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UTILIZING PERSONAL AND CORPORATE SPIRITUAL
DISCIPLINES TO FOSTER EMOTIONAL HEALTH AT
WEST HICKORY BAPTIST CHURCH,
HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA

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To the faithful members of West Hickory Baptist Church in the hope that this project will
prove a genuine help to them in their lives as Christians

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vi
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Ministry Context	1
Rationale	3
Purpose	4
Goals	4
Research Methodology	5
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	7
Conclusion	10
2. THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR UTILIZING PERSONAL AND CORPORATE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TO FOSTER EMOTIONAL HEALTH	11
The Foundational Passage: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4	11
The Personal Spiritual Discipline of Bible Meditation for Emotional Health: Psalm 1	16
The Personal Spiritual Discipline of Prayer for Emotional Health: Philippians 4:1-7	23
The Corporate Discipline of Worship for Emotional Health: Psalm 40	30
The Corporate Discipline of Giving for Emotional Health: 2 Corinthians 8:1-6	36
Conclusion	41

Chapter	Page
3. EVANGELICAL APPROACHES TO UTILIZING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TO FOSTER EMOTIONAL HEALTH	42
Defining Terms: Evangelicals, Spiritual Disciplines, and Emotional Health	43
How Evangelical Leaders in Spiritual Formation Have Connected Spiritual Disciplines and Emotional Health	50
Conclusion	66
4. MINISTRY PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	70
Introduction	70
Curriculum Development	70
Promoting the Curriculum	76
Project Implementation	77
Conclusion	79
5. MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION	80
Evaluation of Project Purpose	80
Evaluation of Project Goals	82
Strengths of the Project	86
Weaknesses of the Project	87
Theological Reflections	89
Personal Reflections	91
Conclusion	92
Appendix	
1. BULLETIN INSERT FOR GROUP PARTICIPANTS	94
2. RUBRIC FOR COURSE EVALUATION	95
3. STUDENT SURVEY ON EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES	97
4. THE GRIEVING WITH HOPE CURRICULUM	101
BIBLIOGRAPHY	155

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Pre- and post-test averages of part 1 of survey: spiritual disciplines	82
2. Pre- and post-test averages on part 2 of survey: emotional health	83
3. Results of <i>t</i> -test for dependent samples	84

PREFACE

Many times I have wanted to give up. The workload seemed too great in light of other pressing responsibilities. The task seemed impossible amid a busy life. About halfway through the program I bookmarked the “Withdraw from SBTS” page on my computer. More than once I stared at that bookmarked page and pondered whether to fill out that form. One person kept me from doing it; one person heard all my complaints; one person stood with me in my doubts—this project is complete because of my wife, Cindy. Her encouragement and belief that I could complete this project is the reason I reached the finish line.

My professors were unreservedly kind and helpful. In the midst of his busy life and ministry, my advisor, Dr. Donald Whitney, was quick to reply to my questions. He helped me become a better writer through his careful editing. Dr. Matthew Haste was likewise gracious in assuring me about the timeline I was on and how I could complete the project in time. In addition, Dr. Joseph Harrod was most helpful in both Project Methodology and Applied Empirical Research. He made a subject that terrified me, statistics, both manageable and understandable.

Finally, the members of West Hickory Baptist Church helped make this project a reality. They willingly allowed me go to Louisville twice a year and supported me every step of the way, especially during the implementation of the project.

“Praise be to the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Cor 1:3-4).

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Hickory, North Carolina
December 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

West Hickory Baptist Church is a wonderful church filled with grieving people. This project aimed to address the emotional health of a select group within the congregation through the development and implementation of a curriculum focused on the practice of personal and corporate spiritual disciplines. Building up believers' emotional health through the spiritual disciplines helped group members make progress in their discipleship.

Ministry Context

West Hickory Baptist Church (WHBC) is a 114-year-old congregation of around 150 members in the foothills of western North Carolina. The church has a solid expository preaching ministry and has gifted teachers among all age groups and classes. For a congregation with many older members, there is a large population of children eighteen-years-old and younger. The Lord has blessed WHBC with talented musicians, an enthusiastic choir, and robust congregational singing. Members reach out to the community. The church partners with several local ministries, runs a food pantry, and hosts the monthly meeting of its neighborhood association. The people of the church love one another deeply. Many members express compassionate concern and offer concerted prayer for those who are sick or hurting in some way.

There are a great number of hurting people at West Hickory. Like many Southern Baptist Churches in recent years, WHBC has experienced an attendance decline due to deaths among the membership and an aging congregation. In the sixteen years I have served as pastor, the church has buried over 100 members, many of whom were

fully involved in the congregation for years. Nearly 20 percent of WHBC members are home-bound. Though many new members have joined the church in the last few years, growth has not outpaced the decline. People who once attended regularly now only come a few times a year because of poor health. The decline in weekly worship attendance promises to accelerate in years to come as more than a third of the congregation is seventy-five years-old or older. In light of these demographics, grief and emotional pain are common experiences for the congregation.

Although a general spirit of concern and love characterizes WHBC members, there is a need to help members be better prepared to face the many of trials of life, such as aging, the loneliness of widowhood, the pain of children who have strayed from the faith, the heartbreak of strained relationships, and other deep valleys of grief. Church members who love the Lord and love one another are all-too-often unprepared to help other members through times of emotional suffering. Caring for hurting members is one of the most sacred tasks of pastoral ministry, especially in the short-term aftermath of a crisis; but a pastoral team, no matter how committed, cannot adequately shepherd hurting members long-term. The needs simply outpace the resources. However, if congregation members could be better prepared to respond to the common crises within their own life and in the lives of others then such preparation would extend the church's ministry in powerful ways and help members live out their calling to be a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9).

One simple and appropriate way to better prepare members to face physical and emotional pain is through the ordinary means of grace, that is, the personal and corporate spiritual disciplines found in the Bible. At WHBC, preaching, prayer, worship, Bible reading, and meditation are all widely valued and practiced within the congregation. However, many members have not seen what a powerful help these disciplines can be for those walking through suffering. This project aims to show members who have faced significant trials the strong connection between faithful practice of the biblical spiritual disciplines and emotional health.

Rationale

WHBC is a church with many members who have gone through significant trials. Church members often struggle to heal emotionally and recover spiritually from the sufferings they endure. Though the church's ministry of the Word through preaching and teaching is strong, and the love of the congregation for one another is real and true, many members do not seem to be making much progress in their walk with God. There is a significant need to equip members to help them deal with the emotional effects of the trials they face. The Bible calls believers to this kind of ministry to one another. A foundational passage for the ministry of members to one another is 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. There, the apostle Paul writes, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."¹ Through this project, members will be equipped to practice the personal disciplines of prayer and meditation and the corporate disciplines of worship and giving within a small group of at least twenty members in order to grow in obedience to 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Therefore, extended exegesis of 2 Corinthians 1 will serve as the biblical foundation for this project.

The curriculum was designed to foster emotional health through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Through the personal spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditation, group participants would grow in their love for God and their understanding of God's love for them through their trials. Through the corporate disciplines of worship and giving, group participants were drawn away from preoccupation with their own circumstances and brought more fully into the body of the church, where there is fellowship and love and opportunity to bless others.

The discipline of prayer was explored through an exposition of Philippians 4:1-8. This passage points to prayer as a way to deal with anxiety and bring peace into a

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

believer's life. Bible meditation and its connection to emotional health was discussed through a look at Psalm 1. This psalm exemplifies the power of meditation on the truth of God for emotional health, as the one who meditates on God's Word is like a "tree planted by streams of water, whose leaf does not wither" (Ps 1:3 ESV).² Understanding the connection of the corporate discipline of worship to emotional health was seen through Psalm 40.³ When the psalmist worships the Lord in the congregation, joy abounds and fears are diminished. Finally, the corporate discipline of giving was explored through the exegesis of Paul's commendation of the churches of Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 8:1-6. The believers in Macedonia, though poor, showed great generosity in giving. This generosity was a fruit of their submission to Christ and was accompanied by great joy in their lives.

When group participants experience the love of God more fully and the joy of loving others freely through the practice of these spiritual disciplines, real progress toward emotional health can be made.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to strengthen the emotional health of grieving members of West Hickory Baptist Church through utilizing personal and corporate disciplines in a small group context.

Goals

This project was implemented with four goals to measure its success.

1. The first goal was to recruit a group of at least twenty church members who are interested in strengthening their emotional health through spiritual disciplines.

² Many other Old Testament passages, such as Ps 73, Ps 119, and Josh 1:8 confirm the value of meditation to bring stability, wisdom, and peace to the believer's life. Jesus demonstrates the fruit of this kind of meditation in his encounter with Satan in the wilderness as recorded in Matt 4:1-11.

³ The first three verses of this psalm in particular highlight the way God lifts the one who waits on him out of the pit and gives him a new song.

2. The second goal was to provide a survey whereby the group may assess their current practice of spiritual disciplines and their emotional health.
3. The third goal was to develop an eight-week curriculum on utilizing select personal and corporate spiritual disciplines to foster emotional health.
4. The fourth goal was to strengthen group members' practice of these disciplines through the implementation of the curriculum to foster emotional health.

Research Methodology

Four goals were used to determine the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to recruit a group of at least twenty church members who are interested in strengthening their emotional health through spiritual disciplines. One month before the course began, bulletin inserts were distributed in the morning worship service for three consecutive Sundays. These inserts invited adults to participate in the “Grieving with Hope” curriculum. Students signed up by returning the inserts in the offering plate during the worship service.⁴ These bulletin inserts were turned in to the church secretary. The secretary made a roster of all group participants. The bulletin insert spelled out the aims of the course and the requirements for attendance and at-home assignments. This goal was measured by securing bulletin inserts from members who were interested in being part of the group. The goal was considered a success when at least twenty church members made a commitment to participate in the small group curriculum.

The second goal was to assess this group's current view of their emotional health and their current practice of spiritual disciplines. This goal was measured through a twenty-item, pre-test paper survey using a six-point Likert scale.⁵ The church secretary collected these papers and members were randomly assigned a four-digit Personal Identification Number (PIN) for the survey. Members responded to statements describing their emotional life and their understanding and habits related to the four disciplines

⁴ See appendix 1.

⁵ See appendix 3. All of the 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.

covered in the curriculum. This goal was considered successful when all small group members completed the survey and the results had been analyzed. The results of the pre-test survey were compared with results of the post-test survey and statistically evaluated to determine whether students' participation in the course made a statistically significant difference in their practice of spiritual disciplines and in their emotional health.

The third goal was to develop an eight-week curriculum on utilizing personal and corporate spiritual disciplines to foster emotional health. This curriculum showed a positive connection between faithful practice of personal and corporate spiritual disciplines and emotional health. This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of one pastor, elder, or missionary, one church member not in the group, and one faculty professor, student, or graduate of the Southern Seminary Biblical Spirituality program or related discipline. The panel was composed of both male and female members. A rubric on a four-point scale was given to panel members for evaluating the biblical faithfulness, methodology, and applicability of the project.⁶ Each lesson was evaluated by the panel according to the rubric. When the aims set forth in the rubric had been affirmed by all panel members at a level of at least 3.0 on a four-point scale for every lesson, then this goal was considered accomplished. Each lesson not meeting the 3.0 standard was revised until the panel unanimously affirmed that it met the standard.

The fourth goal was to strengthen group members' practice of these disciplines through the implementation of the curriculum to foster emotional health. The course took place in a small group format with at least twenty participants. Weekly sessions ran one hour and combined teaching with discussion. Group members were required to complete at-home exercises and participate in group discussions. This goal was considered successful when two benchmarks had been met or exceeded: (1) when at least twenty group members attended seven or more group sessions, (2) when group members had taken a post-course survey matching the pre-course survey. Group attendance was noted

⁶ See appendix 2.

using a weekly attendance sheet. The post-test was given at the close of the last course session. Like the pre-test, this post-test was also a paper-based test. The pre-course and post-course responses were analyzed using a *t*-test for dependent samples to determine whether there was a statistically positive difference in test results among those who participated in the course.⁷ If the two benchmarks were met and the *t*-test produced a statistically positive result, then this goal was considered successful.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Emotional health. *Emotional health* is defined in this project as a consistent and growing faithful response to the work of God in the life of a believer in his circumstances, relationships with others, and assessment of self.⁸ Examples of emotional health include not being debilitated by trials for extended periods, responding appropriately to joys and disappointments, relating well to others, and growing in a loving relationship with God.

Giving. The spiritual discipline of *giving* is the intentional effort on the part of individual believers to share their resources for the purposes of expanding God’s kingdom, building up the local church, and providing help to others. Most often, this discipline involves the giving of money or other material possessions. This discipline is considered corporate because it is an interpersonal discipline.

⁷ Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics For People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 191.

⁸ The influence of various authors goes into this definition. Peter Scazzerro popularized the phrase “emotional health,” but his definition of emotional health is not biblically rooted and is vague. David Powlison likewise helps grapple with issues of emotional health by reminding readers of their fallenness, but he spends more time exploring the negative issues of the heart than pointing toward a positive vision of emotional health. See Peter Scazzerro, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003).

Meditation. *Meditation* is the spiritual discipline of thinking deeply on the words of Scripture, especially the nature and character of God and on the works of God as revealed in the Bible.⁹

Personal and corporate spiritual disciplines. *Personal and corporate spiritual disciplines* are practices of biblical spirituality that believers engage in consistently and intentionally to grow as followers of Christ.¹⁰ Personal spiritual disciplines are individual spiritual practices while corporate spiritual disciplines are group-oriented.¹¹

Prayer. *Prayer* is the act of coming before the presence of God to speak to him. Believers may speak to God words of praise, words of thanksgiving, supplication, intercession, or confession.¹² *Prayer* can be personal or corporate, but for the purpose of this project, the discipline of private prayer was the focus.

Worship. *Worship* is ascribing to the Lord the glory due his name from a heart of love for him (cf. Ps 29). This worship is both individual and corporate.¹³ For the purpose of this project, the focus was on corporate worship, particularly the Sunday morning gathering of the local church.

⁹ Donald Whitney points out several examples from the Puritans of meditation as a bridge between Bible reading and prayer. Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Second Edition (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2014), 72.

¹⁰ Whitney defines spiritual disciplines: “The Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times.” Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 17.

¹¹ Some disciplines, such as worship, may be either personal or corporate, as a believer may worship individually or with others.

¹² Timothy Keller states, “Prayer is the only entryway into genuine self-knowledge. It is also the main way we experience deep change—the reordering of our loves. Prayer is how God gives us so many of the unimaginable things he has for us. Indeed, prayer makes it safe for God to give us many of the things we most desire. It is the way we know God, the way we finally treat God *as* God. Prayer is simply the key to everything we need to do and be in life” (Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* [New York: Viking, 2014], 18).

¹³ Whitney writes, “Christianity is not an isolationist religion. The New Testament describes the Church with metaphors like *body* (1 Corinthians 12:12), *building* (Ephesians 2:21), and *household* (Ephesians 2:19), each of which speaks of the relationship between individual units and a larger whole.” Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 92.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project involved a select group of at least twenty church members rather than the whole congregation. Second, the project was limited to a timeframe of twenty weeks. This timeframe provided for adequate preparation time for lessons and at-home assignments, preparation of the evaluation rubric, preparation of the survey given to group members, as well as the weeks needed to teach the curriculum. Third, rather than attempting to cover spiritual disciplines comprehensively in an eight-week period, four spiritual disciplines were chosen as the focus of the curriculum. These four disciplines were the personal spiritual disciplines of Bible meditation and prayer, and the corporate disciplines of worship and giving. The disciplines were intended to help group members who are grieving come back into warm fellowship with God and meaningful interaction with others.

Many personal and corporate spiritual disciplines, such as fasting, journaling, silence and solitude, fellowship, and evangelism were considered, but ultimately rejected in favor of the four disciplines listed above. Two disciplines—fasting and journaling—seemed impractical due to the advanced age of many members of the group. Many group participants were in their seventies and eighties. Such persons often struggle to write for any length of time due to conditions like arthritis. Fasting was also avoided because of the age of group members, as many members are fearful of going too long without eating. Past efforts at fasting as a church have not seen widespread participation from older members.

Other disciplines seemed less helpful to those grieving because of the danger that participants might become more deeply isolated through these disciplines. The disciplines chosen were selected to encourage group members to focus upward (loving God) and outward (loving others) rather than focusing inward. Of course, looking within is not intrinsically wrong, but for the grieving person there is already a great temptation for excessive introspection. Disciplines that were more introspective in nature, like solitude and silence, were thus avoided. In the case of the discipline of evangelism, it

seemed to be asking too much of a grieving person to focus on evangelism through a time of emotional turmoil. The corporate discipline of fellowship would seem appropriate, but was rejected due to the concern that the emotional turmoil of the grieving member might dominate the agenda in times of fellowship in ways that might be unhealthy for the group. Most of the disciplines not selected carried an element of uncertainty in terms of participation by group members. Irregular participation would lead to uneven evaluation; therefore these disciplines were rejected.

On the other hand, the four disciplines chosen provided meaningful avenues of participation for group members. Giving seemed to be a corporate discipline highly suitable to a meaningful reconnection with others because giving pushes grieving members both to consider the needs of others and to focus less on their own needs. Worship, which was clearly taught through the curriculum as being more than just church attendance, helped group members reconnect with God and, in its corporate context, remind group members that they are not alone. On the level of personal spiritual disciplines, Bible meditation and personal prayer seemed to be bedrock disciplines that would enable group members to make progress in their walk with God.

Conclusion

The path of help through spiritual disciplines is the path of meaningful reconnection with God and others, and a way of cultivating the sense of hopeful purpose that comes from living in light of the greatest commandment to love God and to love neighbor. As students turn toward God and toward one another through the practice of spiritual disciplines, emotional healing can take place.

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR UTILIZING PERSONAL
AND CORPORATE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES
TO FOSTER EMOTIONAL HEALTH

The practice of personal and corporate spiritual disciplines in times of emotional distress is a means God uses to comfort believers through the ministry of His presence and through the ministry of His people. Grieving Christians will be well-served by a spiritual disciplines curriculum founded on biblical principles. Therefore, this chapter establishes a scriptural basis for the connection between the faithful practice of spiritual disciplines and emotional health.

The Foundational Passage: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Paul's opening blessing in 2 Corinthians 1 lays out the animating principle of this ministry project. Believers, as they receive grace from God in their trials, are able to help each other grow in grace as they comfort one another. Spiritual disciplines, personal and congregational, aid believers in this ministry of mutual comfort.

Paul the apostle was under fire when he wrote 2 Corinthians. Unexpectedly, the opposition was not from outside the church but was from within the church at Corinth. A faction of members within the church accused him of hypocrisy. They said he did not fulfill his promises. They charged him with asserting authority where he had none.¹ Paul's failure to visit the Corinthians as he had promised also gave his opponents an opportunity to oppose him. They were able to stir up doubts about Paul's true concern for the church. Paul's foes took his absence as an opportunity to plant the assumption in the

¹ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word, 2015), 79.

minds of the Corinthian believers that Paul was ashamed of his weaknesses and thus embarrassed to come to them.² The combination of blatant attack and subtle accusation undermined Paul's ministry in Corinth to such an extent that he was compelled to defend himself before the church. New Testament professor Mark Seifrid explains, "In the height of irony, Paul now must defend his apostolic authority to a church that was the fruit of his apostolic labor."³ Renowned scholar Martin Hengel says that 2 Corinthians is Paul's most personal letter.⁴ However, Paul is careful to root his defense of himself not in his personal qualifications but in the gospel. The good news of Jesus, with its message of grace, will form the heart of Paul's defense of his ministry.

