's attributes has on the believer's spiritual maturity. The assumption for that study would be that there is a direct relationship between focusing on God's attributes during corporate worship and the level of Christian maturity in the life of the participant. A third possible opportunity for further study is to measure

the impact on a believer's Christlikeness from simply meditating in their personal life versus meditating in a corporate worship service. The study could search for any difference between meditating personally and corporately while aided by worship music.

APPENDIX 1

MARKS OF A DISCIPLE ASSESSMENT

Instructions: Circle one response per statement that best describes your beliefs using the following scale.

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

|   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| The eternal consequences of my sin were removed at conversion, but I still need to combat the desire to sin in my daily walk. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| Evangelism should be left primarily to pastors and others in vocational ministry.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| God is not offended by sins I commit after receiving Christ as Lord and Savior.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| My spiritual growth depends on strong relationships with other believers.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| It is hard for me to understand how God can be both loving and just.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| My prayer time is not a begrudging activity, but motivated by my desire to be closer to Jesus.                                | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| Removing the desire and practice of sin from my life is accomplished solely by human willpower.                               | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| My relationship with other believers currently has a negative impact on my relationship with Jesus.                           | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| Prayer includes listening to God in His Word as well as speaking to Him   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| I consistently seek opportunities to tell others about Jesus.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| I believe my prayers are most effective when I pray the longest about a topic.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| Most of my prayer time is spent asking God for help.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| The desire and the power for spiritual growth is the work of the Holy Spirit.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| In part, Christian fellowship is distinguished from merely socializing with other Christians by its                           | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

|  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| emphasis on the discussion of explicitly spiritual matters.  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
| When I sin, I need to confess and repent of both my behavior and my motives.                                     | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| My behaviors and attitudes tend to agree with my verbal testimony about God.                                     | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| God forgives my sin, but I must demonstrate holiness to be justified.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| Because I have Jesus, relationships with other believers are not necessary for my spiritual growth, but optional | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| Because Christ forgave me, I no longer have the capacity to sin voluntarily.                                     | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| I became justified as a free gift by God when I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior.                            | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| The Bible teaches that God's holiness requires Him to be just.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| The Holy Spirit is solely responsible for the results when I share the gospel.                                   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| Christians are united with Christ, but never equal with Him.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| When I sin, even in a small way, I am always quick to ask Jesus to forgive me.                                   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 2

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS EVALUATION

Using the following instrument, a panel evaluated the readings and reflections to ensure it is biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

Name of evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

| <b>Readings and Reflections Evaluation</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
|---|---|---|---|---|----------|
| <b>1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
| Criteria  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Comments |
| <b>Biblical Faithfulness</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
| The content of the readings and reflections are hermeneutically sound. All Scripture is properly interpreted, explained, and applied. |   |   |   |   |          |
| The content of the readings and reflections are theologically sound.  |   |   |   |   |          |
| <b>Scope</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
| The content of the readings and reflections sufficiently cover each mark it is designed to address.                                   |   |   |   |   |          |
| The readings and reflections sufficiently cover the essentials of being a disciple.   |   |   |   |   |          |
| At the end of the course, participants will be able to counsel others biblically.   |   |   |   |   |          |

APPENDIX 3  
BIBLICAL MEDITATION AND METHODS QUIZ

1. Briefly describe biblical meditation.

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2. Which method of biblical meditation has been most helpful to you?

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Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX 4

### OUTLINE OF BIBLICAL MEDITATION CLASS

#### Biblical Meditation Week 1 – The Basics

##### 1. Introduction.

- a. Stigma of the term Meditation – What comes to mind?
- b. Distinction between biblical meditation and alternatives.

| <b>Biblical Meditation</b>     | <b>Alternatives</b>        |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Fill mind with God’s Word      | Empty the mind             |
| Personality maintained         | Lose identity              |
| Know God                       | Become a god               |
| Desire to live life biblically | Live only for self         |
| Based on God’s instructions    | Based on church traditions |
| Embrace Scripture              | Circumvent Scripture       |

##### c. Definitions of biblical meditation.

- i. “Deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”<sup>1</sup> – Donald Whitney
- ii. “Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.”<sup>2</sup> – J. I. Packer

##### 2. Scriptural lessons about biblical meditation.

- a. Psalms.
  - i. Ps 1:1-3
    1. Continual meditation (day and night).
    2. Verbal muttering with barely a sound.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. and updated ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 46-47, Kindle.

<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 22, Kindle.