The apostle makes the unusual choice of beginning his letter with a blessing rather than a thanksgiving. Paul's normal practice is to open his letters with thanksgiving and close his letters with blessing.⁵ But in 2 Corinthians, Paul first brings himself and his readers a reflective statement of blessing that highlights God's comfort of His people.

Commentator David Garland says,

The other church that is not the recipient of thanksgiving at the start of a letter is the church in Galatia. There, Paul was defending the gospel and was forceful in his approach to the church. But his forcefulness of approach may have been rooted in their love for him (see Gal 4:16). In Corinth, Paul believes at least a faction of the church is opposed to him and he thus has to affirm his apostolic authority. Leading off by recounting God's blessings in his life enables him to focus on God's work in him as an apostle from the beginning of the letter.⁶

The choice to begin with a statement of blessing grounds all that follows in a

² Mark Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 2.

³ Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 2.

⁴ Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 69.

⁵ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 53.

⁶ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 55.

gospel base. Paul's focus on God also accords with his commitment to avoid manipulation, deception, and other shameful ways in ministry (2 Cor 4:1-7). Notably, Paul's statement of blessing would have been noticed by the first readers of the letter, as they would have remembered that Paul opened his first letter to Corinth with a statement of thanksgiving. Recognizing that letters like Paul's were often read in the context of gathered worship in the early church, Paul's choice to lead off with a blessing becomes even more powerful.⁷

Following a standard greeting-wish of "grace and peace," Paul unfurls his statement of God's blessing and its effects on his ministry. Second Corinthians 1:3-4 reads, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

The man who had been accused by this church of vacillation and boasting, of weakness in speech and gifting, of dishonesty and foolishness and lack of true apostleship, rests and revels in the comfort of God. With a few strokes of a pen, Paul subverts the Corinthians' understanding both of themselves and of his ministry. In the first letter to Corinth, Paul described the church as having an attitude of self-sufficiency ("Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us!" [1 Cor 4:8]). The church in Corinth was focused on strength and gifting. This is why they supported the "super-apostles" (2 Cor 11:5). However, Paul knows real strength comes through weakness and gifts are God's to give. Thus, his blessing acknowledges the reality of trials with the sure supply of God's comfort. With this opening blessing, Paul has set the direction of his entire letter: strength through weakness, suffering leading to exaltation, in other words, a Christocentric ministry. As noted New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn declares, Paul "experiences Christ as the Crucified as well as the Exalted; indeed, it is only when he experiences Christ as crucified that it is possible

⁷ Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 12.

for him to experience Christ as exalted, only when he experiences death as the dying of Christ that it is possible to experience the risen life of Christ.”⁸ New Testament scholar Ralph Martin affirms Dunn’s thesis and expands on it: “We should not overlook the way that apostle and gospel are so closely bound together in these chapters. What was at stake at Corinth was nothing less than the essence of the *kerygma* as expressed in the way of the cross (*theologia crucis*) for proclamation and daily living.”⁹ Throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul will speak in contrasting pairs: death/life, weakness/strength, and affliction/comfort. These contrasts support the idea that God meets believers in their times of need and supplies all that is needed for life and godliness.

Paul begins his blessing with a word of praise to “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Cor 1:3).

Commentator Frank Matera writes,

In praising God as the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, Paul affirms that God is the source of the mercy and consolation he has experienced in his apostolic ministry, despite his afflictions. These afflictions encompass the physical suffering and mental anguish that he endures because of his apostolic ministry, especially as described in the hardship lists of 4:8–11; 6:4–10; 11:23–29; and 12:10.¹⁰

The language of this blessing is like the rich liturgy of the synagogue.¹¹

God’s mercy comes to believers through Jesus Christ. Seifrid states,

“Justice” and “mercy” have met one another in Christ. In Jesus Christ we meet God in absolute and unconditioned mercy. This is so, not because judgment has been set aside, but because it has been overcome. It is “the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ,” whom believers know and confess as the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”¹²

⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 334.

⁹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 80.

¹⁰ Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 41.

¹¹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 141.

¹² Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 21.

It is this God who comforts believers that they may comfort one another. In the immediate context of 2 Corinthians, Paul is talking about himself and his co-workers, not the church in Corinth, when he uses the word “us.” Verses 6-7 explain that it is Paul and his co-workers who have been afflicted and received comfort. Paul knew from the time of his conversion that his path would be marked by suffering. He also knew that he would be an apostle to the Gentiles. In Corinth itself, as recorded in the book of Acts, he was encouraged by the Lord to persist in ministry in the knowledge that God was calling a people to himself there (Acts 9:15-16; 18:10). Now, with the church in Corinth established, Paul acknowledges that his pathway has been filled with suffering. This suffering though, has been redemptive. The trials Paul has faced have been instrumental in his ability to minister to others. This truth counters the tendency of the Corinthians to look to strength and gifting. For Paul, strength comes through suffering and the ability to minister is earned through fiery trials. As Seifrid explains, “Paul thus reminds the Corinthians that the final gift of comfort is not given apart from the reality of suffering.”¹³ While speaking of himself, Paul is also implying that this dynamic of God’s working through suffering will be the experience of the believers in Corinth as well. God’s work through suffering is especially evident in the community of God’s people. Seifrid elegantly states, “The more genuine and deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, and for all eternity.”¹⁴ Through this ministry project it is hoped that genuine and deep community in Christ brings great comfort to each project participant.

¹³ Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 13.

¹⁴ Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 18.

The Personal Spiritual Discipline of Bible Meditation for Emotional Health: Psalm 1

Many texts, from Joshua 1:8 to the whole of Psalm 119, point to the value of the personal spiritual discipline of meditating on the Word of God but there is no better passage in Scripture for showing the connection of emotional health to Bible meditation than Psalm 1.

In his commentary on Psalms 1-72, Derek Kidner writes,

It seems likely that this psalm was specially composed as an introduction to the whole Psalter. Certainly it stands here as a faithful doorkeeper, confronting those who would be in the “congregation of the righteous” with the basic choice that alone gives reality to worship; with the divine truth that must inform it, and with the ultimate judgement that looms up beyond it.¹⁵

Psalm 1 is a fitting introduction to the entire psalter and a powerful source of inspiration on its own. The psalm introduces crucial themes that will impact the rest of the book of Psalms.¹⁶ Central to these themes is the fundamental truth that the righteous occupy themselves with the law of the Lord. As scholar Walter Brueggemann indicates in his commentary on Psalms, “As an introductory poem, Psalm 1 urges a lifestyle centered on meditating on divine instruction, or *Torah*.”¹⁷ The good life, according to Psalm 1, is not a life of self-determination but a life of submission to the revelation of God.¹⁸ Because of its style and content, Psalm 1 is commonly classified among the wisdom psalms. The language of this psalm is more like the book of Proverbs than like many of the other psalms.¹⁹

¹⁵ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Kidner Classic Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 63.

¹⁶ Nancy deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *Psalms*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 56.

¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 28.

¹⁸ Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 29.

¹⁹ Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 2018), 58.

Psalm 1 is often considered by scholars as part of a set with Psalm 2. These two psalms show readers how God is working out his will in the world; namely, through his Word and through his promised Messiah. As God works in these two ways, as exemplified in Psalms 1 and 2 respectively, he gathers a community of followers to live under his Word and to follow his Messiah.²⁰

Essential to the life of happiness, of wholeness, according to Psalm 1, is consistent meditation on God's *Torah*, or law. Psalm 1 is not alone in laying out the two ways to live (God-ignoring, God-belittling self-rule, or faithful submission to God's Word). This psalm finds a counterpart in Jesus' teaching at Matthew 7:13-14, when he talks about the broad way that leads to destruction and the narrow way that leads to life. Just a few verses later (Matt 7:17-19) Jesus echoes Psalm 1 in his words about the trees with good and bad fruit.²¹ In the Old Testament, Jeremiah 17:5-8 is quite close to Psalm 1 in its wording and meaning.²² Old Testament scholar Arthur Weiser summarizes the psalm: "The true meaning and value of life is to be found not in success as such but in that joyous and unshakeable trust in God which cannot be broken."²³

The Psalm opens with the word "blessed," sometimes translated "happy."²⁴ This statement of blessedness is a beatitude. Jesus' statements of blessedness are the most famous beatitudes in the Bible, but there are many beatitudes in the Old Testament.

The blessedness will first be described by what the blessed man does not do. Psalm 1:1 says, "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in

²⁰ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobsen, and Turner, *Psalms*, 57.

²¹ Arthur L. Weiser, *Psalms: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1962), 103.

²² Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 63.

²³ Weiser, *Psalms*, 106.

²⁴ This translation is a poor choice in American culture, where happiness is so often a fleeting attachment to positive circumstances.

the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.” The man is described as not being on the path that leads to destruction. The wicked person walks down a path that leads to judgement and despair. The righteous person walks down a path that provides a worthwhile pursuit (meditating on the law of the Lord, thus knowing God) and a desirable end.²⁵ The emphasis at this point in the psalm is on the blessed man, though, and what he does not do. The Hebrew is emphatic in its use of the word “not” (lō’) in verse 1, bringing home the truth that the righteous man is not characterized by the kind of wickedness in verse 1.²⁶

Initially, the numbering in the psalm is noteworthy. The righteous man at first is on his own, set up against the three (the wicked, the sinner, and the scoffer) and their companions. As is often the case in the Bible, the odds are set against God’s people. Rolf Jacobsen writes, “One who walks in the way of the righteous must struggle against the traffic, buffeting against the currents of peer pressure and group-think. Yet in spite of this, it is still the way of happiness.”²⁷

Kidner says the three descriptions of the wicked in verse 1 correspond to the ideas of thinking, behaving, and belonging.²⁸ Sin is entered into by degrees. First there is walking, just being part of the worldly system and beginning to yield to its ways. This is followed by standing, growing accustomed to God-ignoring ways. Finally, the godless life becomes one’s way of life. Those who sit in the seat of the mocker provide a kind of parody of ancient cities where leaders sat at the city gate to render godly judgments. These gather instead to mock God. Meditation on God’s Word is the farthest thing from

²⁵ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobsen, and Turner, *Psalms*, 58.

²⁶ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobsen, and Turner, *Psalms*, 60.

²⁷ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobsen, and Turner, *Psalms*, 60.

²⁸ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 64.

their minds.²⁹ In and of itself, the ideas of walking, standing, and sitting are not negative concepts. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 uses the words to speak of the person who follows after God's commandments.³⁰

The message of verse 1, then, is not that living in the world is inherently evil, but that conforming to its patterns leads to destruction. As Weiser declares,

Anyone whose life at the present time is rootless and lacking any inner meaning because he is godless, will not be able to hold his own either when he sees himself arraigned at the judgement seat of God and has to face God alone. God is in everything which is being done according to his will; it is he, and not man, who secures the stability of man's life; anything, however, which is done apart from God is bound to perish.³¹

In contrast to the wicked, verse 2 describes the blessed one as one "whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night." Those who meditate on the law of the Lord find life in God. Understanding the word "law" in the context of Psalm 1 is critical to comprehending the psalm's meaning. "Law" here is not opposed to "grace." Nor does "law" refer here only to the first five books of the Bible. The word in Psalm 1 is better rendered "teaching," a word that encompasses law, prophetic writings, and wisdom literature. The focus then, is not simply on God's commands but on knowing God himself through his scriptures. Mays writes, "This is why the *Torah* is a delight, not because it is an available instrument of self-righteousness, material for a program of self-justification, but because the Lord reaches, touches, and shapes the human soul through it."³²

The verb *hāgā* normally translated as "meditates," is interesting. To most modern believers, meditation is thought of as a wholly internal activity, a mental exercise. For many believers, apparently influenced by non-Christian thought about the practice

²⁹ John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 83.

³⁰ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobsen, and Turner, *Psalms*, 61.

³¹ Weiser, *Psalms*, 107-8.

³² James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 42.

increasingly common in contemporary culture, meditation is even cut off from the Bible, so that it becomes more a matter of emptying one's mind than a matter of being filled with God's truth. But readers must remember that ancient Israel was an oral culture. These psalms were read, and sung, aloud. Thus meditation in Psalm 1 is a much more expressive, outward kind of activity. Well-known pastor Eugene Peterson writes, "In the language of the psalmist, this word meditate has to do with slow eating, literally to slowly chew or masticate or suck on a lollipop. My understanding of meditate in Psalm 1 took on a whole different meaning when I came across the same Hebrew word in Isaiah in the sentence 'As a lion or a young lion growls over its prey'" (31:4, NRSV).³³

Meditation on the teachings of God in his Word is to be the constant focus of the righteous man. The result of this focus on Scripture is stability of life and strength. This principle is illustrated in Joshua 1:8, where God commands Joshua, Moses' protégé: "Keep this book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." Seen here is both the connection between meditation and speaking God's Word and the promise of blessing through meditation. The other truth that is plain from Joshua is that meditation must lead to action. True meditation leads to godly living.

In Psalm 1, the state of blessedness for the man who walks away from sin and who walks instead in the truth of God is expressed in verse 3: "That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers." However, the blessedness is not described as a reward but as a result. As a tree with a constant supply of water will flourish, so will the man who avoids sin and meditates on God's Word. The tree of a godly man's life is fruitful, and its leaf does not wither. In Ancient Near Eastern terms, this meant the well-watered tree could stand the intense heat and summer winds and make it through any

³³ Eugene Peterson, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire: A Conversation on the Ways of God Formed by the Word of God* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2017), 108.

drought, which points to the emotional stability and integrity of the godly man who makes God's Word his delight.

Verse 4 contrasts sharply in the Hebrew as it describes the wicked. "Not so the wicked!" The transition between the serenity of verse 3 and the opening of verse 4 is jarring. The transition to a new metaphor also has a jarring effect. The wicked are not compared to a dry bush or prickly shrub, in contrast to the vibrant tree of verse 3. The comparison is worse. They are chaff. They are the husks of grain flung into the sky to be carried away by the wind. The tree in verse 3 does not wither in the hot winds of summer, but the wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away. Without drawing direct parallels or pressing the symbolism the truth is clear enough that in the man who avoids sin and meditates on God's truth there is stability and fruitfulness and health while with the wicked man there is, like chaff, rootlessness, weightlessness, and uselessness.³⁴

The contrasts of these two ways to live leads to verses 5 and 6, where the destiny of the righteous and wicked are unfolded. For the wicked, there is no hope of righteous standing before the great Judge, the Lord himself. Verse 5 says, "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." Further, there is no place of belonging with the people of God. Having gone their own way, the wicked in the end are left separated from God and his people.³⁵

The righteous, on the other hand, have found a home with God and with one another. The righteous are in an assembly in verse 5 and in verse 6 the psalmist says, "For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous." For the first time in the psalm, the word "righteous" is used in the plural. There is now a true community for the people of God to help them withstand the throngs of wickedness on the path of sin.³⁶ Not only is

³⁴ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 65.

³⁵ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 65.

³⁶ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobsen, and Turner, *Psalms*, 63.

the assembly of the righteous highlighted for the first time in this last section of the psalm, but God himself makes his first active appearance. He was referred to earlier with reference to his law, but now he is front and center in the action of the psalm.³⁷ Like the book of Ecclesiastes, with its scant mention of God but its call at the end of the book to “remember the Creator in the days of your youth,” so Psalm 1 closes on a high note of faith-affirming orthodoxy.³⁸

The good news of verse 6 is that the Lord knows the way of the righteous. The Hebrew verb *yāda* ‘ is sometimes translated as “watch over,” as in the NIV, for example. But the translation “knows” is better, as it points to the intimate relationship of God to his people. This translation helps readers not to associate knowledge merely with information. Instead, as Peterson claims, we must approach God’s knowing his people as “firsthand relationship, personal knowledge, historical, and existential.”³⁹

In contrast to the righteous, who are known by God, the wicked, who have always sought their own way, are left alone to go down the path of destruction. The Bible does speak elsewhere of God’s punishment of the wicked and of his direct judgement of sin, though in Psalm 1, as commentator Peter Craigie says, “The doom of the wicked, as it is expressed in this psalm, is not primarily a punishment, any more than the happiness of the righteous is a reward. Each is presented as the natural outcome of a way of life which has been chosen.”⁴⁰ The two ways to live part at the Last Judgment, without a third way in between. How important then, for time and eternity, that God’s people be wholly his, submitted to his truth, not walking in wickedness but living by God’s Word. Indeed, when believers take up the discipline of Bible meditation, great blessing is promised. As the Lord Jesus said in Luke 11:28, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God

³⁷ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobsen, and Turner, *Psalms*, 63.

³⁸ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 90. See Eccl 12:1.

³⁹ Peterson, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*, 111.

⁴⁰ Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 61.

and obey it.”

The Personal Spiritual Discipline of Prayer for Emotional Health: Philippians 4:1-7

The power of the personal spiritual discipline of prayer to foster emotional health is seen in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Written from prison but permeated with joy, Paul’s brief letter to Philippi has provided great comfort to Christians for two millennia. The great promise of prayer’s efficacy in verse 6 has been a particular comfort to followers of Jesus through the ages.

Philippians 4:1 functions as a transitional verse from the polemical third chapter to the personal fourth chapter.⁴¹ The fourth chapter makes for a lengthy closure to the letter, one filled with personal statements, exhortations, and words of comfort. These statements are made in the context of Christian community. Although individual members of the church in Philippi are named in this section, always in the background is Paul’s concern for the church as a whole.

Paul loves this church deeply, but he recognizes at the time of the writing of this letter, the church is divided.⁴² There have been signs throughout the letter that there was division at Philippi. The exhortation of 2:1-11 is particularly noteworthy, with its insistence on single-mindedness, unselfishness, and humility.⁴³

Philippians 4:1 begins with a “therefore” that looks back to the contents of chapter 3. Believers are to stand firm in the Lord because of their union with Christ (3:7-

⁴¹ Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word, 2015), 238.

⁴² Walter G. Hansen, *Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 278.

⁴³ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 238. The exhortation to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel is replete with calls to oneness (see 1:27-30). Phil 2:14, with its command to do all without grumbling or arguing, likewise seems to point to an unsettled church. The positive example of Timothy in chap. 2, as contrasted in v. 21 with those who look out for themselves, hints at problems at Philippi.

17), the destiny of those who stand as enemies of the cross (3:18-19), the reality of their heavenly citizenship (3:20-21), and in the present passage, the tender love Paul expresses to the Philippians.⁴⁴

The combination of exhortation and comfort so common in Paul shines through in verse 1. The Philippians, in spite of their troubles, are his beloved brothers and sisters. In his imprisoned state Paul longs for those he loves so much. They are his dear friends. More than that, they are his joy and crown. In a letter that is centrally about joy, Paul roots his joy not only in the gospel of Christ but, through the gospel of Christ, in the people of God. Paul says the Philippians are his “crown.” Here he likely has in mind the laurel crown of the athletic victor and his focus, based on context, is likely the present rather than the future. These precious believers in Philippi are a sign to Paul that he has “fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7-8). While Paul in his other writings (even in Philippians 1) does look to his heavenly reward, here the focus is on the present blessing the Philippian church has brought to his life.⁴⁵

With the overflow of love Paul expresses to the Philippians in 4:1, there is also a word of exhortation: “Stand firm in the Lord.” By using this word *στήκετε*, (“stand firm),” Paul describes the believers at Philippi as soldiers who are called to stand at their post even under great pressure.