3. Repeatedly pondering God's Words.
    - ii. Pss 48:9; 104:33-34
      1. Hebrews meditated on God's love during corporate worship.
      2. Meditation as a sacrifice during corporate worship.
      3. Singing parallels meditation. Sung meditations?
    - iii. Psalmic meditative pattern. (remember the M&Ms)
      1. Pss 77:11-12; 143:5
        - a. "remember" – calling God's past wonders to mind.
        - b. "meditate" – verbally muttering God's deeds.
        - c. "muse" – muttering thanks and praise for God's work.
      2. Intentionally remind yourself of God during times of trouble.
      3. Anticipate God's rescue.
  - b. Other biblical books.
    - i. Joshua 1:8
      1. Day and night
      2. Purpose is to **do** what God's Word says.
      3. The doing brings prosperity and success
        - a. As God measures prosperity and success.
        - b. Not as world sees prosperity and success.
        - c. Meditation on God can lead to success in God.
    - ii. Phil 4:8
      1. Think about whatever is...
      2. Dwell in NASB = Meditate in NKJV.
3. History of the practice of biblical meditation.
    - a. Desert Fathers.
      - i. Monks focused on Scripture during meditations.
      - ii. Quietly verbalized their meditations.
      - iii. Later monks did not always focus on Scripture, but on church traditions.
    - b. Reformers.
      - i. Luther - Inclined meditation to gospel.
      - ii. Calvin.
        1. Re-oriented Catholic meditative methods.
        2. Meditation starts with union with Christ, which was not a destination as the Catholics made it.
    - c. Puritans.
      - i. Thomas Manton.
        1. We meditate on what delights us.
        2. Heart is defective, which prevents us from meditating.
        3. Meditation is to warm the heart not fill the head.

- ii. John Flavel.
    - 1. Not meditating on God dishonors, slights, and robbed.
- 4. Worship and biblical meditation.
  - a. Meditations can be sung (i.e. Psalms, Jonathan Edwards).
  - b. Selah.
    - i. No one sure what the term means.
      - 1. Musical interlude for reflection?
      - 2. Trumpet blast while people prostrated and prayed?
      - 3. Designed to fix the worshipper's mind on God?
      - 4. Amplified version says to "pause, and calmly think of that"?
  - c. Meditating on God's Word when in His presence has to propel us to His likeness.
- 5. Conclusion.
  - a. The value of meditation comes from the value of the object focused on.
  - b. Meditation, getting God's word in us, propels us towards Christlikeness.
  - c. Meditation is like a fire that warms our heart.
    - i. Verbal muttering or silent pondering.
    - ii. Continual, day and night, not just once a day.
    - iii. Remember the M&Ms.
  - d. Looking ahead.
    - i. Biblical meditation class.
      - 1. Three more weeks of class.
      - 2. Methods from Dr. Whitney's book.
      - 3. Quiz after last class.
    - ii. Meditate on Scripture during corporate worship.
      - 1. Marks of a Disciple Assessment survey.
      - 2. Eight weeks with biblical meditation during corporate worship.
      - 3. Marks of a Disciple Assessment survey again.

## **Biblical Meditation Week 2 – Methods 1 & 2.**

- 1. Review.
  - a. Distinction of biblical meditation.
    - i. Fill mind with God's Word.
    - ii. Keep personality.
    - iii. Builds desire to know God and live biblically.
  - b. Biblical meditation.
    - i. To ponder spiritual realities in Scripture.
    - ii. To ponder life from a scriptural perspective.

- iii. “Day and night”, continual.
  - iv. Verbal or non-verbal.
2. Method 1 - Emphasize different words in the text.
- a. Teach.
    - i. Speak the verse repeatedly, emphasize a different word each iteration.
    - ii. Think about the meaning and context of each highlighted word.
    - iii. Example Rev 22:13.
      - 1. *I* am Alpha and Omega – Who is speaking.
      - 2. I *am* Alpha and Omega – Jesus describes who He is.
      - 3. I am *Alpha* and Omega – What does alpha mean?
      - 4. I am Alpha *and* Omega – Not just the start, but... .
      - 5. I am Alpha and *Omega* – But the end, Jesus is all inclusive.
  - b. Practice.
    - i. Romans 3:24 – “being justified freely by His grace”
    - ii. Matthew 6:9 – “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name”
3. Method 2 - Imagine an illustration or picture in your mind that explains the text.
- a. Teach.
    - i. Think “that is like...”.
    - ii. The illustration explains, clarifies, or make verse memorable.
    - iii. Can be based on history, news, sports, or your past.
  - b. Practice.
    - i. Isa 6:1-4:  
 In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,  
     “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts,  
     The whole earth is full of His glory.”  
 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.
    - ii. Acts 2:42–43:  
 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

### **Biblical Meditation Week 3 – Methods 3 & 4.**

- 1. Review biblical meditation
  - a. Distinction of biblical meditation
    - i. Fill mind with God’s Word.
    - ii. Keep personality.