The pressures of the church at Philippi were common to the churches of Paul’s day and included external persecution, the threats of false teachers, and internal conflict among the body of believers. What is unique about the church in Philippi is that Paul names the individuals involved in the conflict. Even in 1 Corinthians, in the case of horrific

⁴⁴ Hansen, *Philippians*, 278-79.

⁴⁵ Though Paul often expresses his love to the people of God in the various churches of his ministry, the church in Philippi seems to receive the most effusive expressions of love. For example, Phil 1:7-8 reads, “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Jesus Christ.”

sexual sin, Paul did not name the perpetrator. But in Philippians, Paul names those at the center of the conflict: “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil 4:2). The fact that Paul calls these women by name in a letter that would be read to the entire church shows that this was not some minor dispute but was a conflict that had major ramifications for the whole assembly.⁴⁶ Notable New Testament professor Moises Silva writes, “The apostle’s directness confirms how close he felt to this church; one does not take risks of this sort unless one can depend on thick cushions of love and trust to absorb the impact of a rebuke.”⁴⁷

Paul is careful to address the women equally, repeating the phrase “I plead with” before each name. Paul also mixes commendation in with his exhortation. Paul valued these women as trusted co-workers in the gospel. This is why their conflict is so concerning to him: the power and reputation of the gospel is at stake. There is here, then, a clear rebuke of two valued associates.

The serious nature of the issue between Euodia and Syntyche is often lost on readers and hearers today. Those who preach this passage often frame the dispute as a petty argument between two women with too much time on their hands. However, the fact that the church in Philippi began under the auspices of faithful women like Lydia means that this dispute must have been quite substantial and significant.⁴⁸

Though the precise nature of the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche is unknown, Paul’s admonition to them is known. He calls them to: τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν (“agree with each other, be of the same mind”). This rich phrase, given in an exhortation to the whole church in 2:2, points to a total harmony of life between the two women. Professor

⁴⁶ Frank S. Thielman, *Philippians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 216.

⁴⁷ Moises Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 190.

⁴⁸ Silva, *Philippians*, 192. See also the story of the church in Philippi in Acts 16:11-15.

Frank Thielman says, “They should be in Spirit-produced fellowship with one another, and this relationship should be characterized by ‘tenderness and compassion,’ a mutual love, and a unity of purpose. It should, in addition, lead them to put the interests of the other ahead of their own interests.”⁴⁹ How can this reconciliation take place? Only “in the Lord.” Only through a living relationship with Christ can these women find the resources they will need to forgive one another.

However, the resources of Christ are often administered through the people of God, so Paul calls on a third party to intervene to help these women reconcile. The emphatic particle “yes,” with the statement of request for help from the true companion, intensifies Paul’s petition.⁵⁰ These women had struggled with Paul to spread the gospel, like athletes on the field of competition. Now Paul asks the loyal companion to struggle to help these women come back together.

The identity of the true companion is not stated but he, along with Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, and the rest of Paul’s co-workers are all in the “book of life,” according to verse 3.⁵¹ Thielman says that this signifies “a traditional title of honor frequently used in Jewish literature for the people of God who have suffered persecution but have nevertheless remained faithful (Dan. 12:1; Rev. 3:5; cf. Isa. 4:3; Luke 10:20).”⁵² Paul is making it clear that conflicts among believers are to be dealt with lovingly, directly, and quickly. Leaving disagreements and disputes to fester in the dark is not an option for the people of God. The dispute of verses 2-3 is in the background of the exhortations given to the church in verses 4-7. The tension in the church in Philippi must have been thick, as

⁴⁹ Thielman, *Philippians*, 216.

⁵⁰ Hansen, *Philippians*, 284.

⁵¹ Suggestions for the identity of the loyal companion include Timothy, Epaphroditus, Luke, Lydia, and even a person with the name “Syzygus,” the Greek word translated “loyal companion.”

⁵² Thielman, *Philippians*, 217.

would be the case in any church where there is significant conflict between key members. The admonitions, then, of the next section, should be viewed with the backdrop of the conflict between these key women of the church in mind.

Verse 4 tells readers first to “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Silva declares, “Neither Paul’s difficult circumstances nor the frightening dangers faced by the Philippians can be allowed to eclipse Christian joy as the mark of faith.”⁵³ Paul’s idea of joy in the Lord is a deep-seated confidence in God in spite of circumstances. Because of this, it can be had πάντοτε (always), depending, as it does, not on changing times but on an unchanging God.

British New Testament scholar N. T. Wright provides needed perspective on Paul’s call to rejoice:

We normally understand that word today, I think, as meaning something that happens inside people, a sense of joy welling up and making them happy from within. All that is important, and is contained within Paul’s command; but in his world and culture this rejoicing would have meant (what we would call) public celebration. The world all around, in Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth and elsewhere used to organize great festivals, games and shows to celebrate their gods and their cities, not least the new “god,” Caesar himself. Why shouldn’t the followers of King Jesus celebrate exuberantly? It’s only right; and celebrating Jesus as Lord encourages and strengthens loyalty and obedience to him.⁵⁴

Paul repeats the call to rejoice as a way of emphasizing its value in trying times, then he balances the call to effusive celebration with a charge to gentleness. Wright helpfully adds, “At the same time, it’s interesting that he at once says that the public image of the Christian church should be of a gentle, gracious community (verse 5). Exuberance must not turn into mere extrovert enthusiasm which squashes sensitive souls and offends those who are by nature quiet and reserved.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Silva, *Philippians*, 194.

⁵⁴ N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 130.

⁵⁵ Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 131.

The Pastoral Epistles put a premium on gentleness. It is a qualification for elders in 1 Timothy 3:2 and a call to all members of the church in Titus 3:3. The book of James further declares that the wisdom from above is characterized by gentleness.⁵⁶

Silva says, “Paul expects believers to be guided by a frame of mind that does not put priority on personal rights. Believers whose primary concern is whether or not they are being dealt with fairly will fail to exercise a fundamental element of Christian behavior: preferring others above themselves.”⁵⁷

In the midst of the exhortation to rejoice and display gentleness Paul inserts the line, “the Lord is near.” The meaning of this phrase here is uncertain. It could be Paul’s way of reminding the Philippians that the Lord is present and aware of each person’s conduct and able to help each person in need. The phrase may also point to the imminent return of Christ, reminding the church in Philippi that their troubles will soon be over, and God will set all things right. But scholar Gerald Hawthorne believes Paul’s ambiguity is intentional:

Just possibly Paul deliberately chose this particular word, ἐγγύς, “near,” with all its ambiguity precisely to include both ideas, of time and of space, together: the Lord who will soon return is the Lord who once came so close to humanity (Phil 2:6–8) as actually to share the human lot and who though absent now in body is still near at hand in his Spirit to guide, instruct, and encourage.⁵⁸

Rejoicing in the Lord and walking in gentleness make a good beginning on the path of emotional stability and spiritual health, but it is with verse 6, and the call to prayer, that the real power for overcoming anxiety is found. In verse 6 Paul writes, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

Paul echoes the teaching of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount by telling his readers to “not be anxious about anything” (Matt 6:25-34). The Philippians had good reason to be

⁵⁶ Hansen, *Philippians*, 288.

⁵⁷ Silva, *Philippians*, 194.

⁵⁸ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 245.

anxious. Not only were they going through a significant church conflict between two of their most valued members, but they were a church that had known poverty, and a church under threat of false teachers (2 Cor 8:1-2). When Paul's own experience of constant persecution and imprisonment is considered, the command to not be anxious about anything is seen for the comprehensive command it is for the first readers of this letter and for all subsequent readers. The antidote to anxiety is prayer and petition with thanksgiving. Hawthorne writes emphatically,

What then is the alternative to worry? How does one gain and keep one's equilibrium in a world heaving with anxiety-creating situations? Paul's answer: by prayer. With the use of three synonyms strung together in a row—προσευχῇ, “prayer,” δεήσει, “petition,” and αἰτήματα, “requests”—Paul emphatically urges the Philippians to find release from anxiety in prayer and yet more prayer.⁵⁹

Hansen concurs: “Prayer orients our lives toward God; we grow in an open relationship with God by presenting our specific desires and needs to him.”⁶⁰

Importantly, Paul anchors the power of prayer to the necessity of thanksgiving. Without thanksgiving, believers are prone to complain and to treat God as a dispenser of personal desires rather than a faithful Lord. In this way, prayer not only answers the human tendency to worry but also addresses the temptation to grumble and complain, which Paul has already highlighted in Philippians 2:14. Prayer turns the heart of the believer away from anxiety and toward the heart of God.

The result of this life of prayer is the “peace of God, which transcends all understanding.” This peace “will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). The peace Paul is speaking of in verse 7 is not the peace of God that has come to the Philippians through their justification. He is also not describing a peace that is merely a matter of good feelings. Paul describes a peace that guards heart and mind. He describes a peace too vast to understand and too perfect to ever devise.

⁵⁹ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 245.

⁶⁰ Hansen, *Philippians*, 291.

This peace will stand like a guard over the prayerful believer. This military term, φρουρεῖν, refers to a group of soldiers standing guard over a city to protect it from an assault.⁶¹ Paul says the peace of God will guard both the minds and the hearts of believers.

The answer to anxiety, then, is the peace of God through prayer. This peace is the peace of God. It is not the peace of changed circumstances, though sometimes God is merciful to bring relief from trying circumstances. It is a peace that is beyond knowledge. Commentator R. R. Melick writes, “When believers cannot make sense of their lives, they can lean on God in prayer and find peace.”⁶² Paul was speaking to a congregation of believers when he called the church in Philippi to prayer. Praying together was certainly a part of this summons to prayer but the plural “hearts” and “minds” in verse 7 points to an individual aspect to his call as well. Paul expects his words here to affect each member of the church in Philippi as each member battles anxiety through coming to God in prayer.

As believers in Christ seek unity and take Paul’s exhortations in Philippians 4:4-7 to heart, peace and stability of mind and heart will result. Therefore, the practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer, of gratefully casting anxieties on the Lord, is essential to emotional health.

The Corporate Discipline of Worship for Emotional Health: Psalm 40

David wrote Psalm 40 to express his praise to God for past faithfulness and to call on God for present help. It is a psalm that highlights the blessing of the corporate discipline of worship within the context of emotional distress. Thus, it is a fitting scripture for consideration in the context of a study of spiritual disciplines and emotional health.

Frequently, psalms begin with prayer and end with praise, but in the case of Psalm 40, this order is reversed. Additionally, Psalm 40:13-17 is repeated later in the

⁶¹ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 247.

⁶² R. R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 149-50.

psalter, appearing in a slightly modified form as Psalm 70. Because of these irregularities, some scholars have suggested that Psalm 40 is a composite document, cobbled together from a variety of sources. However, this view is not persuasive, primarily because many other psalms begin with praise and end with prayer (Pss 27 and 89, for example).⁶³

Psalm 40 is a psalm of King David. Pastor and author John Piper describes David's perspective at the beginning of the Psalm:

The king of Israel is in “the pit of destruction” and “the miry bog”—descriptions of his spiritual condition. The song of praise is coming, he says, but it is not now on his lips. It is as if David had fallen into a deep, dark well and plunged into life-threatening mud. In this pit of mud and destruction there is a sense of helplessness and desperation. Suddenly air, just air, is worth a million dollars. Helplessness, desperation, Waiting in Darkness, apparent hopelessness, the breaking point for the overworked businessman, the outer limits of exasperation for the mother of three constantly crying children, the impossible expectations of too many classes in school, the grinding stress of a lingering illness, the imminent attack of a powerful enemy. It is good that we don't know what the experience was. It makes it easier to see ourselves in the pit with the king.⁶⁴

The pit of trauma, hardship, and inner conflict runs throughout the psalm. As a whole, the psalms are a place where the conflicts and struggles of believer's lives are exposed. This exposure is healthy. The psalms offer a way through trauma to happiness for those who read and pray them.⁶⁵ Psalm 40, given in the context of public worship to the people of God, is among the most realistic and powerful portrayals of life's harsh realities and God's sufficient grace.

The psalm begins with a recollection of God's past faithfulness (40:1-10). This remembrance is not given to God but to the congregation and all those who would later read the psalm. The second section of the psalm (40:11-17) is David's direct petition to

⁶³ Mays, *Psalms*, 167.

⁶⁴ John Piper, *When the Darkness Will Not Lift: Doing What We Can While We Wait for God—and Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 34-35.

⁶⁵ Brent A. Strawn, “Trauma, Psalmic Disclosure, and Authentic Happiness,” in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 144. Strawn mentions numerous studies that confirm the idea that speaking out about one's trauma is a key element to overcoming it, while pushing it down is usually unproductive.

God. True worship has a horizontal and a vertical dimension. This is seen in modern congregational singing. Many hymns and choruses are directed to God (for example, the hymn “How Great Thou Art”). On the other hand, some songs are proclamations of believers to one another (the hymn “How Firm a Foundation” fits this description). Worship concerns the revelation of God’s nature and works, and the relationship believers have with him by his grace. Believers praise God and testify to one another every time they gather together in God’s presence for worship.

David’s testimony is initially an expression of his cry to God: “I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.” Piper exclaims,

One of the reasons God loved David so much was that he cried so much. “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping” (Ps. 6:6). “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?” (Ps. 56:8). Indeed they are! “Blessed are those who mourn” (Matt. 5:4). It is a beautiful thing when a broken man genuinely cries out to God.⁶⁶

Even more beautiful is the kindness of God to turn toward his people who call on him. David recalls God meeting him in his waiting. How long David waited or what circumstances he faced that made him so desperate is unknown. It is possible, especially in light of how the words in verse 6 are reminiscent of Samuel’s declaration to Saul that the kingdom had been taken from him (cf. 1 Sam 15:24), that David is referring to the period when his life was being pursued by jealous King Saul.

Throughout his life, David found God faithful. David says in verse 2, “He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.” Jeremiah had likewise been confined in such a pit, but his was a literal one (Jer 38). Pits like the one into which Jeremiah was cast were often muddy cisterns, exposed to the elements and a place where a person could perish if no one came to their aid. While David could be referring to a literal pit, it is more likely that he speaks metaphorically, intending his readers to understand that his struggles made him like a

⁶⁶ Piper, *When the Darkness Will Not Lift*, 35.

man stuck in a miry hole. Interestingly, in the Old Testament, the pit often refers to the grave and to Sheol (see Ps 28:1; 30:3). In today's language, David is expressing the idea that he has been through a hellish trial. As is so often the case in the Bible, God does not merely deliver his people from trouble, he leads them into newness of life. David recounts this deliverance as that which made him sing a hymn of praise to God. The song is new in two ways, as explained by Goldingay: "The song may be a renewed song, because the worshipper may well not have been singing when overwhelmed by the flood, and also a fresh song, because the experience of Yhwh's deliverance gives the worshipper a fresh story to sing."⁶⁷

Notably, David here affirms that his song is a song of praise to "our God." Further, he says, "Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in God." Thus, as Weiser reminds his readers, "The individual personal life lived by faith is of significance also for everybody else."⁶⁸ Goldingay adds, "An act of deliverance is never complete until it has led to the worshipper offering the kind of testimony that we are reading."⁶⁹ The people of God, when seeing the hand of God, tremble and believe. Weiser states, "The genuineness and truth of the experience of the presence of God is demonstrated precisely by this strange combination of fear and trust."⁷⁰

In verses 4 and 5, David shifts from recounting God's past deliverance to praising God for his power and blessings. The individual deliverance of David forms the backdrop for congregational praise. As Craigie writes, "God's acts of righteousness become the property of the community as a whole."⁷¹

David does not center his concept of God in a single dramatic deliverance.

⁶⁷ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 570.

⁶⁸ Weiser, *Psalms*, 336.

⁶⁹ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 570.

⁷⁰ Weiser, *Psalms*, 336.

⁷¹ Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 316.

Instead, he recounts “many” wonders God has done. God’s powerful works show that the true and living God is greater than the idols of verse 5, idols that sway the hearts of the proud but not those who trust in the Lord. The people of God have come to see that God is incomparable in his majesty and in the multitude of his deeds.

Gathered in worship with God’s people, David has praised God for his deliverance and his majesty. In verses 6-8 he discusses how believers ought to relate to this great and powerful God. Surprisingly, David does not advocate coming to God through sacrifice, although sacrifice is not being criticized in Psalm 40. Instead, David is saying that more is required than external sacrifice if one is to worship God faithfully.⁷² The whole-hearted devotion to God evident in David’s words is the true sacrifice, the giving of oneself to God. Thus, when the book of Hebrews picks up this passage from Psalm 40 and applies it to Christ, he is found to live, both in action and example, the ultimate life of sacrifice. Craigie elaborates in his commentary on Psalms:

In one sense, Hebrews goes beyond Ps 40; the perpetual sacrifices of the past have become obsolete in terms of the permanent sacrifice of Christ. But in another sense, the writer of the Epistle grasps the fundamental sense of the psalm and neatly reverses it. The king in the ancient kingdom had been required to offer sacrifices, but that was not all; beyond the formalities of the cult, obedience and profound spirituality were required of him, for sacrifices in and of themselves achieved nothing. In Christ, says the writer of the Epistle, there is a reversal; first, he affirms his intention to do the divine will (Heb 10:9), and that intention in turn leads back inevitably to sacrifice, but now to the sacrifice that ends all sacrifices.⁷³

Like a beautiful symphony in two movements, Psalm 40 reaches the climax of the first movement of praise in verses 9-10.⁷⁴ The joyful conclusion to this first section is David’s affirmation that he speaks in praise of God in the midst of the assembly. Spiritual leadership was his responsibility as King of Israel, but now this same responsibility—this call to declare the praises of God to one another—falls to every believer (see Eph 5:18).

⁷² Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 198.

⁷³ Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 317.

⁷⁴ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobsen, and Turner, *Psalms*, 379.

After speaking to the people of his kingdom in verses 1-10, David now speaks to his Lord and King in verses 11-17. David had been in a miry pit of external trials at the beginning of the psalm and he recounted God's deliverance. But now David is facing a different kind of trial. He needs mercy, love, and faithfulness from God. David is not threatened by an army or illness or any other external threat. This time, David's own heart is the problem. Rather than feeling abandoned by God, David acknowledges that he has abandoned God (Pss 22:1, 71:11). David admits that he is struggling with sin and that this state of sin has rendered him blind to reality. The man who was confident that his deliverance would cause many to see and fear God now struggles to see God himself.

David's move from praise to prayer, from trial to deliverance to other trials is true to the experience of believers through the ages. Life is not an unbroken upward climb of spiritual progress. Scholar Rolf Jacobson reminds readers, "Those who praise God with feet set on secure rocks today may cry to the Lord from the watery depths tomorrow."⁷⁵

Believers move from desperation to dependence as they draw near to God in worship. The prayer suggests hope, but it also suggests a major crisis. The psalm concludes with the petition that God will not delay but will act as recounted at the beginning of the text. Brueggemann helpfully reflects on this psalm:

The sequence of the psalm is thus instructive: trouble and woe can always come. The psalm suggests that in the midst of this mix of life and faith, openness to divine instruction, singing of divine involvement in life, and trust in divine providence are commendable. The realistic faith of Psalm 40 urges hope that God will be involved in the midst of the pilgrimage.⁷⁶

The closing words of this psalm remind readers that the man who was mightily delivered once will soon again find himself in need of deliverance. In verse 10, when David says, "I am poor and needy, may my LORD take thought for me!," he is speaking words that could be applied to all believers at one time or another. It is critical for

⁷⁵ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobsen, and Turner, *Psalms*, 383.

⁷⁶ Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 197.

believers today to recognize that life is filled with challenges and blessings and that God is in the midst of all of life. Corporate worship helps to remind believers of their true identity, of God's true nature, and of God's power to deliver. It is evident from Psalm 40 that believers dealing with grief will be blessed as they join together with other believers to recount the goodness of God and call on him for mercy.

The Corporate Discipline of Giving for Emotional Health: 2 Corinthians 8:1-6

The pain of emotional distress often has a paralyzing effect on the soul because trouble tends to cause people to look inward and become self-focused. The corporate discipline of giving is a wonderful remedy for emotional distress. As grieving Christians band together to share their resources for the extension of God's kingdom, the building of the church body, and for the needs of others, their own burdens are lifted, and their hearts are strengthened. Paul's words to the church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 8:1-6 confirm the impulse to meet needs with a spirit of giving. The text states,

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.

Paul's second letter to Corinth was written in a period of great trial for the apostle and real tension with the church in Corinth. An earlier visit had gone poorly, and an earlier letter had been poorly received. Therefore, Paul spent the first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians defending his apostolic authority. Likewise, the last four chapters of this letter were concerned with Paul taking on his theological foes and upholding his calling as an apostle sent by Christ. However, in the middle of the book, with chapters 8 and 9, there is an excursus to discuss the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. This abrupt shift in the content of the letter has led some scholars to question whether the material in

chapters 8 and 9 was later inserted into the body of the letter. However, a simple reading of 2 Corinthians reveals a great deal of connection between the rest of the letter and these two central chapters. First, there is the matter of Titus, Paul's beloved fellow worker, who is spoken of at length in chapter 7, and whose ministry among the Corinthians has been well-received. Also in chapter 7 there is a description of the church in Macedonia, a key place in chapters 8 and 9. Far from being separate from the rest of the book, these two elements tie chapters 8 and 9 to the letter as a whole. From a thematic perspective there is also an obvious link. The message of 2 Corinthians is not just about Paul's apostolic authority, it is about the power of the gospel to change lives. What better way for the church in Corinth to demonstrate that they are new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:11-21) than to serve the desperately needy church at Jerusalem through giving? New Testament scholar Murray Harris further notes, "While the focus of chapters 1-7 is Paul's defense of his apostolic authority, and the focus of chapters 10 and 11 is Paul's opponents, chapters 8 and 9 tie the two sections together because it was Paul's opponents who were hindering the giving project that Paul endorsed."⁷⁷

The physical destination of the collection Paul urges on the Corinthians is Jerusalem, although Paul never says so here in 2 Corinthians 8.⁷⁸ The reason for the Jerusalem church's poverty can only be guessed. Readers know from Acts 6 that many widows in the church in Jerusalem needed care and also, many Christians of a Jewish background felt a pull to come live their final years in the Holy City, perhaps in expectation of the resurrection.⁷⁹

The Jerusalem collection is mentioned in many places in Paul's writings, including Romans, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians. The collection was more than simple

⁷⁷ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 553.

⁷⁸ The destination of the collection is seen by reading 1 Cor 16:3.

⁷⁹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 418.

charity. Paul's motivation was deeply theological. He wanted the Corinthians to experience God's sanctifying work through the grace of giving to others. Paul wanted the saints at Corinth to be like their Savior who, "though he was rich became poor, that through his poverty we might become rich" (2 Cor 8:8). Paul further saw the collection as a way to open the door to fellowship between believers of Gentile background and those of Jewish background. The collection would provide an opportunity for the two to be made one in Christ not only in identity but in practice (Eph 2:11-22). Finally, as Garland writes, "Giving to the church in Jerusalem gives the church in Corinth an opportunity to participate in something greater than themselves."⁸⁰

As chapter 8 opens, Paul is aware that his relationship with the church at Corinth is on shaky ground with many church members actively opposing his ministry. Titus has had an encouraging encounter with the church (7:7) and Paul himself has expressed "complete confidence" in the church (7:16), but Paul still comes at the issue of the collection in a roundabout way, by pointing to the extraordinary generosity the Macedonians have already demonstrated in their giving.

From the beginning of chapter 8, Paul emphasizes the word "grace," a word that appears ten times in these two chapters with varying nuances. This grace has come to the churches of Macedonia. This would include churches like Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, churches that have been commended elsewhere in the New Testament for God's work through them. Grace does not take away the Macedonians' hardships, instead it frees them up to give. This grace was not manufactured by the Macedonians but was God's gift to them. So, Paul leads off warmly, calling his fellow believers in Corinth "brothers and sisters" for the first time since 1:8, thus affirming his love for them and his confidence in them. Ultimately, Paul is not just writing about the collection, his focus is on God's grace at work in God's people.

⁸⁰ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 364.

The description of the Macedonian churches in verse 2 is remarkable. These churches, tried and tested, poor and needy, out of abundant joy overflowed in rich generosity. According to Acts 16:15-17:11, the churches in Macedonia had faced harsh persecution from their inception from both Jewish and Gentile opponents. Joy in trial was a feature of both the Philippian and Thessalonian churches (Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 1:6).

The term translated “generosity” does not normally take that meaning in Greek. Seifrid argues persuasively that “the term *haplotēs*, which is rendered ‘generosity’ in the major English translations (ESV, NIV, NRSV), should be interpreted instead in its usual sense as ‘simplicity.’ God’s grace brings a ‘simplicity’ in human beings that opens them to a receiving-and-giving so that hidden and self-seeking motives are overcome.”⁸¹ This explanation accords well with Paul’s words about his own ministry in 4:1-7. He seeks to have the same sort of simple and guileless ministry for himself that he sees in the Macedonians. The opposite of this kind of ministry is seen in the lukewarm church of Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22), a church of great material wealth but spiritual poverty.

What explains the Macedonians acting contrary to all human expectation? How could they give beyond their natural ability and even plead for the privilege of giving to other saints in need? The simple answer is that they were a gospel people. The church in Macedonia had grasped the message Paul will take up at the end of this letter, which he had learned from the Lord: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9-10). The grace of God at work through humble hearts can bring about results above and beyond what believers can ask or imagine.

Paul seems almost dumbfounded by the transformative service of the Macedonians. He notes that it was “entirely on their own” (8:3) that they urgently pleaded to be part of the Jerusalem collection. Paul so often had to cajole, urge, and prod those he worked with, but with the churches in Macedonia, though unimpressive in the world’s eyes, he found evidence of God’s grace and spiritual growth.

⁸¹ Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 321.

Verse 4 shows that Paul saw this collection as an act of service. Martin declares, “διακονία, ‘service,’ all commentators are agreed, stands for the offering that Paul was minded to collect from his people at Corinth to support the Jerusalem community.”⁸² Giving is the end result of a heart of worship, an expression of love for God’s people. There is also a hint of the equality of Jew and Gentile here as Paul closes not by identifying the church at Jerusalem by name or by bringing their Jewish background to the fore. Rather, he simply calls them the Lord’s people. If not for 1 Corinthians 16:3, readers would not know for certain whether Paul was referring to the church at Jerusalem or to another congregation.

Matera writes concerning verse 5: “Paul is astonished because the self-giving of the Macedonians exceeded his every expectation. Even before they undertook the collection, they ‘first’ gave themselves ‘to the Lord [Christ] and to us [Paul].’”⁸³ Paul subtly underlines his apostolic authority by pointing out the allegiance of these faithful churches to his ministry calling. He also brings out the important principle of initial consecration. Before believers can give to others, they must first give themselves to the Lord.

Paul hopes the example of the Macedonians will inspire the Corinthians to excel in the grace of giving. Paul was not setting up a rival competition to see which church could give the most. He had eschewed gimmicks and manipulation long ago in his ministry (2 Cor 4:1-7). Instead, Paul is trying to inspire the Corinthians for their own joy and the good of the church in Jerusalem. For a church that had struggled with sin and been plagued with infighting and disputes, focusing outside their own circumstances to the needs of others would be a great benefit to them. At the same time Paul knew that if left to themselves, the Corinthians would probably overlook the needs of the church of Jerusalem and become occupied with their own issues. Therefore, he charged Titus with securing a

⁸² Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 434.

⁸³ Matera, *II Corinthians*, 187.

commitment to giving from the church at Corinth. Accountability can be a positive good. Since Paul stated that he had confidence in the Corinthians, he is not trying to force them into giving; he is encouraging them simply to let the grace of God flow through them in acts of love toward others.⁸⁴ About five months after Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he wrote a letter to the church in Rome. In that letter, he states that the churches in Macedonia and Achaia have given to the collection for Jerusalem (Rom 15:26-27). Corinth was located in Achaia, which means they heeded Paul's instructions here and got involved in the service of giving to the church in Jerusalem.⁸⁵

The grace of giving is a corporate activity that can greatly strengthen the lives of believers. The Macedonians, in a time of great personal hardship, banded together to financially support others in need. They had little to offer but gave all they could, and God was honored. May believers, particularly those struggling with grief, follow their example by taking up the corporate spiritual discipline of giving as a way of life.

Conclusion

The ministry of mutual comfort by the grace of God is one of the sacred privileges of Christian living but it is an often-neglected privilege. Believers get busy, occupied with their own lives. Some believers are in no position to help their fellow Christians in the path of discipleship because they are sidelined by struggles with sin and spiritual defeat. Still others are crippled by guilt because they are not resting in their identity in Christ. The practice of key spiritual disciplines can help the busy believer, the struggling disciple, and the Christian battling shame. In particular, the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible meditation, worship, and giving, as seen in the scriptural examples presented in this chapter, when faithfully practiced, will strengthen the lives of believers and provide mutual encouragement to any Christian fellowship.

⁸⁴ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 435.

⁸⁵ Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 557.

CHAPTER 3

EVANGELICAL APPROACHES TO UTILIZING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TO FOSTER EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Evangelicals have historically practiced the spiritual disciplines, but for the last forty years evangelicals in America have become increasingly interested in the practice of spiritual disciplines not only as a way to connect to God and to conform to Christlikeness, but also as a way to foster emotional health.⁸⁶ The pace of life and rapid societal change in the late twentieth century pushed many evangelicals to seek an expression of faith that dealt with the whole person and with all of life.⁸⁷ This holistic emphasis has continued to

⁸⁶ Tom Schwanda, a recently retired professor at Wheaton College who studies the history of evangelical spirituality, compellingly shows the vitality of the practice of spiritual disciplines among evangelicals from Whitefield, Wesley, and Edwards through the nineteenth century. He writes, “Evangelicals are not known for their awareness of or appreciation for their own history.” Tom Schwanda, “Evangelical Spiritual Disciplines: Practices for Knowing God,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 220. Additionally, many figures in early twentieth century evangelicalism, such as Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, were known for their practice of spiritual disciplines. Trotman, for example, early in his ministry set aside one hour for daily prayer, read the Bible daily, and aimed to memorize one verse a day. Betty Skinner, *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1974), 65.

⁸⁷ Fuller Theological Seminary professor Robert K. Johnston briefly explains the points of focus in evangelicalism in the 1960s and 1970s and then contends, “Now, as we move into the 1980s, a change has again taken place. It is not that God the Son, God the Father, or God the Holy Spirit is any less central to Christian theology. We remain committed to a triune God. Similarly, God continues to speak through his church. Nevertheless, the cutting edge of theological reflection has moved from the divine to the human. The God-intended shape of human life has become the overarching concern of evangelicals and ecumenicals alike. Evidence for this fact is as diverse as (1) the sociologically oriented biblical studies of Norman Gottwald and Wayne Meeks, (2) Wolfhart Pannenberg’s “theology from below,” (3) Ron Sider’s ethical reflections on nuclear holocaust, (4) Henri Nouwen’s books on the psychology of the Christian life, (5) Robert Roberts’s *Spirituality and Human Emotion* (1983), (6) Lewis Smedes’s book on the second tablet of the Decalogue (the part concerned with human relationships), (7) Richard Foster’s *Freedom of Simplicity* (1981), and (8) the countless books on the family that continue to be written by James Dobson, Kevin Leman, Norman Wright, and Gary Collins. (Robert K. Johnston, “What Is the Major Shift in Theological Focus?” *Christianity Today*, February 3, 1984, 78)

the present day.⁸⁸ This chapter explores the last four decades of evangelical thinking on the connection between spiritual disciplines and emotional health through surveying the works of evangelicals who have been influential in the realm of spiritual formation and exploring how they have connected the practice of spiritual disciplines to emotional health.

Defining Terms: Evangelicals, Spiritual Disciplines, and Emotional Health

Evangelicals

Perhaps one of the most confusing labels in the Christian world today is the word *evangelical*. For many people outside the church, *evangelical* is a word equated with conservative politics, as seen in past movements like the Moral Majority and some of the recent support of President Donald Trump. Among Christians, *evangelical* is still generally understood to describe Christians who are focused on the necessity of conversion, the priority of the Bible, the centrality of the cross, and the importance of a faith that is active in everyday life.⁸⁹ This delineation is important because evangelicalism serves to unite believers from diverse groups under these priorities. A Methodist evangelical, for example, will often share more spiritual common ground with an evangelical Pentecostal than with another Methodist from a non-evangelical perspective. Movements like Together for the Gospel and the influence of parachurch organizations like the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship demonstrate that evangelical priorities are often a more important source of unity than denominational identity.

⁸⁸ Ed Stetzer, "Spiritual Formation That Fits You," The Exchange (Blog), December 28, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/december/spiritual-formation-for-different-personality-types.html>. Stetzer's article discusses a variety of spiritual practices and speaks to the ongoing search among evangelicals for a spirituality that promotes growth through spiritual disciplines.

⁸⁹ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989). These characteristics, commonly known as *Bebbington's Quadrilateral*, though disputed by some scholars, have been generally accepted by scholars as the characteristics common to evangelicals.

Without an evangelical approach that takes God at His Word, centers life and godliness on the work of Jesus and the life of faith, and believes that Christianity is for all of life, the study of spiritual disciplines seems empty. In other words, evangelicals are the focus of this study because within the faith framework of evangelicalism the bringing together of spiritual disciplines and emotional health finds a real theological foundation.⁹⁰

Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines have a long history in the church. Aside from Old Testament examples, one sees the habits of Jesus to the practices of believers in the book of Acts, to the disciplines practiced and taught by the apostle Paul, the Bible reveals that people of faith have always established regular life practices aimed at fostering spiritual growth. This cultivation of life with God often led to spiritual stability and a life marked with joy. These practices carried on in the church through the centuries, were expressed in diverse settings, from the disciplines set out by the early church manual *The Didache* to the Rule of Benedict to the community of Bonhoeffer in the twentieth century.

Spiritual disciplines are personal and interpersonal practices of biblical spirituality that believers engage in consistently and intentionally to grow as followers of Christ.⁹¹ Some of these practices are done privately while others are engaged in corporately. Several spiritual disciplines may be practiced both individually and with others. For example, one may pray privately or in a small group or congregational setting.

⁹⁰ To be sure, there is a rich history of spiritual formation within the Catholic Church and mainline Protestantism. Contemporary writers like Richard Rohr and Henri Nouwen, and others have been deep influences in Christendom and have even influenced many evangelical leaders. Nevertheless, the theological foundation of these authors often does not stand up to biblical scrutiny from the perspective of those who identify more closely with the theology of the Reformation.

⁹¹ Donald S. Whitney defines spiritual disciplines as “The Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times.” Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Second Edition (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2014), 17.

There are many disciplines that almost all evangelical leaders in spiritual formation affirm. Among these disciplines are Bible reading and meditation, prayer, fasting, worship, stewardship, and service. The pioneering figure in contemporary evangelical spiritual formation, Richard Foster, lists twelve disciplines in his classic work *Celebration of Discipline*.⁹² Dallas Willard, a deeply influential teacher among evangelicals, lists fifteen disciplines in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.⁹³ Donald Whitney, among the most influential voices among evangelicals for spiritual disciplines in the new millennium, includes ten personal spiritual disciplines in his *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*.⁹⁴ Whitney's book on interpersonal spiritual disciplines, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*, contains twelve spiritual practices intended for corporate participation.⁹⁵ David Mathis' *Habits of Grace* categorizes the disciplines under the broad headings of the Word, prayer, and fellowship.⁹⁶ Mathis, a scholar at Bethlehem College and Seminary, includes several disciplines under each of these categories (for example, fasting is described in a chapter in the prayer section). Well-known evangelical leader Kenneth Boa lists twenty disciplines in his book *Conformed to His Image*, but acknowledges (as does Whitney) that there is no definitive, agreed upon list of disciplines

⁹² Foster divides the disciplines into Inward, Outward, and Corporate disciplines, with each area containing four disciplines. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988).

⁹³ Dallas Willard divides disciplines into two groups. He covers seven disciplines of abstinence and eight disciplines of engagement. He writes, "Roughly speaking, the disciplines of abstinence counteract tendencies to sins of commission, and the disciplines of engagement counteract tendencies to sins of omission." Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 175-76.

⁹⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 21ff. Whitney spends two full chapters on Bible intake as a way to emphasize its priority as a spiritual discipline.

⁹⁵ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1996).

⁹⁶ David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus Through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 37ff.

either in the Bible or among evangelicals.⁹⁷ Siang-Yang Tan and Douglas Gregg, coming at spiritual disciplines from an evangelical charismatic perspective, list twelve disciplines in their illuminating work *The Disciplines of the Holy Spirit*.⁹⁸ Robert Mulholland (1936-2015) was emeritus professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary and a significant influence on several current leaders in the spiritual formation movement. He viewed the spiritual disciplines narrowly, calling them the classical spiritual disciplines and limiting them to Bible reading and meditation, prayer and fasting, and worship. However, in his book *Invitation to a Journey*, Mulholland advocates two additional categories, corporate spirituality and social spirituality, which overlap with the categories offered by many of the teachers listed above.⁹⁹

While most prominent spiritual formation teachers highlight a handful of practices as the spiritual disciplines, spiritual director Adele Ahlberg Calhoun names seventy-five unique spiritual practices in her *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*. However, Calhoun herself categorizes these practices under headings that align with more traditional listings of the disciplines. For example, she lists seventeen practices under the heading “Prayer.” Still, Calhoun is an outlier since some of the practices she lists do not fit into the categories other leading teachers have observed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 82.

⁹⁸ Siang-Yang Tan and Douglas H Gregg, *Disciplines of the Holy Spirit: How to Connect to the Spirit's Power and Presence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 41ff. Similar to Foster, Tan and Gregg organize the disciplines into three groups of four disciplines each: disciplines of solitude, disciplines of surrender, and disciplines of service.

⁹⁹ Robert S. Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 165.

¹⁰⁰ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2015), 13-16. Ahlberg includes practices like care of the earth and slowing (“to curb my addiction to busyness, hurry, and workaholism; to learn to savor the moment”).

Emotional Health

Almost as difficult to define as *evangelical* is the term *emotional health*. The term finds its origins not in Scripture but in modern psychology. The National Institutes of Health define *emotional health* as “the ability to successfully handle life’s stresses and adapt to change and difficult times.”¹⁰¹ Among evangelicals, the term has gained popularity through the writings of pastor and author Peter Scazzero.¹⁰² Evangelicals have also focused on issues of psychology and emotional health through ministries like *Focus on the Family* and popular evangelical counselors like John Townsend. Reformed evangelicalism has explored issues of emotional health through the biblical counseling movement with noted authors like Jay Adams and David Powlison sharing scriptural insights to help believers cope with life’s challenges. Scripture contains the ideas commonly associated with emotional health while using different terminology.