- iii. Builds desire to know God and live biblically.
  - b. Biblical meditation
    - i. To ponder spiritual realities in Scripture.
    - ii. To ponder life from a scriptural perspective.
    - iii. “Day and night”, continual.
    - iv. Verbal or non-verbal.
- 2. Method 1 - Emphasize different words in the text.
- 3. Method 2 - Imagine an illustration or picture in your mind that explains the text.
- 4. Method 3 - Create an artistic expression of the text.
  - a. Teach.
    - i. Compose a song.
    - ii. Sketch a picture.
    - iii. Write a poem.
  - b. Practice.
    - i. Amos 4:13  
For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into darkness and treads on the high places of the earth, The LORD God of hosts is His name
    - ii. Matthew 6:9–13  
In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.
- 5. Method 4 – Pray through the text.
  - a. Teach.
    - i. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten His Words.
    - ii. By faith, ponder thoughts the Holy Spirit drops into the mind.
    - iii. Allow heart to connect to text.
  - b. Practice.
    - i. Romans 3:23-4  
For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.
    - ii. Acts 1:8  
But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

## **Biblical Meditation Week 4 – Methods 5 & 6.**

1. Review biblical meditation
  - a. Distinction of biblical meditation
    - i. Fill mind with God’s Word.
    - ii. Keep personality.
    - iii. Builds desire to know God and live biblically.
  - b. Biblical meditation
    - i. To ponder spiritual realities in Scripture.
    - ii. To ponder life from a scriptural perspective.
    - iii. “Day and night”, continual.
    - iv. Verbal or non-verbal.
2. Method 1 - Emphasize different words in the text.
3. Method 2 - Imagine an illustration or picture in your mind that explains the text.
4. Method 3 - Create an artistic expression of the text.
5. Method 4 – Pray through the text.
6. Method 5 – Think about how the text points to the law or the gospel.
  - a. Teach.
    - i. Law – OT – God’s requirements for living with Him in Heaven.
    - ii. Gospel – NT – God’s provision of righteousness, via Jesus, to fulfill God’s requirements.
    - iii. How does text point to either the law or gospel?
    - iv. What other verses connect with the text?
  - b. Practice.
    - i. Ps 23:1 – John 10:11
      - The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
      - I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
    - ii. 1 John 1:6-7 – John 8:12
      - If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.
      - Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”
7. Method 6 - Ask Philippians 4:8 questions of the text.
  - a. Teach.
    - i. What in the text is:
      1. True.
      2. Honorable.

3. Right.
4. Pure.
5. Lovely.
6. Of good repute.
7. Any excellence.
8. Worthy of praise.

b. Practice.

i. 1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

ii. Rom 7:24–25

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

8. Quiz

## APPENDIX 5

### MEDITATION AND REFLECTION HANDOUTS

#### **Meditation and Reflection – Week 1 The Holiness of God**

Verse: 1 Peter 1:15-17; Isaiah 46:9:

1 Peter 1:15-17:

NKJV: But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.

NASB: But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.” If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth.

Is 46:9:

NKJV: For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me.

NASB: For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me.

Reflection:

Sometimes people today find it difficult to think of God as loving and, at the same time, just.

Here the Apostle Peter teaches us that the same God, who we lovingly call Father, lovingly called us to salvation, also judges. Peter notes that God is fair and impartial because He is holy. Holiness means to be set apart or otherness. God was not created and is in a category by Himself. Therefore, He has complete and clear authority that is not tainted by sin. He is the standard. By this holiness, God is perfectly able to judge accurately and authoritatively.

Meditating on 1 Peter 1:15-17 causes the believer to realize that our holiness comes from God’s holiness, which He imparts to us through redemption given by Jesus Christ on the cross. However, the holiness given to us by Jesus should never make us think that we are equal with Christ. The believer can gain this understanding by meditating on Isaiah 46:9, “I am God, and there is no one like Me.” Although we are united to Christ and He makes us holy, we can never place ourselves in the same category or consider ourselves equal with Jesus. He is Creator and we are His creation. Let us gaze with amazement and respect at His perfect, pure, and awesome holiness.