Psalm 1 is a biblical portrait of emotional health. The person who does not walk in the ways of sin but walks with God is like a tree planted by streams of water, whose leaf does not wither and whose way is prosperous. Likewise, the Jewish idea of *shalom* connotes a sense of wholeness, well-being, and peace. Emotional health is also seen in the apostle Paul’s words in Philippians 4:11-13. Paul says he has learned the secret of being content in every circumstance. Whether he is hungry or well-fed, regardless of his circumstances, he is content. Remembering he was in prison when he wrote those words is a reminder that Paul is not just dealing in abstraction. Emotional health comes when the lives of believers are founded on the rock of Christ rather than the sinking sands of worldliness or selfishness (Matt 7:24-27). There is, then, in the biblical picture of emotional health, one of personal stability, an ability to weather storms of

¹⁰¹ National Institutes of Health, “Emotional Wellness Toolkit,” <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/emotional-wellness-toolkit>.

¹⁰² Peter Scazzero’s chief idea is that emotional health is integral to spiritual health: “Christian spirituality, without an integration of emotional health, can be deadly—to yourself, your relationship with God, and the people around you.” Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 7.

circumstance, and a heart that rejoices in the Lord. Emotional weakness, on the other hand, is found in those who are double-minded, those who are not wholly devoted to God but divided in heart. This type of person is “unstable in all his ways” (Jas 1:8).

The Bible’s teaching about emotional stability does not mean that believers are free from emotional ups and downs. Paul acknowledges the torment he felt from the thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12). He also admits that at least one time in his ministry he wanted to give up (2 Cor 1:8). Many figures in the Bible face distress and they do not always handle trouble well. Elijah, after a great victory at Mt. Carmel over the prophets of Baal, ran for his life under the threats of Jezebel and upon finding a place of hiding, sat down and wished to die (1 Kgs 19:3-5). Likewise Jonah, displeased at the repentant response of the people of Nineveh and frustrated that the vine God had given him for shade had withered, sat hopelessly under a scorching sun and a brutal wind.

Emotional health is a godly response to circumstances coupled with a deep trust in God’s rule. Such a response does not preclude sadness, weeping, grief, or anger, however. At times, these sorts of emotions are appropriate, as seen (without sin) in the ministry of Jesus (Mark 3:1-6, 11:15; John 11:35). Emotional health does not mean a believer must maintain a constant state of happiness. It means responding appropriately to circumstances and people. Emotional health should grow as one grows closer to God. Spiritual disciplines are one of God’s choice means for drawing near to Jesus and conforming to Christlikeness. Thus, the spiritual disciplines are particularly useful for fostering emotional health.

However, what does one make of the saints who have gone before, lights of church history, who seemed to be emotionally unhealthy? The great hymn writer William Cowper, who authored Christ-exalting songs of lasting distinction, tried to take his own life on more than one occasion.¹⁰³ The godly missionary David Brainerd, often beset with

¹⁰³ Thomas Taylor writes, “His views of religion were not sombre; he had experienced their cheering efficacy, and dispensed to others the consolation he had proved them to be adapted to impart. The

poor health and little ministry fruit, lived for long seasons in a state of despondency.¹⁰⁴ Methodism's founding leader, John Wesley, had a dismal marriage that contributed greatly to its sorrows.¹⁰⁵ Pastor and influential author A. W. Tozer also had marriage difficulties.¹⁰⁶ Examples abound of men and women whom God greatly used who appear to be emotionally deficient in significant ways. The simple answer to this dilemma is to affirm the sovereignty of God. The Lord often works through weakness. Every vessel God uses is imperfect. Character flaws and emotional instability cannot stop the plan of God. Throughout the Bible, God used wicked kings and unlikely characters to fulfill His purposes. At the same time, God calls His people to be holy. The question is not whether God can use someone in spite of their emotional struggles. The question is whether emotional health is a part of personal holiness.

Passages like Psalm 1 demonstrate that emotional health is, at the very least, a by-product of the pursuit of holiness. Additionally, the exhortations of the New Testament at times focus on emotional response as an important aspect of discipleship. For example, Paul's exhortation to "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4) seems to urge readers to a response to God that includes the emotions. The corporate exhortations of the New Testament also tend to emphasize activity within the fellowship of the local church that is

impression which haunted his imagination, during the partial derangement which closed the latter period of his life, was not simply erroneous or unscriptural; it was wholly out of the line of religious belief." Thomas Taylor, *The Life of William Cowper, Esq.* (London: L. & J. Seeley, 1835), 106.

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Edwards quotes David Brainerd as saying, "No poor creature stands in need of divine grace more than I, and none abuse it more than I have done, and still do." Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, vol. 7, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 159.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Southey illustrates Wesley's marital troubles with this chilling quote in a letter Wesley wrote to his wife: "Of what importance is your character to mankind? If you were buried just now, or if you had never lived, what loss would it be to the cause of God?" Robert Southey, *The Life of John Wesley* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 266.

¹⁰⁶ While his marital relationship was less tumultuous than that of John Wesley, the damning quote of his wife after his death shows, at least in her view, marital dissatisfaction. After remarrying, Ada Cecilia Odam said, "I have never been happier in my life. Aiden loved Jesus Christ, but Leonard Odam loves me." Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 160.

aimed at promoting and preserving emotional health. In 2 Corinthians 1:3 Paul reminds believers that God “comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” This phrase indicates that Paul wanted to promote within the church in Corinth a fellowship where members try to help one another through their trials and toward emotional health.

On a fundamental level, the fruit of the Spirit, listed in Galatians 5:22-23, tends to emphasize characteristics that describe emotional health. The characteristics are gifts of God’s Spirit, but believers can cultivate these gifts or neglect them. As a result, the believer’s personal sense of wholeness, the believer’s sense of emotional health, is affected by whether he is actively cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in his life or turning away from the Spirit’s work.

Believers are called to a life of holiness (see 1 Pet 1:15). Emotional health, characterized biblically as stability rooted in faith, is an important component of holiness. Believers can grow in holiness and thus in emotional health. Believers throughout the Bible and church history have utilized the spiritual disciplines to grow in holiness. Since emotional health is a component of growth in holiness, and spiritual disciplines can help believers grow in holiness, the spiritual disciplines are a means God uses to help believers grow in emotional health.

How Evangelical Leaders in Spiritual Formation Have Connected Spiritual Disciplines and Emotional Health

In evangelicalism, increased focus on spiritual disciplines and an emphasis on emotional health converged in the late 1970s. Richard Foster’s groundbreaking *Celebration of Discipline* coincided with the rise of Christian leaders like Tim LaHaye and James Dobson, who focused on bringing psychology together with the Bible to help Christians with everyday problems.¹⁰⁷ Although Dobson’s Focus on the Family organization later

¹⁰⁷ Most of Tim LaHaye’s first published works were about marriage and personal growth. *Transformed Temperaments* (1971) used the ancient idea of “bodily humours” to teach about four basic

became more associated with politics rather than psychology, and LaHaye became famous for his end-times novels, in the beginning both men were intent on a kind of synthesis of biblical truth and psychology.¹⁰⁸ In the 1980s, other psychologists in the Christian counseling movement gained a foothold in evangelical culture.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, new proponents of the spiritual disciplines, such as Dallas Willard, began to uphold the value of spiritual practices for the Christian life. In the 1990s and the opening decade of the new millennium, multiple voices arose in both areas. Donald Whitney became an influential proponent of tethering the spiritual disciplines to the Bible. Other men and women like Ken Boa, Ruth Haley Barton, and Jerry Bridges promoted various approaches to the spiritual disciplines but all viewed them as a helpful aspect of spiritual growth.¹¹⁰ Simultaneously, new leaders in Christian counseling arose. Steve Arterburn was an influential voice among evangelicals, hosting a popular radio program called *New Life Live* that dealt with personal problems from a Christian worldview. Among more conservative evangelicals, the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation, led by

personality types (sanguine, choleric, melancholy, and phlegmatic). This teaching was influential in many conservative churches in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1974, Zondervan published LaHaye's *How to Win Over Depression*, one of the early evangelical books to use the term "depression." His 1976 book, *The Act of Marriage*, was one of the first books penned by an evangelical to deal with marital sex in a straightforward manner. Although LaHaye had an interest in end-times events that is reflected in his early writings (1973's *The Beginning of the End*, for example) until the 1990s and the *Left Behind* series, LaHaye was known for his teachings relating to marriage and personal well-being.

¹⁰⁸ James Dobson's educational background was in psychology, as he served on the faculty at the University of Southern California for fourteen years. Dobson was a pioneer in the Christian counseling world. Only after the rise of Jerry Falwell's *Moral Majority* did Dobson begin to become better known for his political involvement.

¹⁰⁹ Here one might think particularly of Bill Gothard. Gothard was not trained in psychology, but his study entitled "Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts" was highly influential in the counseling ministries of many conservative evangelical and fundamentalist churches.

¹¹⁰ Jerry Bridges (1929-2016) was a trustworthy voice for conservative evangelicals. Like Whitney, his approach was deeply rooted to the Scriptures. Ruth Haley Barton remains a popular voice in spiritual formation, but her approach is less scripturally-rooted, tending toward mysticism. Ken Boa's ministry focuses primarily on personal spiritual disciplines and provides many tools and online resources designed to help believers grow spiritually (see kenboa.org).

David Powlison, became an important voice for both biblical fidelity and utilizing biblical counseling to help Christians with spiritual and emotional health.¹¹¹ In the 2010s, a more sophisticated approach to spirituality and emotional health came through the writings of men like Curt Thompson and Rob Moll.¹¹² These authors ventured into the area of neuroscience to show the body, mind, and soul connections that are essential to spiritual health and emotional growth.¹¹³ While the standard works on spiritual disciplines had been broadly accepted, David Mathis arose as an additional conservative evangelical voice promoting the value of a disciplined life.¹¹⁴

With Peter Scazzero's 2006 book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, the connection between emotional health and spiritual life was communicated even more explicitly. Scazzero's use of spiritual disciplines leans toward the contemplative and is highly individualized rather than corporate, but his book is still valuable because it attempts to reveal the strong biblical link between emotional health and spiritual health.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ See www.stevearterburn.com and www.ccef.org for more information.

¹¹² Curt Thompson is a proponent of the science of neuroplasticity, the idea that the brain can retrain itself to deal with trauma or to move in a new direction. He sees spiritual disciplines as a vital aid in the rewiring the brain needs. He writes, "In many ways, these disciplines, when practiced faithfully (but without burden), do the very things we have been discussing to help integrate our brains." Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010), 175.

¹¹³ Rob Moll contends that the scientific truths about neuroplasticity are connected not only to thoughts but to bodily action. He sees the spiritual disciplines as the actions that trigger our minds toward the healthy pathways that come with consistent thought patterns. He explains, "By pairing thought with action, the spiritual disciplines provide the routines necessary to train our bodies, and thus our minds as well, to follow after Jesus." Rob Moll, *What Your Body Knows about God: How We Are Designed to Connect, Serve, and Thrive* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2014), 116.

¹¹⁴ Mathis' influence has come through his long association with John Piper and the ministry Desiring God. In addition to his book *Habits of Grace*, Mathis has written dozens of articles at www.desiringgod.org, a popular website for evangelicals. Many of these articles are related to the spiritual disciplines.

¹¹⁵ Scazzero writes, "The combination of emotional health and contemplative spirituality addresses what I believe to be the missing piece in contemporary Christianity." Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 46.

In the early 2000s, another movement began to grow online that threatened to curb the influence of proponents of both spiritual disciplines and the Christian counseling movement. Discernment ministries like Lighthouse Trails Research and Apprising Ministries began to regularly publish online material that called into question the popular focus on spiritual disciplines. Even deeply conservative evangelical authors like Whitney came in for criticism for quoting Foster and Willard in the first edition of his *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. The net effect of the discernment ministries seems to have caused many conservative evangelicals to be wary of the spiritual disciplines.¹¹⁶ A more helpful approach to Christian spirituality than that found in the discernment ministries is seen in the scholarly works of Richard Lovelace, Donald Bloesch, and Peter Adam.¹¹⁷ These men identify the danger of mysticism in its tendency to advocate the pursuit of Christian practices in an effort to experience God in an unmediated way. All three men also hold to the primacy of Scripture in the cultivation of the spiritual disciplines. Thus, the works of these evangelical scholars and others like them provide a helpful corrective to both mysticism and an uncritical use of psychology while avoiding the reactionary and disproportionate responses that so often characterizes discernment ministries.

Foundational Voices: Foster, Willard, and Whitney

Richard Foster. A former pastor from the Quaker tradition whose writings on

¹¹⁶ The influence of “discernment ministries” in evangelicalism over the last fifteen years is difficult to pinpoint because of the rapid pace of change evident in the online forms that so often host these types of ministries. Yet, it is undeniable that these kinds of ministries have exerted pressure on conservative evangelicals to clarify their positions on a variety of issues. These ministries have also participated in a kind of “cancel culture” against figures they believe are biblically or morally deficient in some way.

¹¹⁷ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979); Donald Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007); Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 16 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004).

spiritual disciplines and the Christian life have been deeply influential for evangelicals, Richard Foster was a pioneering voice advocating the practice of spiritual disciplines. Foster views the practice of the spiritual disciplines as the “doorway to liberation.”¹¹⁸ He sees the long-term pursuit of God through the spiritual disciplines as the pathway for soul healing through the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. Joy becomes the hallmark of the Christian as he walks with God.¹¹⁹ Foster views the spiritual disciplines as a middle way that puts an end to idleness on the one hand and reliance on human works on the other hand.¹²⁰ He also affirms the power of a changed life, saying that the world is desperate for authentically changed lives.¹²¹ The influence of Foster in the world of spiritual formation is difficult to overestimate. Most of the notable figures in the realm of evangelical spiritual formation were influenced to some extent by Foster.

Dallas Willard. Although he was known professionally for his work as a professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, Willard’s spiritual calling to strengthen believers in discipleship became his life’s great work. One of the most influential spiritual leaders of the last fifty years, Willard defined *discipleship* as the critical missing piece of contemporary Christian culture.¹²² Though he does not often use the language of emotional health, his idea that Jesus intends His people to know the soul rest expressed in Matthew 11:28-30 certainly sounds like the principle of emotional health

¹¹⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1.

¹¹⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 2.

¹²⁰ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7.

¹²¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 11.

¹²² Dallas Willard, “Discipleship: For Super-Christians Only?” *Christianity Today*, October 10, 1980, 24-27. Willard’s article served as his introduction to the broader evangelical world. In the 1980s his influence grew and reached its literary apex in the 1990s with the publication of his *magnum opus*, 1997’s *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*.

described by other authors.¹²³ Willard believed the spiritual disciplines were an answer to a shallow evangelicalism.¹²⁴ Spiritual growth is not automatic. Therefore, Willard says that believers need the spiritual disciplines.¹²⁵

Rather than using the phrase “emotional health,” Willard prefers the language of attachment. Loving attachment to God is the starting point of spiritual life and emotional health.¹²⁶ Jim Wilder, who worked with Willard in conference ministry, relates Willard’s teaching on the connection between emotional health and spiritual maturity when he quotes Willard from a conference message: “You can’t count on having emotional maturity without spiritual maturity. If you have spiritual maturity, you will be emotionally mature. So if we’re concerned about emotional maturity, then we will work on spiritual maturity.”¹²⁷ Willard, then, saw a clear connection between emotional maturity and spiritual maturity, while also identifying the spiritual disciplines as a key means of spiritual growth.

Don Whitney. Along with Foster and Willard, the name in Reformed evangelical circles most often connected with the spiritual disciplines is Donald S. Whitney, Professor of Biblical Spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Author of several books on spiritual growth, he is best known for his 1991 work *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Using Paul’s words to Timothy, “discipline yourself for godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7), Whitney makes the case that a disciplined life is the

¹²³ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 2.

¹²⁴ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 24.

¹²⁵ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 153.

¹²⁶ Jim Wilder, *Renovated: God, Dallas Willard & the Church That Transforms* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2020), 43.

¹²⁷ Wilder, *Renovated*, 129.

biblical way to Christlikeness and a way to avoid spiritual disaster.¹²⁸ Whitney's work in the area of spiritual disciplines is marked by a strong commitment to the Bible and a practical and accessible style. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* opens with an introduction that limits the spiritual disciplines to those practices that appear in Scripture.¹²⁹ The book then focuses strongly on "Bible Intake" as the primary spiritual discipline, the source of all the other spiritual disciplines.¹³⁰ This biblical focus seems not to arise as a reaction to other proponents of spiritual disciplines (Foster and Willard are not mentioned in the 2014 revision of the book) but by a genuine belief that a biblical basis is the surest and most effective path to the pursuit of the disciplines. Whitney's works on the spiritual disciplines also provide more practical help than the more theoretical works of Foster and Willard.¹³¹ The accessible nature of his works along with his high view of Scripture explain his popularity among evangelicals.

Whitney does not refer explicitly in his books on the connection between emotional health and spiritual life, but he does advocate the use of at least one spiritual discipline, journaling, for emotional health. He writes, "We tend to feel most deeply about what we think most deeply about. By slowing down and prompting us to think more deeply about the things of God, journaling helps us feel more deeply about them."¹³²

¹²⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 21.

¹²⁹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 4.

¹³⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 21-78.

¹³¹ Two examples of Donald Whitney's works that are eminently practical are *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); and *Simplify Your Spiritual Life: Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003).

¹³² Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 257.

The Contemplative Way: Scazzero, Barton, and Calhoun

Peter Scazzero. Peter Scazzero was the founder of New Life Fellowship Church in Queens, New York. The church grew rapidly and Scazzero appeared to be a highly successful pastor, but he confesses that he was dying inside. His emotional life was a shambles and he was near burnout.¹³³ This personal experience drove Scazzero to study emotional health and discipleship, looking for the missing piece in his own life that would keep him from burnout. Unlike the other leaders surveyed in this section, Scazzero is wary of the spiritual disciplines because he sees these practices as ways to avoid real inner emotional and relational engagement.¹³⁴ Instead, Scazzero advocates the practice of contemplative spirituality as a means of reconnecting with one's emotional life.¹³⁵ Scazzero believes the practices of contemplative spirituality will allow a believer to pull away from the pressures of the world to rest in God.¹³⁶ Contemplative spirituality in Scazzero's thinking is the life of "being with God" rather than "doing for God."¹³⁷ For Scazzero, contemplative practices include surrendering to God's love, seeking to commune with God and hear from God, and practicing silence and solitude.¹³⁸

For Scazzero, emotional health is defined by several aspects, such as managing one's own feelings, having compassion for others, and learning to resolve conflict

¹³³ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 10.

¹³⁴ Scazzero writes, "In fact, the spirituality of most current discipleship models often only adds an additional protective layer against people growing up emotionally. Because people are having real, and helpful, spiritual experiences in certain areas of their lives—such as worship, prayer, Bible studies, and fellowship—they mistakenly believe they are doing fine, even if their relational life and interior world is not in order. This apparent "progress" then provides a spiritual reason for not doing the hard work of maturing." (Scazzero, *Emotional Healthy Spirituality*, 15).

¹³⁵ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 37.

¹³⁶ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 47.

¹³⁷ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 51.

¹³⁸ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 45.

maturely.¹³⁹ These aspects do not differ substantially from the definitions of emotional health offered by other leaders in biblical counseling and spiritual formation, but Scazzero differs from many other leaders because he sees contemplative spirituality as the remedy for emotional instability rather than the practice of the biblical spiritual disciplines. Although he views the spiritual disciplines (especially those related to prayer) as helpful to some extent, other spiritual practices are held in higher regard. Scazzero advocates daily hours of prayer, the practice of Sabbath, and alignment of one's life with the church calendar.¹⁴⁰ He suggests a Rule of Life like that of Benedict will be helpful to most believers who want to grow in emotional maturity.¹⁴¹ Scazzero is a strong advocate of contemplative spirituality because he believes it allows believers to slow down, anchor in God's love, and break free from illusions (such as finding identity in pleasure or achievement).¹⁴²

There is much to commend in Scazzero's approach to emotional health. His definition of emotional health is thorough and is borne of personal experience. However, many believers find Scazzero's approach to spirituality troubling. His insistence that Christians must not "use God to run from God" is a valuable insight.¹⁴³ It is true that one might practice spiritual disciplines as a way to earn God's favor or to feel as if he is doing well when he has not really dealt with his emotional issues. However, in spite of this useful warning, Scazzero's approach to spirituality falls short because it is not biblically rooted but is instead deeply mystical. Scazzero's focus is inward; his goal often appears

¹³⁹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 45.

¹⁴⁰ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 46.

¹⁴¹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 196.

¹⁴² Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 47.

¹⁴³ Scazzero writes, "In my case, using God to run from God is when I create great deal of 'God-activity' and ignore difficult areas in my life God wants to change." Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 24.

to be unmediated union with God, and his approach relies much more on personal prayer, solitude, and silence rather than meditation on Scripture.¹⁴⁴ Theologian Donald Bloesch has identified the mystical approach evident in Scazzero's work as being incompatible with biblical Christianity.¹⁴⁵ In comparison to Whitney and even to Foster and Willard, Scazzero's work simply is not sufficiently rooted in Scripture.

Ruth Haley Barton. Mentored by Robert Mulholland, Ruth Haley Barton has emerged in the last two decades as an influential voice in the realm of spiritual formation. Barton's story mirrors that of Scazzero. She was on staff at a well-known megachurch and found herself walking the halls of the church unable to keep her thoughts together, feeling lost and alone.¹⁴⁶ Barton found her answer in the practice of solitude and silence. Her approach is connected to Scripture more fully than Scazzero. She uses narrative passages (the stories of Elijah and Moses figure prominently in her books) to draw out lessons on the spiritual life. However, like Scazzero, her focus in spiritual formation leans toward the contemplative. She elevates solitude and silence (along with retreat) above the other disciplines.¹⁴⁷ Barton's approach is aimed at bringing peace and wellness to the soul. The inward journey is the focus, a hallmark of mysticism. She has written helpfully for leaders, urging them to avoid burnout and to reconnect with God in the midst of ministry. Her work is limited also in the breadth of its discussion of the spiritual disciplines. Barton centers her approach primarily in the inner, contemplative disciplines like prayer, silence, and solitude, as well as in practices like Sabbath and retreat. Like

¹⁴⁴ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 45.

¹⁴⁵ Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*, 68.

¹⁴⁶ Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 27.

¹⁴⁷ Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 79.

Scazzero, because of her tendency toward mysticism, her work is of limited value in a study about the value of biblical spiritual disciplines for emotional health.¹⁴⁸

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, unlike Barton, could never be accused of being too narrowly focused in her discussions of spiritual disciplines. A retreat speaker, spiritual director, and co-pastor with her husband at Redeemer Community Church in Needham, Massachusetts, Calhoun has written extensively about spiritual disciplines from the experience of over forty years of ministry. Her *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* is among the most descriptive treatments of the spiritual disciplines available. However, because of its descriptive nature, Calhoun does not take time to explain the connection between spiritual disciplines and emotional health. In other words, hers is a work of practical theology, aimed at application. As such, each spiritual practice is organized with a rubric that defines and describes the practice, with scriptural support for the practice and the spiritual fruit expected from the practice.¹⁴⁹ The sheer number of disciplines in the book (seventy-five) is astonishing.¹⁵⁰ Calhoun seems to recognize the challenge of these numbers, so she organizes these practices under seven headings: worship, openness to God, relinquishing the false self, sharing life with others, hearing God's Word, incarnating the love of Christ, and prayer.¹⁵¹ Calhoun does not include an equal number of disciplines under each category. A full seventeen of her spiritual practices, for example, fall under the category of prayer, while only four disciplines are mentioned

¹⁴⁸ Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

¹⁴⁹ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 49.

¹⁵⁰ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 13-16.

¹⁵¹ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 7-8, 22. The first letter of each of these category descriptions taken together form the word "worship." Calhoun views worship as the heart of the Christian life.

with connection to reading and hearing God’s Word.¹⁵² Calhoun views the spiritual disciplines as “a way of following your heart’s desires into the arms of God.”¹⁵³ Unfortunately, the scriptural connections Calhoun attempts to forge to specific disciplines are often weak.¹⁵⁴ Because of this lack of grounding in Scripture and traditional evangelical practice, many of the disciplines Calhoun advocates will not be widely accepted by evangelicals.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, because of the prescriptive nature of the book, there is little space given to the connection between spiritual disciplines and emotional health.

The Scientific Approach: Thompson, Moll, and Wilder

Curt Thompson. Psychiatrist Curt Thompson is a Christian who has studied the connection between neuroscience and spiritual life. Thompson endorses scientific studies that support the idea of neuroplasticity (the idea that the brain can rewire itself through repeated intentional thought and behavior).¹⁵⁶ He asserts that “mindfulness” is essential to living a righteous life and living in a state of increasing emotional health.¹⁵⁷ By mindfulness, Thompson does not mean the popular notion in the secular world of a state of thoughtfulness brought about by yoga or meditation. Thompson means that one who is mindful is increasingly living a life where the different parts of the brain are

¹⁵² Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 8.

¹⁵³ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 23.

¹⁵⁴ For example, in describing the practice of Labyrinth Prayer, Calhoun references Ps 23:3-4 as providing biblical support for the practice of walking in prayer through a labyrinth. “He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” is a general principle, not a specific call to walking in a labyrinth. It provides no real biblical grounds for a practice that many evangelicals with regard with suspicion. Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 262.

¹⁵⁵ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 63-65. For example, Calhoun lists “iconography” as a discipline of worship. The making of icons, however, is seen as a false practice by many Christians and most evangelicals would be wary of such a practice.

¹⁵⁶ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 2.

¹⁵⁷ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 4.

integrated.¹⁵⁸ In Thompson’s view, unrighteousness flows from dis-integration, mindlessness leading to disconnects in the brain that result in sinful choices.¹⁵⁹ He says that mindfulness can be developed and enhanced through the spiritual disciplines: “Long before neuroscientists began advocating these approaches, believers engaged in spiritual practices that foster the mind’s development—whether we call it an undivided heart or an integrated prefrontal cortex.”¹⁶⁰

Thompson’s list of spiritual disciplines is very similar to Richard Foster’s. He mentions the inward disciplines of “meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.”¹⁶¹ Like Foster and Whitney, Thompson believes meditation on Scripture is the starting place for the spiritual disciplines and influences all the others.¹⁶² Thompson declares the value of the spiritual disciplines for emotional health:

All of the spiritual disciplines both require and support the skill of mindful attention, which enables us to set our minds on the Spirit. When we pay attention to what we are paying attention to and when God’s voice (telling us we are his sons and daughters whom he loves and in whom he takes great pleasure) is the most resonant tone to which we are listening, our minds—specifically the prefrontal cortex—tend to be more integrated.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 4.

¹⁵⁹ Thompson states, “In fact, the story of Eden shows how, like Adam and Eve, we are more interested in knowing right from wrong (a dominantly left-brain hemisphere function used to cope with fear and shame) than knowing God, which requires integration of all parts of the brain.” Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 175.

¹⁶¹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 175.

¹⁶² Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 175. It should be noted that while all these men begin with meditation, Whitney offers the more robust title “Bible Intake” to refer to a variety of spiritual practices that keep the Word central. Foster and Thompson both approach meditation with a respect for the Word but with far less connection to the Word than Whitney (and as will be seen later, David Mathis).

¹⁶³ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 178.

Thompson's approach provides an additional level of scientific support for the practice of spiritual disciplines for emotional health.

Rob Moll. A journalist and editor at *Christianity Today*, Rob Moll's *What Your Body Knows about God* makes the case that the Bible does not separate body and soul but treats human beings as whole persons. He sees soul characteristics as having corresponding biological characteristics. For example, when speaking of love and relational intimacy Moll declares, "Oxytocin is involved in all human bonding, producing the warm feelings we have after a night with close friends or a relaxing massage, or that a mother has when nursing her baby."¹⁶⁴ When it comes to the spiritual disciplines, Moll sounds very much like Thompson, claiming that the disciplines are valuable because they redirect neural pathways.¹⁶⁵ He explains, "To change our being, to make us spiritually sensitive beings, we need to take up the practices that make us the kinds of people who desire to live out a love for God and our neighbors."¹⁶⁶ Moll believes that in the day-to-day routines of life, spiritual disciplines play a vital role in reshaping behavior. And with changed behavior, a healthier emotional life follows.¹⁶⁷

Jim Wilder. Jim Wilder calls himself a "neurotheologian," a title that gives away his perspective. Like Thompson and Moll, Wilder is deeply invested in the study of neuroscience and its applications to spiritual life. What sets Wilder's work apart is his thesis of the fast track and the slow track brain. The slow track (the left brain) is the conscious mind—what is sensed in a particular moment. The fast track (the right brain) is the unconscious mind—the level of reaction and assimilation, which reflexively tries to

¹⁶⁴ Moll, *What Your Body Knows about God*, 83.

¹⁶⁵ Moll, *What Your Body Knows about God*, 117.

¹⁶⁶ Moll, *What Your Body Knows about God*, 124.

¹⁶⁷ Moll, *What Your Body Knows about God*, 124.

control the environment so that one responds properly to circumstances.¹⁶⁸ Wilder contends that most Christian discipleship is aimed at the slow track when it should be aimed at the fast track. He posits that most churches teach on specific topics in an impersonal way that does little to train the fast track mind to respond in a godly way to the challenges of life. According to Wilder, believers spend much time in church learning about God but little time learning to live with God.¹⁶⁹ Borrowed from Willard, this principle of attachment is critically important to Wilder. If believers do not live in loving attachment to God, then they will not develop the fast track brains to respond well to the trials they face.¹⁷⁰ Without a rightly-oriented fast track brain, believers will find spiritual maturity elusive. Wilder brings emotions into the discussion by viewing them as a subset of spiritual maturity. He dismisses emotional health as a goal and views spiritual maturity as the proper apex of a life of loving attachment to God.¹⁷¹ The spiritual disciplines, in his view, are useful insofar as they reinforce the neural pathways of the fast track brain. Thus, apart from loving attachment to God, spiritual disciplines have little value.¹⁷²

Back to Basics: Boa and Mathis

Ken Boa. Similar to Whitney in his insistence on the practical benefits of

¹⁶⁸ Wilder, *Renovated*, 41.

¹⁶⁹ Wilder, *Renovated*, 107.

¹⁷⁰ Wilder, *Renovated*, 108.

¹⁷¹ Wilder writes, “Emotional maturity represents how far we can take maturity using only human models. What God’s Spirit and people add to normal maturing, we call spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is not a separate phenomenon but rather emotional maturity plus more. Jesus says that even the pagans can love their neighbors. This is a good deal further than many Christians bother to go. Spiritual maturity is indicated by the ability to love our enemies spontaneously from the heart.” (Wilder, *Renovated*, 50).

¹⁷² Wilder explains, “Transformation comes when our mind goes beyond correcting our beliefs to practicing attachment love. False beliefs certainly need correction, but we cannot stop there without correcting our loves. We remember that the One who holds the seven stars told the church at Ephesus that they had their beliefs right, ‘But I have this against you: that you have left your foremost love.’” Wilder, *Renovated*, 87.

spiritual disciplines, Boa is open to a wider expression of spiritual life under what he calls “Twelve Facets of the Complete Christian Life.”¹⁷³ Boa’s twelve facets are Relational Spirituality (loving God and others), Paradigm Spirituality (living with an eternal perspective), Disciplined Spirituality (Engaging in the Spiritual Disciplines), Exchanged Life Spirituality (living by our true identity in Christ), Motivated Spirituality (living by biblical incentives), Devotional Spirituality (falling in love with God), Holistic Spirituality (all of life under the Lordship of Christ), Process Spirituality (a focus on being over doing), Spirit-Filled Spirituality (walking in the Spirit’s power), Warfare Spirituality (engaging with the world, the flesh, and the devil), Nurturing Spirituality (a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship), and Corporate Spirituality (accountability, fellowship, and worship). It is readily apparent that Boa is attempting to synthesize the various strains of evangelicals under these twelve facets. In a sense, this is a noble goal. Evangelicalism should value the emphases of its various wings. Almost any evangelical could look at this list and identify with one or more of these facets of the Christian life. However, Boa is going beyond a simple observational list of evangelical practice. He contends that Christians should incorporate all of these aspects of the Christian life if their spirituality will be complete.¹⁷⁴ He makes a compelling case for the twelve facets. The problem is that not all of the facets have been consistently practiced in a biblically rooted way. Devotional Spirituality has often opened the door to mysticism or to pietistic practice. Similarly, Spirit-Filled Spirituality has at times been abused. Faith healers who are clearly charlatans have shielded themselves from criticism by claiming a Spirit-Filled Spirituality. Boa is deeply practical but he does not focus very much on the connection between emotional health and the practice of the spiritual disciplines. Actions and behaviors are paramount and emotional health is seen as a by-product of a life well-lived to the glory of God.

¹⁷³ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 20-22.

¹⁷⁴ Boa writes, “Anyone who studies the four Gospels should be suspicious of an approach that reduces the nuances of the spiritual life into a single formula or method.” Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 20.

David Mathis. The work of David Mathis, long-time executive editor with John Piper's Desiring God organization, is very much in the line of earlier conservative evangelical figures in spiritual formation like Jerry Bridges and Donald Whitney. His work is a refining of the earlier classics of these authors. The refinement comes in the form of simplification, as Mathis brings the spiritual disciplines under three categories and roots the disciplines in the gospel. Mathis says believers need to hear God's voice in his Word. Believers also are called to talk to God. Because of Jesus' work for believers, they have access to God. God also intends believers to live in community. This means that the spiritual disciplines are not just personal devotions but are to be lived out with other believers. The spiritual disciplines are blessings, not burdens.¹⁷⁵ Mathis believes this simplified approach will free Christians to practice the spiritual disciplines with joy.¹⁷⁶ He is clear that God's grace is a gift but affirms that through the spiritual discipline believers can put themselves in the path of God's working.¹⁷⁷

Mathis does not speak of the emotional life in his book, but the book is a very helpful look at the spiritual disciplines, making it worthy of reflection and study.

Conclusion

Bebbington's Quadrilateral, that classic definition of evangelicalism, demonstrates why evangelicals have long been attracted to the spiritual disciplines. A focus on conversion meant for evangelicals that faith was something intensely personal. This focus on the person led to a desire to cultivate a personal faith. The spiritual disciplines were an easy fit for the practice of a personal faith. Likewise, the authority of

¹⁷⁵ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 32.

¹⁷⁶ Mathis states, "Much has been said in terms of duty, and too little said about joy. And the seeming proliferation of long lists of disciplines can leave young Christians overwhelmed by what they're not practicing, and in some cases contribute to a low-grade sense of guilt which threatens to keep us from fully engaging with the rest of our everyday lives for which these practices should be preparing us." Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 33.

¹⁷⁷ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 25.

Scripture motivated evangelicals to embrace the spiritual disciplines. Because evangelicals believe the Word of God is “living and active” (Heb 4:12), they seek ways to open themselves up to its work in them. Also, the cross-centered focus of evangelicals makes for fertile ground in the practice of spiritual disciplines. Evangelicals from Billy Graham to the present day speak of a “personal relationship with Jesus.” This view of personal intimacy with the Son of God lends itself to the practice of spiritual disciplines like prayer, solitude, and silence. Finally, the activist streak in evangelicalism provides a foundation for the practice of corporate spiritual disciplines like service and stewardship.

Evangelical scholar Tom Schwanda has shown that spiritual disciplines were part of the evangelical movement from the beginning.¹⁷⁸ Now, in the last forty years, their value for spiritual life has become even more evident. Foundational practitioners like Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Don Whitney led the way in a movement that has grown powerfully in the new millennium. Others have added to their work. Sometimes, the additions have been unhelpful. Many writers in the area of spiritual formation have veered toward mysticism in their teachings. Mysticism often turns evangelicals away from the distinctive characteristics that have enabled them to be a unique force for good in the world. Mysticism is personal but tends not to foster activism. Mysticism often claims Jesus at the center but fails to use the Bible as the infallible guide to godliness. In fact, the Jesus at the center is often not the cross-centered Jesus of evangelicalism; rather, He is a model of virtue or the first enlightened one. He is the one who shows believers the way to God. The ultimate goal is unmediated union with God, the very antithesis of the evangelical approach, where the Spirit works through the Word to reveal the Son to believers as the mediator between God and man. Moreover,

¹⁷⁸ Schwanda, “Evangelical Spiritual Practices,” 220-36.

evangelicalism puts union with God through faith in Christ as the beginning point of the Christian life, not the ultimate goal.¹⁷⁹

Other approaches have provided more promise. Contemporary teachers who seek to understand the implications of neuroscience for the spiritual disciplines have deepened the study of spirituality to embrace body and soul. The idea of rewiring the brain to form attachment to God is a positive argument for the practice of spiritual disciplines. Teachers who have reaffirmed the foundational teachers have also proven helpful in recent years. Evangelical approaches like that of David Mathis are a welcome shift from the move toward mysticism that characterized much spiritual formation teaching in the early 2000s.

As to the connection between spiritual disciplines and emotional health, all teachers of the spiritual disciplines point to their benefits, but few directly address emotional health. For many teachers, emotional health is a subset of spiritual maturity, so they will not directly address emotional health because it is already being addressed when they speak of maturity. For those who do mention emotional health, the response is mixed. Scazzero is leery of the practice of spiritual disciplines for emotional health. He believes they can actually keep a believer from emotional health by providing a false sense of faithfulness to God.¹⁸⁰ His words are wise, for this pattern can be seen in the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who were scrupulous in their spiritual practices though their hearts were far from God. Nevertheless, when practiced from a humble heart of faith, the spiritual disciplines can be, as Thompson declares, a vital means of training the mind and heart to love God and follow him.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Evangelicals believe that union with God is inaugurated at conversion and deepens until its fulfillment in heaven. Thus, it is possible for believers to have a deeper sense or experience of union with God, but the actual fact of union with God is secured through the work of Christ and the reality of that union is not affected by the actions of believers.

¹⁸⁰ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 24.

¹⁸¹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 178.

A brief survey of leaders in evangelical spiritual formation has shown that spiritual disciplines are a valuable means to pursuing spiritual maturity and the emotional health that most often flows from spiritual maturity. Therefore, developing a curriculum that utilizes choice spiritual disciplines to foster emotional health in believers is a reasonable and positive aim.