## **Meditation and Reflection – Week 2**

### **The Depth of Sin**

Verse: James 1:15:

NKJV: Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

NASB: Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Reflection:

Sin begins in our thoughts and desires. Its roots are intertwined deeply within our human nature. As James notes, a conceived sin in our minds and hearts can grow and become deadly. Even small sins need to be brought to the light of Jesus for forgiveness. Sin is part of our fleshly nature and is not defined by our behaviors only, but also by our motives. Proverbs tells us “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.” The depth of our sin is not just on the surface, visible by our behavior, but is also ingrained in our fleshly thinking and motive. No wonder then that Isaiah said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined!” after experiencing God’s holiness (Is 6:5).

When the believer’s understanding of God’s awesome holiness and great love grows, meditating on James 1:15 will cause an increased hatred for sin, no matter how small, because sin displeases God. Knowing God through meditating on His Word increases our desire to please Him in both our behaviors and our motives.

## **Meditation and Reflection – Week 3**

### **Justification**

Verse: Romans 3:23-24:

NKJV: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

NASB: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Reflection:

Many people confuse justification with sanctification. This verse describes justification as a gift given freely by the grace of God through Jesus’ work on the Cross. Believers receive the unearned gift of justification when they receive Jesus as their personal savior and Lord. Upon conversion, the eternal consequence of the believer’s sin is removed. Justification cannot be earned by good behavior. However, the residue of sin in this temporal world still exists. Sanctification, the process of conquering the residue sin, occurs over time and is empowered by the Holy Spirit working internally in the believer’s heart. Sheer willpower is not effective in furthering this process.

Meditating on this verse, and others like it (i.e. Romans 8:3-4; Romans 8:32-34; Ephesians 2:8-9 ), will help the believer understand that justification is a gift that they need not earn. Believers can think of justification as a removal of the eternal consequences of their sin, but not their earthly consequences of sin.

### **Meditation and Reflection – Week 4 Sanctification**

Verse: 1 Peter 1:2:

NKJV: Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, **in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience** and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ

NASB: Who are chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood

Reflection:

Sanctification, as opposed to justification, is a process not done by our willpower, but empowered by the Holy Spirit. In Peter's greeting to the church (1 Peter 1:2), sanctification (spiritual growth) is noted as a work of the Holy Spirit. The process of becoming more like Jesus, sanctification, occurs when the Holy Spirit begins to change the believer's desires and motives from the inside out. Our feeble attempt to focus our will on being good eventually fails. Sanctification, like justification, is also a gift. The Apostle Peter points this out in 2 Peter 1:3 that God's power has given us everything we need for "life and godliness."

Meditating on this verse, as well as 2 Peter 1:3, causes the believer to realize that God already provided a way to become more Christlike every day. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts the desire to please God and, because of His love for us, obey His words. The Holy Spirit changes us to want to run from sinful desires and practices.

### **Meditation and Reflection – Week 5 Evangelism**

Verse: Acts 1:8:

NKJV: But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

NASB: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

Reflection:

This is Jesus' last statement to his disciples before he ascended into Heaven. Jesus'

command not only applies to His disciples of that day, but His disciples today. Notice that Jesus' words were not given to the "professionals" of His day, but rather to every day laborers. Fishermen and tax collectors, those who had a close relationship with Him, were told to be His witnesses to all people. As well, being Jesus' witnesses is preceded by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is responsible for the results of sharing our testimony with others. We are responsible to simply share. When the Holy Spirit is upon us, witnessing, by our behaviors and our words, becomes empowered and bold. Integrity characterizes our witness when our behaviors match our words.

Meditating on this verse causes the believer to realize that the Holy Spirit is required before telling other people about Jesus' goodness and love. In fact, meditating on this verse and others bring the realization that the Holy Spirit is solely responsible for any decision others make when we share the good news with them.

### **Meditation and Reflection – Week 6 Prayer (Part 1)**

Verse: Matthew 6:9-13:

NKJV: In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

NASB: Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Reflection:

To many believers, prayer focuses on themselves and their needs. In these verses, Jesus teaches us that prayer is not just about our needs, but more about remembering spiritual realities, such as recognizing God as Father in Heaven, acknowledging His holiness, and eagerly stating the truth of His coming kingdom and will on Earth. Notice that our requests are surrounded by statements of faith, truth, and praise. Prayer should include a time of adoration, surrender, and remembrance of truth, as well as requests for help. Instead of viewing prayer as a begrudging activity, we should eagerly look forward to spending time with our loving Father in prayer.