CHAPTER 4

MINISTRY PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

Grieving members of West Hickory Baptist Church in Hickory, North Carolina needed a biblical pathway toward emotional health. This ministry project was developed to help members grow in emotional health through the practice of personal and corporate spiritual disciplines in the setting of a supportive small group of believers.

The project was implemented through a curriculum called “Grieving with Hope.” The curriculum was taught over eight weeks in the late spring and early summer of 2021. The participants’ practice of spiritual disciplines was evaluated and their emotional health assessed through a twenty-item survey. The survey was given to students before the first session began and the same survey was given to students at the close of the last class session. The results of the two surveys were compared to show whether a statistically significant difference emerged as a result of the students’ participation in the “Grieving with Hope” class. In addition to the survey, an exit question was given to each participant to fill out to determine whether, from a qualitative standpoint, the class had been helpful to course participants.

Curriculum Development

In the winter and spring of 2021, after completing chapter 3 of the ministry project, work began on the eight-week “Grieving with Hope” curriculum. After the curriculum was completed, it was sent to an expert panel. The first panel member is a fellow student at SBTS in the Biblical Spirituality program. He is also a teacher at a Christian school. His expertise in classroom teaching as well as his experience as a student at SBTS made his insights valuable. The second member of the panel is a

laywoman at West Hickory Baptist Church. This woman is a spiritually mature, long-term member of the church who has taught Sunday school for many years. She also has experience teaching older members. Since I believed the audience for the curriculum would be primarily for those sixty-five and older, I thought her expertise and insights would be helpful. The final member of the expert panel is a long-term minister with the Navigators. Though his ministry is primarily with the military, his focus is on spiritual formation. His familiarity with the spiritual disciplines as well as his outsider's perspective (he lives in Colorado) proved useful in the finalization of the curriculum. All the panelists scored all areas of the curriculum at an average of 3.0 or above on a scale of 1 through 4. Their scoring of the curriculum rubric will be shared in appendix 2. Panelist 3 considered lessons 2, 7, and 8 to be insufficient in opportunities for class participation. These lessons were revised and submitted to this panelist and changes were sufficient to raise the scores for these lessons to a 3.0.

From the outset of planning the curriculum, due to the research conducted in chapters 1–3, it was determined that four spiritual disciplines, two personal and two corporate, would be taught. Teaching about these disciplines would comprise four of the lessons in the curriculum, one session for each discipline. Research in chapter 3 led to the formulation of the content of the other lessons in the curriculum. An introductory lesson focusing on the need of believers to turn to God and to each other arose from research conducted for chapter 3 of this ministry project, drawing particularly on the works of Dallas Willard and Jim Wilder.¹ Lesson 1 began with a time of discussion, with students sharing both what they are thankful for in their lives as well as some of the trials they have faced. The lecture portion of the lesson focused on the importance of healthy relational attachment to God and to other people in our lives. The move from knowing about God to living in the presence of God was emphasized. Psalm 88 was chosen as a central text

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988); Jim Wilder, *Renovated: God, Dallas Willard & the Church That Transforms* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2020).

for this session because of the sense of distance from God reflected in the psalmist's words. The lesson then turned back to discussion with the students as they were asked to share times in their lives when they felt distant from God. We also discussed in this lesson times God has met us in our grief. The central truth of this lesson is our need to turn to God in times of grief. This lesson closed with the singing of the hymn "He Will Hold Me Fast." Students were asked to observe a "Day of Thanks" in the coming week, when their focus in prayer and observation of life would be gratitude. Students were to share the results of the day of thanks at the start of session 2.

Session 2 began with a call to students to share what they learned from the exercise of giving thanks to God for a whole day. The introduction of session 2 pivoted from this focus to review the need to turn to God when things do not go well. The lesson then turned to a discussion of the great divide we feel in our lives between body and soul. I showed through a participation project how the Bible presents an integrated (body and soul) view of humanity. Students looked up verses that brought out the body and soul integration of people and read them aloud in the class, discussing them together. I finished this section by looking at the incarnation, the ultimate proof that God cares for body and soul. I showed scientific evidence that spiritual practices can positively affect our body.² Session 2 warned believers that they should not fall into the trap of dualism with its tendency to compartmentalize life. Conversely, this lesson focused on the way the body could affect the soul and the soul could affect the body. For their "Take it Home" assignment, students were asked to read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 several times during the coming week, reflecting on what these verses say in relation to the body and soul connection we have as humans. This session closed with the hymn, "This is My Father's World."

² Rob Moll, *What Your Body Knows about God: How We Are Designed to Connect, Serve, and Thrive* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 15.

Session 3 explored the process of sanctification. This exploration of how God changes people began with a discussion of our beautiful and broken world. Students reflected both on the creative grandeur of God and the great horror of life in a fallen world. After this discussion, I opened the class in prayer by praying through Ephesians 2:8-10. Session 3 built on the truths of the first two lessons to explore how sanctification works. David Powlison's writings were especially helpful in the development of this lesson.³ This session was a culmination of my research. I understood through the research for chapters 2 and 3 that loving attachment to God and healthy relationships with people are fostered by the practice of spiritual disciplines and that these spiritual disciplines are God's tools to change lives. The fact that we are integrated humans, body and soul, means that we are able to grow in holiness through physical practices like Bible meditation and giving. The group explored the Bible to see the concept of forsaking sin and pursuing holiness. Students were given the "Take it Home" assignment of praying through Colossians 3:1-17 at least two times in the coming week.⁴ This lesson ended with the singing of the hymn, "When Trials Come."

Session 4 focused on the first of two personal spiritual disciplines: Bible meditation. In this lesson, I shared about a time about ten years ago when I lost sixty pounds. I asserted that my weight loss happened because I had a workout routine, and I was consistent in its practice. I talked about mindful eating rather than mindless eating and what a difference this makes to the number on the scale. Transitioning to the subject of the spiritual disciplines, I said that spiritual strength comes through the consistent practice of hearing from God (Bible meditation) and talking to God (prayer). The discipline of Bible meditation was chosen as the first discipline to be covered because what believers

³ David Powlison, *How Sanctification Works* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); *God's Grace in Your Suffering* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

⁴ With the "Take it Home" assignments at the close of lessons 2 and 3 as well as by beginning session 3 by praying through Eph 2:8-10, I was trying to model the spiritual disciplines for the students throughout the course and not just on the weeks when we talked about each particular spiritual discipline.

need most in a time of grief is to receive comfort and direction from God. I gave several practical tips for Bible meditation, using Psalm 23 as a test case, and then set students off individually to meditate on the theme passage for the curriculum, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. Students came back together and shared what they had learned from their time of meditation. The goal of this exercise was to show students how meaningful meditation was compared to only reading the Bible. I gave students several passages to meditate over in the coming week and we closed our session by singing “How Firm a Foundation.”

Believers going through trials need to talk to God. Therefore, the personal spiritual discipline of prayer was chosen as the topic for session 5. I started this session with a humorous and poignant quote from Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, where Huck describes his disappointments with prayer. I asked the students to help me see the holes in Huck’s reasoning about prayer and used this quote to launch into a discussion of prayer. A study of Philippians 4:1-7 formed the backbone of this lesson. This passage was particularly appropriate to the curriculum because it was a summons to turn to God (“in everything by prayer and petition make your requests known to God” [Phil 4:6]) and to turn to each other (“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be on one mind in the Lord” [Phil 4:2]). The class concluded with a discussion about the nuts and bolts of prayer, particularly how to pray the Bible. Students were assigned five brief passages to pray through for the coming week and we closed the class by singing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

With session 6, the focus turned to corporate spiritual disciplines. The corporate discipline of worship was covered in session 6 because participants needed the comfort that comes from drawing near to God in the fellowship of other believers. This lesson began with a discussion of the contrasts between worship in the Old Testament and the New Testament, then focused on Psalm 40 as an example of godly worship through a time of grief. Students were given a worship inventory—a list of six questions to take with them

to prepare their hearts for the Sunday worship service. We sang “The Church’s One Foundation” as the closing hymn for this session.

The corporate discipline of giving was the subject of session 7. This discipline was chosen because believers in grief often become isolated from others and engrossed in their grief. This obsession with grief can be debilitating. Giving enables believers to take their mind off their needs and to focus on the needs of others. Giving brings joy and blessing to others and to the giver. As the New Testament proclaims, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The class opened as I asked several students to share a time when someone had given to them in a way that was meaningful. I used the discussion as a launching point to look at the churches of Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 8:1-6. Students spent a few minutes meditating on this passage and then shared their insights with the group. After studying the passage together, I gave students the opportunity to pray over this passage on their own and then pray together for its principles to become active in their lives. Five final thoughts about giving were then shared that highlighted the need to excel in this grace of giving. A questionnaire was sent home with students and each student was asked to use the questions on the sheet to evaluate their giving. The class closed by singing the hymn, “Take My Life and Let it Be.”

For the four lessons on the spiritual disciplines, the works of Donald Whitney and David Mathis were especially helpful.⁵

The final session in the curriculum was summative in nature, focusing on a review of the first seven weeks of the curriculum as well giving the class a chance to pray together. As students came into the class, they were asked to fill out two slips of paper. One slip of paper said, “What has been the best part of the *Grieving with Hope* class for you?” The other slip of paper said, “Do you have any questions about grief or the spiritual disciplines that we did not fully cover in this class?” After students filled in the papers, I

⁵ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014); *Praying the Bible* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2015). David Mathis, *Habits of Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016).

collected them. I answered questions at the end of the class and saved other responses to share as part of my qualitative research. I began the lesson in session 8 by recounting the church's history in the sixteen years I had been here. This reminded us once again of the drumbeat of trials that runs through our lives. Then I allowed students to share times when they felt supported by their church family. I followed this time of discussion with a brief recap of our time together studying the spiritual disciplines. I thanked each class member for their participation and concluded the class by answering the questions the students had asked. Most students had no questions, but I did answer questions from a handful of participants. We concluded our time by praying together. I asked the students to take a few minutes to meditate on Psalm 46 and then we prayed through the psalm to close the class. At the conclusion, the class students filled out the post-course survey. We closed our time together with a favorite hymn, "I'd Rather Have Jesus."

Promoting the Curriculum

During the last three weeks in April 2021, bulletin inserts for the "Grieving with Hope" curriculum were distributed in the morning worship service at West Hickory Baptist Church. Members filled out the inserts and turned them into the offering plate to indicate their interest in being part of the study. I collected these inserts and informed students of the upcoming date for beginning the class. I was aiming for at least twenty study participants. Forty-three church members signed up for the class. Of those forty-three, three students did not show up, four students were only able to attend three or four sessions because of health issues, and seven others, because of travel or unexpected schedule conflicts, were only able to attend five or six of the sessions. For responses to be used in the survey, I required students to attend at least seven of the eight sessions. By the close of the class, twenty-nine students met this standard, with twenty-one of the twenty-nine students attending all eight sessions.

Project Implementation

The “Grieving with Hope” class began on Sunday, May 16, 2021 and finished on Sunday, July 18. There was no class session on Father’s Day (June 20) or on the Fourth of July. Students filled out a four-page paper survey at the beginning of the first class session. The first page was a consent form for participation in this project, the second page was a brief demographic survey, and the final two pages were composed of a twenty-item survey using a six-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The first ten items (page 3 of the survey) concerned the students’ current understanding and practice of spiritual disciplines. The second ten items (the final page of the survey) dealt with the students’ assessment of their emotional health.

All students read the first page of the survey and agreed to participate in the course by checking a blank at the bottom of the page. Participants wrote their name on the front page of the survey with the understanding that the church secretary (without looking at their answers to survey questions) would assign a Personal Identification Number (PIN) that would be used in evaluating their surveys. These numbers were written on the first and second page of each survey. I confirmed each student’s willingness to participate by looking at the front page. The next time I saw the surveys, the front page had been removed and I was left only with the last three pages and the PIN for each survey. The secretary cross-referenced the attendance sheet to remove from statistical consideration those participants who did not attend at least seven of the eight class sessions. The secretary kept the cover sheets in a separate file and did not look at the survey answers of any student. These procedures ensured anonymity for the students.

In terms of demographics, 17 of the 29 students who completed at least seven class sessions were aged 65 or older. Eleven participants were between 40 and 65. Only 1 participant was under 40 years old. The group was largely female, representing 23 of the 29 participants. As a whole, the church is about 60 percent female, so female participation was over-represented in the class. The first item on the demographic survey asked students to check the blank indicating how long they had been a Christian. The blanks ranged from

“I am not sure I am a Christian” to “More than twenty-five years.” Almost all class participants claim to have been Christians for more than twenty-five years. One participant marked the blank indicating that they had been a Christian for six to ten years and 1 participant marked the blank, “I am not sure I am a Christian.” The second demographic item asked how often participants had a personal time of Bible reading. Options ranged from “never” to “five or more times per week.” A majority of students (17 out of 29) indicated that they had a time of Bible reading five or more times per week. Five students indicated they read the Bible on their own two to four times per week, 2 students indicated that they personally read the Bible once per week, 3 students indicated occasional Bible reading (less than once a week), and 1 student indicated that he never reads the Bible on his own.

The same range of answers was given for the next item on the survey, “How often do you have a personal time of prayer?” An overwhelming majority of students (24 of 29) indicated that they had a personal time of prayer five or more times a week. Four students indicated that they pray two to four times per week and 1 student prays occasionally (less than once a week).

Worship attendance was the next item on the demographic survey. In answer to the question, “How often do you meet with other Christians for worship?” participants responded by filling in blanks ranging from “Never” to “Three or more times a month.” Again, the overwhelming majority of participants were regular church attenders. Twenty-six of 29 students said they attend church three or more times per month, 2 respondents attend about twice a month, and 1 respondent attends a few times a year.

Finally, students were asked “Do you give a portion of your income to the local church or other Christian organizations?” This was a yes or no question. All students indicated that they do give at least some of their income to the local church.

The demographic survey indicated a class composed primarily of elderly members who were largely faithful to basic participation in the four spiritual disciplines

we were going to study. The results of the demographic survey initially pointed toward a group with little room for improvement. However, the demographic survey did not explore the area of grief or emotional trials. The explicit aim of the curriculum was not simply to help students more faithfully practice the spiritual disciplines but to help students deal with trials and grief through use of the spiritual disciplines. Church attendance alone does not equal heartfelt worship. Bible reading does not equal an authentic relationship with God. Therefore, although the demographic survey looked as if the group might be filled with faithful and spiritually mature believers, the curriculum itself could still be helpful to strengthen spiritual practices and emotional health. The results of the twenty-item survey on spiritual disciplines and emotional health helped to determine whether the course had been helpful to participants.

Conclusion

When I reflect on the preparation of this curriculum and its implementation, I am thankful. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the lessons did not begin when I had hoped, for my plan was to teach this curriculum in the spring rather than the summer. Because the core idea of the curriculum is that we are strengthened emotionally when we turn to God and turn to one another in the context of the spiritual disciplines, meeting together in person was essential. This was not possible until vaccinations were widely available. With the coming of summer, church attendance began to rebound so that the curriculum could be implemented. I am grateful to the Lord for the members of West Hickory Baptist Church who participated so fully and attended the sessions so consistently. I saw almost no drop off in participation from the first weeks of the course to its conclusion. I owe this to the grace of God and the graciousness of my church family.

CHAPTER 5

MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

The “Grieving with Hope” class was a wonderful time in the life of our church. This chapter evaluates the good fruit of the class and explores ways the class could be improved. I have already had requests to offer this class again, so I am hopeful that this ministry project will have a lasting impact on the life of West Hickory Baptist Church.

Evaluation of Project Purpose

This project came into being as I evaluated our greatest needs as a church. One of the greatest needs I saw was for help through the hardships so many members faced. Grieving loss, struggles with poor health, and relational difficulties defined the lives of so many members. Therefore, I developed this project to give members a biblical pathway through grief. Knowing that we cannot escape grief nor ignore it for very long, members needed a way to manage grief. This ministry project was developed to help members grow in emotional health through the practice of selected personal and corporate spiritual disciplines in the setting of a supportive small group of believers.

This purpose was fulfilled through the development and implementation of the eight week “Grieving with Hope” curriculum. These classes, taught to almost forty church members, sought to strengthen emotional health through the practice of select personal and corporate spiritual disciplines. The survey data from the class indicated a statistically significant outcome for class members.

In addition to the survey data, the value of the class was also revealed through the exit statement issued to each student at the beginning of the last class session. Each student was asked to respond to this statement, “My favorite part of the *Grieving with*

Hope class has been (fill in the blank).” The answers to this statement provided some qualitative information to support the quantitative results of the pre- and post-test surveys. Most students filled in this sheet with an answer expressing gratitude for the fellowship or teaching they experienced in the class. Below are a few of the most meaningful responses from the students --

My favorite part was the focus on Scripture and listening to others’ stories. The idea of looking to God and looking to others—seeing how God has been faithful to so many in such great difficulties—is encouraging and helpful.

My favorite part was applying the Spiritual Disciplines to all of life and using them to break the cycle of grieving thoughts.

My favorite part was learning more about God and understanding better how He helps in all things in ways I haven’t recognized before. There are many more!! Sharing with other class members, feeling a part of the Christian community, learning how to meditate on the Word. It’s been great!!

My favorite time has been learning to pray better by reading the passage and writing down what I remember the most and then praying about what it means to me. This has helped me in my own personal prayer time.

My favorite part was understanding that grieving is normal and God is always beside you.

My favorite part was group interaction with participants sharing testimonies re: topic of the week. Teaching was quite relevant to the course. Homework assignments reinforced well the discussion of the week and made me think more about the content of the lessons. I had a lightbulb reaction to better understanding sanctification.

This class has been helpful to me in many ways – praying more, especially when seeing and admiring God’s creation. Practicing the spiritual disciplines and also in giving.

My favorite part of the class has been seeing that the Spiritual Disciplines (my working out of them) are paths through the grief process.

These responses were thrilling to me because they indicated that many students really did experience the fulfillment of the project’s purpose. The students found a greater sense of emotional health through the practice of choice spiritual disciplines.

This class is only a beginning. Spiritual disciplines are an ongoing need for believers. I hope to be able to teach the class again. I hope through communication with these participants (conversations, phone calls, emails, bulletin inserts) I can continue to encourage them to practice the spiritual disciplines for the purpose of godliness.

Evaluation of Project Goals

Four goals were developed for this project. The first goal was to recruit a group of at least twenty church members who were interested in strengthening their emotional health through spiritual disciplines. This goal was far exceeded in the project as forty-three members signed up to take the class. By the end of the class, twenty-nine students attended at least seven of the eight class sessions, and twenty-three participants attended all eight lessons. I was thankful for the broad participation of the church family in this project even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruitment through the use of bulletin inserts seemed to work well. I do not know of any church members who were unaware that the class was going on this summer. The only members who missed out were those who were not yet coming back to church because of the pandemic. Some of these members have already requested that the class be offered again in the future.

The second goal of the project was to provide a survey whereby the group may assess their current practice of spiritual disciplines and their emotional health. The vehicle for fulfilling this goal was a twenty-item, pre-class survey using a six-point Likert scale. Members responded to statements describing their emotional life and their understanding and habits related to the four disciplines covered in the curriculum. The results of the pre-test survey were compared with results of the post-test survey and statistically evaluated to determine whether students' participation in the course made a statistically significant difference in their practice of spiritual disciplines and in their emotional health.¹

An evaluation of each item of the spiritual disciplines survey shows that participants were generally strong coming into the class (see table 1).² Students rated themselves highly in most areas, especially the last four items, which dealt more with

¹ See appendix 3.