Meditating on this passage increases our understanding of the nature of prayer. Prayer brings us closer to Jesus and places us in proper context with God's truth. God already knows our needs (Matthew 6:8). In prayer, we simply and honestly acknowledge our spiritual state in His glorious kingdom. In that context, God meets our needs. Meditating on God's words about prayer, needs-focused prayers turn into time of refreshing in His presence.

## **Meditation and Reflection – Week 7**

### **Prayer (Part 2)**

Verse: Matthew 6:7-8:

NKJV: And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

NASB: And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So, do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Reflection:

Many believers view prayer as a time to ask God repeatedly for help. Jesus teaches us that prayer is much more than a monotonous monologue. Prayer is about placing ourselves in God's spiritual reality. The ingenuine repetition of many words does not get God's attention. Rather praying a few words with a tender, alive, and humble heart attracts His attention. The Psalmist says God reacts because of our love relationship with Him (Ps 91:14). As well, prayer is a two-way conversation, including speaking and listening. Often God speaks to us while we read Scripture. Listening while considering His revealed Word in Scripture causes prayer time to be new and refreshing.

While meditating on these verses, the believer realizes that God already knows the needs and hurts. Prayer then becomes a time to remember God's spiritual reality with our minds and to surrender to that reality with our hearts. As we meditate on God's Word, we hear God leading us to turn away from the worldliness all around us and to turn towards Him to become more like Jesus.

## **Meditation and Reflection – Week 8**

### **Community**

Verse: Acts 2:42-43:

NKJV: And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

NASB: They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

Reflection:

Many believers are starved for fellowship. Not the socializing kind focused on sports, weather, or family. But the deep-down, Christ-centered, spiritually-satisfying kind. The kind that binds believers together as they experience the awe and wonder of God's work accomplished right before their eyes. This kind of fellowship spurs spiritual growth and

increases thankfulness for the great honor of being in this kind of fellowship. The kind of fellowship found in this verse impacts us positively and brings us the humble reality that Jesus loves me, as do my fellow believers.

Meditating on this verse causes the believer to imagine what life was like then. It must have been exciting to see miracles occurring regularly and to enjoy a strong spiritual bond with other believers who experience the same reverence for Jesus as you do. The fellowship must have been sweet and most likely was focused on spiritual realities rather than social chatter. Isn't that what our hearts desire? Don't we hunger to experience close relationships and comradery around all that Jesus has done, is doing, and will do?

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## ABSTRACT

### DEEPENING DISCIPLESHIP DURING CORPORATE WORSHIP AT REFRESHING RIVER OF GOD FELLOWSHIP IN EPHRATA, PENNSYLVANIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019  
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Chapter 1 sets the purpose, goals, requirements, and methodologies for this project. Chapter 2 establishes the theological foundation for biblical meditation, reviewing the practice of meditation in the Old and New Testaments and finding a Psalmic pattern to biblical meditation. The discussion then turns to investigating the biblical view of several marks of a disciple, such as God's holiness, the believer's union with Christ, Christ's atoning work, the role of community, and the authority to proclaim the gospel. Chapter 3 surveys the history of biblical meditation in the church, including its practice among the Desert Fathers, the Reformers, and the Puritans. Attention then turns to three issues associated with the practice and stigma of meditation in the current Christian community. The issues are the role of song in biblical meditation, the distinction of biblical meditation from non-biblical forms, and biblical meditation as a remedy for a distracted society, especially when the habit of distraction infiltrates corporate worship. Chapter 4 describes how the teaching material used during the project was prepared, taught, and evaluated. Chapter 5 concludes by assessing the success of the project, personal comments, and the project's strengths and weaknesses.

## VITA

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### EDUCATIONAL

B.B.A., Belmont University, 1986  
M.A., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009  
M.Div., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014

### MINISTERIAL

Worship Leader, Faith Covenant Church, Ephrata, Pennsylvania, 1997-2002  
Choir Director, Ephrata Community Church, Ephrata, Pennsylvania, 2004-  
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Music Coordinator, Swamp Christian Fellowship, Reinholds, Pennsylvania,  
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Associate Pastor, Refreshing River of God Fellowship, Ephrata, Pennsylvania,  
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