² Student responses could range from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" on a six-point Likert scale. Items were valued from 1 to 6 on this scale, with a value of 6 indicating the response that pointed to the greatest spiritual or emotional health. Average scores for most items tended to be in the 4 and 5 range, indicating a level of spiritual and emotional maturity among these students.

concepts than practice. Yet in nine of ten items, the post-test revealed improvement in student scores. The weakest area for students—the tendency for their mind to wander in prayer—increased slightly, but the biggest improvement came with item 5, as students measured their enjoyment of personal devotions. This course seems to have made time with God genuinely more enjoyable for several students. That is a great encouragement to me.

Table 1. Pre- and post-test averages of part 1 of survey: spiritual disciplines³

No.	Statement	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Difference
1	I have been taught about the spiritual disciplines prior to this course.	4.83	4.59	- 0.24
2	The spiritual life is mostly a private thing.	4.10	4.52	0.42
3	My mind often wanders when I try to pray.	2.59	2.79	0.20
4	When I read the Bible, I take time to think deeply about what I have read.	4.14	4.52	0.38
5	My times of personal devotion are usually enjoyable for me.	4.55	5.24	0.69
6	My Bible reading often feels dry.	4.07	4.21	0.14
7	Personal devotions are an essential part of being a mature Christian.	5.34	5.66	0.32
8	What I do with my money is related to my spiritual maturity.	5.10	5.41	0.31
9	Spiritual practices we do in relation to other people like worship, giving, and service are spiritual disciplines.	5.10	5.62	0.52
10	The regular practice of spiritual disciplines can help a person's emotional health.	5.48	5.72	0.24

Evaluation of the survey on emotional health reveals a similar improvement in scores between the pre-test and post-test results. Table 2 reveals a slightly lower overall strength in emotional health when compared to spiritual disciplines. Still, scores across the board in the pre-test are high. Participants seem to be, from their responses, fairly stable emotionally. The greatest improvement in this section is the jump in response to the item, “I am hopeful about the future.” This was the greatest improvement in any item in the

³ Items 2, 3, and 6 were reversed-scored on the survey, so that an answer of “Strongly Disagree” was viewed favorably and given a rating of 6, while the answer “Strongly Agree” was viewed unfavorable and given a rating of 1.

whole survey. The title of the curriculum is “Grieving with Hope,” so it is gratifying that the item showing the greatest improvement among participants was concerned with hope. I was also heartened to see that even where participants scored high in the pre-test, their post-test scores were even stronger. In particular, I was encouraged by the post-test score to item 18, “In recent weeks, I have found comfort through my daily devotions.” The improvement in this response correlates to the improvement in the response to the item about enjoying personal devotions in the first section. I concluded from these data points that this class helped some students enjoy their walk with God and find help for daily living through their walk with God.

Table 2. Pre- and post-test averages on part 2 of survey: emotional health⁴

No.	Statement	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Difference
11	In recent weeks I have struggled with feelings of anxiety.	3.59	3.93	0.34
12	I am hopeful about the future.	4.86	5.59	0.73
13	In recent weeks I have felt sadness over the losses in my life.	2.83	3.14	0.31
14	In times of trial, I have trouble connecting with others.	3.14	3.41	0.37
15	I often feel my spirits lifted after attending worship.	5.66	5.76	0.10
16	Sometimes I feel bitter toward God because of the trials of my life.	4.86	4.69	- 0.17
17	I often feel invisible to others.	4.17	4.14	- 0.03
18	In recent weeks, I have found comfort through daily devotions.	4.93	5.44	0.51
19	I feel like I have a support network of friendship in my local church.	5.59	5.76	0.17
20	I feel joyful when I give to those in need.	5.55	5.86	0.31

The third goal was to develop an eight-week curriculum on utilizing personal and corporate spiritual disciplines to foster emotional health. This curriculum showed a positive connection between faithful practice of selected personal and corporate spiritual

⁴ Items 14, 16, and 17 were reversed-scored on the survey, so that an answer of “Strongly Disagree” was viewed favorably and given a rating of 6, while the answer “Strongly Agree” was viewed unfavorable and given a rating of 1.

disciplines and emotional health. Table 3 illustrates the statistically significant difference shown between the pre-test and post-test surveys.

Table 3. Results of *t*-test for dependent samples

	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test</i>
Mean	90.17857	96.03571
Variance	145.8558	70.70238
Observations	28	28
Pearson Correlation	0.670651	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	27	
t Stat	-3.45759	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000911	
t Critical one-tail	1.703288	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001821	
t Critical two-tail	2.051831	

The t-Stat exceeded both the t-Critical one-tail and two-tail results, indicating that a statistically positive difference was made through the teaching of the curriculum to this group of students. Thus the goal was met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre and post-training survey scores: $t(28) = -3.45759$, $p < .000911$.

The development of the curriculum was evaluated by an expert panel consisting of one missionary, one church member not in the class group, and one student from the Southern Seminary Biblical Spirituality program. The panel was composed of both male and female members. A rubric on a four-point scale was given to panel members to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, methodology, and applicability of the project.⁵ Expert panel members were consistently impressed with the curriculum and made many encouraging comments throughout their evaluations. One panelist asked me to incorporate more class participation in three of the lessons. He approved my changes, and the lessons

⁵ See appendix 2.

were cleared to be taught, with each element in the rubric achieving at least a score of 3.0 on the four-point scale. Meeting this threshold in the rubric, along with the statistically significant results of implementing the ministry, demonstrates that this goal was achieved.

The fourth goal of the project was to strengthen group members' practice of the selected spiritual disciplines through the implementation of the curriculum to foster emotional health. The course took place in a small group format with twenty-nine participants completing at least seven of the eight weeks of the course. At the close of the last session, all participants who had attended at least seven of eight sessions were eligible to take the post-test survey, which was identical to the survey they took at the start of the class. The pre-course and post-course responses were analyzed using a *t*-test for dependent samples to determine whether there was a statistically positive difference in test results among those who participated in the course. The combination of the statistically positive result from the *t*-test and the encouraging thoughts shared at the end of the class by class members convinces me that this goal was met. I believe many students in the class are in a better place spiritually and emotionally than they were at the beginning of the class.

Strengths of the Project

When I began research for chapter 2, I felt like what was required was merely a hoop to jump through. In my pride, I thought I already knew about the key Bible passages relating to the spiritual disciplines. I thought that after years of Bible teaching experience I could easily convey these truths to those participating in the group. How wrong I was. Careful exegesis of key passages ended up forming an essential part of my curriculum. The work of chapter 2 provided a biblical foundation for the course. This was a great strength of the course as I could interact with students not from the perspective of my knowledge or understanding but from the perspective of God's revelation. The course was thoroughly biblical, for which I am thankful.

As research for the project continued, I began to draw from some of the best of

evangelical scholarship on biblical spirituality. Chapter 3 took a long time to take shape, but my survey of evangelical approaches to the spiritual disciplines and emotional health was integral to curriculum planning. As with chapter 2, the “Grieving with Hope” curriculum was directly shaped by insights gained through the research carried out for chapter 3.

The course was accessible to students. No one complained about not being able to understand class content. At the same time, students stayed engaged with lesson content to a remarkable degree. Class participation was consistently good and widespread. Interest in the subject matter never seemed to lag, even in the final weeks of the course. Students seemed just as interested in topics related to the spiritual disciplines as they were in topics related to their own emotional health.

The course was appropriate to these students. I believe that one of the contributing factors to the success of the project is my longevity at West Hickory Baptist Church. Having been at the church since 2005, I have walked through grief with many members. I have also increased in my understanding about how members learn and what teaching methods work best with them. The combination of pastoral and pedagogical experience with this particular body of believers served the purpose and goals of this project well. There were no slide presentations and just a few visual aids. Most of our time was spent in lecture or discussion, and for this group of older believers, this approach worked well.

A final strength of the course was the enthusiasm evident in class members. Their consistent eagerness to learn, willingness to share, and desire to grow spiritually were among the most significant factors that made this project a success.

Weaknesses of the Project

This ministry project was not without its weaknesses. First, I was never totally satisfied with my course survey. I wish I had changed the first item on the spiritual disciplines section, which read, “I have been taught about the spiritual disciplines prior to

this course.” This statement is too close to a “yes or no” item, which is to be avoided when developing these Likert scale surveys. I did not realize until the first survey had gone out that this item was going to be useless for evaluation. In other words, because it was about what had happened to the students before the class began and said nothing about the results of the class, the comparison between pre- and post-test results was bound to be identical and therefore unhelpful for statistical evaluation. In fact, it was worse than that. Scores on this item actually went down in the post-test. I believe that some students filled out the pre-test believing they had been taught the spiritual disciplines before and so they filled out the survey with an “Agree” or “Strongly Agree,” but after going through the class, they may have marked themselves with a lower score because they realized they had not really been taught much about spiritual disciplines after all. If I could start again, I would improve the survey. A lack of experience with this kind of evaluation and a fear of statistics held me back from doing a better job.

The second weakness of the project was its timing. I had hoped to do the class in March and April of 2021, but the COVID-19 pandemic made this timetable impractical. Only after vaccines became widely available did the members most interested in the class begin to attend church again. In addition, my work on chapter 3 lagged as I was uncertain on how to proceed with this chapter. Guidance from the PDS office on chapter 2 was clear, but guidance on how to proceed with chapter 3 was less clear because these chapters vary so much in their approach from project to project. I should have engaged with my supervisor earlier to nail down my approach to chapter 3. However, even if I had completed chapter 3 when I had intended (January of 2021) I do not think I would have been able to offer the class until the time it actually occurred because people would not have been willing to attend the class earlier in the year. Because of the age range of class members and the nature of the course, this class required in-person participation. So, I do not think the time frame was avoidable; however, I still wish I could have been less rushed at the end.

A third weakness was pedagogical. I have many years of teaching experience but after taking “Foundations of Teaching” this summer with Dr. Matt Haste, I realized how much I still have to learn. The insights I gained from this class would have made my curriculum so much better. I wish I had taken “Foundations of Teaching” earlier in my degree program so that I could have used its insights in my project planning. The curriculum would have been greatly enhanced by the ideas I gleaned from authors like James Lang and Larry Richards.⁶

A final weakness concerns the practical realities of church life. The truth is that many members of our church who desperately needed this curriculum did not sign up for the class. They are bound up with shame and are largely uninvolved or unengaged. Quite a few participants in the course were mature and growing believers. While they benefited from this class, it is evident that many of those most in need of what “Grieving with Hope” had to offer never took the opportunity to be a part of the class. When I offer the class in the future, I will still invite the whole congregation, but I will also prayerfully consider a few personal invitations to members I think would really benefit from the class.

Theological Reflections

Through working on this project, two Bible passages shaped my understanding of how spiritual disciplines can foster emotional health. First, I saw afresh the godly man of Psalm 1. This man is like a tree, planted by streams of water, whose leaf does not wither. He is the picture of stability, contrasted with the foolish one who is like chaff blown away by the wind. But the secret of the Psalm 1 man is his life of meditating on the Word of God day and night. In other words, his practice of the spiritual disciplines plays a vital role in his emotional health. Along with this insight from Psalm 1, the passage that spoke most strongly to me about thriving through times of grief was 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. As I

⁶ James Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016). Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2020).

meditated on the fact that the God of all comfort “comforts us so that we can comfort one another with the comfort we have received from God,” I was convinced that my project must include this concept of comforting community. I realized that most people I have known in my ministry who are stuck in a feedback loop of grief are in that place in large part because they are isolated from other believers. Through these two passages, my approach to the curriculum crystalized. I would come to the students with two simple ideas: (1) you can make it through trials and grief by turning to God and turning to one another, and (2) the goal in your life is not to forget all grief or ignore grief, it is to break the obsessive feedback loop of grief that keeps you emotionally crippled. The spiritual disciplines are a gateway to the fulfillment of both ideas. As students practice the personal and corporate spiritual disciplines, they draw near to God and to one another, and as they practice these disciplines they open the door for the voice of God to break the negative feedback loop in their minds.

In addition to these biblical insights, my own life has been enriched by the many excellent books I was exposed to in the course of preparing this project. Peter Adam’s *Hearing God’s Words* and the Richard Lovelace classic *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* were incredibly important in shaping my approach to my project. Lovelace’s understanding of the various streams of evangelicalism gave me a historical framework for the development of evangelicalism I did not have before.⁷ Peter Adam grounded me in a biblical theology of the voice of God. His book shaped my approach to spirituality, giving me greater confidence to make my project Bible-saturated.⁸ In addition, David Powlison’s approach to sanctification was encouraging. Having been saved in an environment that emphasized the teaching of surrender and faith (popularly known as “Let go and let God” teaching), I

⁷ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979).

⁸ Peter Adam, *Hearing God’s Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004).

was heartened by Powlison’s steady wisdom and insistence that God is at work in all kinds of ways over the course of a lifetime, conforming us to the image of His Son.⁹ The works of the Puritans, which were a prominent part of several seminars in the Biblical Spirituality program, also proved helpful to my spiritual life.¹⁰ The seminar “Revival and Spiritual Awakenings & Revivals,” taught by Stephen Yuille, along with Joseph Harrod’s seminar “Christian Classics,” both extensively featured the works of the Puritans and early Evangelicals. I will be served well for years to come by returning to these sources in my personal devotions and study. Through this course I developed a useful library of seminal works on the spiritual disciplines. I intend to re-read many of these books and continue to study in this area. I hope the practice of the spiritual disciplines and training others in the spiritual disciplines will be an ongoing part of the rest of my life.

Finally, the Biblical Spirituality program as a whole has directed me toward a truly biblical spirituality. I have been served well by this program because this program avoids the mysticism evident in much of evangelicalism while providing solid and relevant biblical approaches to spiritual formation.

Personal Reflections

I feel about my doctoral studies much like I feel about pastoring: in some ways, it feels like I have been a student forever; in other ways, it feels like I started two months ago. I finish this program with great gratitude. I know that I am no great teacher. I will probably never have a large following on social media or be famous. I am an ordinary pastor. And that is good. I want to be the best ordinary pastor I can. The Biblical Spirituality concentration helped me become a better pastor. The program helped me become a better disciple of Jesus as well.

⁹ David Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

¹⁰ My time in the Biblical Spirituality program gave me greater exposure to the Puritans than I had previously enjoyed. John Owen, John Flavel, Richard Sibbes, and John Bunyan became companions in my spiritual journey that I expect to read for years to come.

I feel privileged to have studied at Southern. I support all of the Southern Baptist seminaries and I am much closer geographically to one of our other seminaries than I am to Southern. But a couple of times each year I made that seven-hour trip rather than that two-hour trip because I believed the Biblical Spirituality program would hold particular value. Having read several of Dr. Whitney's books before applying to Southern, I was convinced that studying under him and other professors in the program would be enriching. I am glad I chose Southern. One of the unexpected blessings of the program was interaction with my fellow students. I did not become particularly close to any of them during our time together, but I was heartened by observing their lives. Many of them seem to be much farther along in their walk with God than I am. But most of my fellow students have difficult ministries. I was encouraged to be in the same boat with many of these students. I was also encouraged to know that God is working through these men in amazing ways all over the country and even overseas. Being at Southern helped me get out of my little bubble of West Hickory Baptist Church. Being involved in the DEdMin program reminded me that God is at work everywhere.

I shall not soon forget the times in the middle of seminar when we would convene in the beautiful Boyce chapel for worship. The voices of men lifted up in praise was inspiring. The preaching of the Word from fine expositors was encouraging. I suppose encouragement is the best word to describe my overall experience in this program. My professors were universally gracious. The staff was consistently kind, from the cafeteria worker who let me sneak into breakfast late one day to the PDS office staff who answered every question with ease and grace. My time at Southern Seminary has been formative. I am thankful.

Conclusion

I started this program three years ago in my late forties with great optimism. Then I hit fifty. Or should I say fifty hit me. Health issues, the struggles of an aging church, and the challenges of a large family combined to stretch me in uncomfortable ways. I

needed this project as much or more than any of our church members. I needed the Biblical Spirituality program. But I am exhausted. The doctoral program on top of the daily demands of ministry and family is an overwhelming load. I will be relieved when I have finished the program. And yet, although I am tired, I am also refreshed. This program was the kick start I needed to finish my race well. I do not want to run the course of my ministry in vain; I think that is the fear of every pastor. Pastors measure the meaning or the futility of their race by the outward fruit of ministry. For a select few that is satisfying (temporarily), but for the rest of us, with struggling churches filled with struggling people, meaning must be found elsewhere. Thankfully, the Biblical Spirituality program pointed me back to my Savior and back to the truth that walking with Him in the fellowship of God's people is the place where meaning is found.

APPENDIX 1

BULLETIN INSERT FOR GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Grieving with HOPE

Pastor Frady will be leading a group on Sunday nights through an eight week study called *Grieving with Hope*. This class will begin on Sunday night, May 16 at 6:00 p.m. In this group, you will learn about God's grace in the trials of life and find the support of other believers to help you on the way. If you would like to be in the group, please sign up below and put this sheet in the offering plate.

Name: _____

Phone or email: _____

APPENDIX 2

RUBRIC FOR COURSE EVALUATION

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel composed of one pastor, elder, or missionary, one Southern Seminary professor, graduate, or student, and one member of West Hickory Baptist Church not participating in the small group. At least one of the panel members was female. This panel evaluated the curriculum to ensure it was biblically faithful, methodologically appropriate, and sufficiently applicable for group members.

Grieving with Hope: Curriculum Evaluation					
1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The lesson was biblically sound.					
Scripture was interpreted correctly and used in context.					
Cultural and historical factors from biblical passages were properly interpreted and contextualized.					
The lesson addressed the areas of emotional health and spiritual disciplines biblically and consistently.					
Methodology					
The lesson used various learning strategies such as lecture, discussion, and case studies.					
The lesson adequately informed students about spiritual disciplines.					
The lesson sufficiently discussed emotional health in connection to the practice of spiritual disciplines.					
The lesson was interesting and engaging.					
Application					
The lesson contained adequate illustrations to help group members connect lesson principles to life.					
The "Take it Home" assignment for this lesson helped students remember and practice the material covered in the lesson.					
The lesson clearly communicated points of application to group members.					

Evaluator Name: _____

Lesson Title: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX 3

STUDENT SURVEY ON EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Grieving with Hope – Class Survey

West Hickory Baptist Church is committed to growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The spiritual disciplines are a fruitful subject for study and reflection. It is hoped that this class will help you utilize the spiritual disciplines to foster emotional health in your life. Of course, as believers we acknowledge the words of Jesus in John 15:6, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” We know that unless the Holy Spirit is at work, spiritual disciplines alone will be insufficient to bring us emotional comfort. But we also know that God comforts us so that we can comfort one another with the comfort we have received from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). One reason why we will gather as a group is so that you can enjoy the relationships that will be formed and strengthened in the group. While this class forms the core of Pastor Frady’s doctoral research project, the curriculum and group setting are designed to maximize spiritual benefit to you as the Holy Spirit works among us.

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to explore your knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines and to allow you to assess how walking in these disciplines affects your emotional health. As part of the research for this project, you will complete a survey before beginning the first class. Within two weeks after the class, you will complete the same survey. The church secretary will assign a Personal Identification Number (PIN) to your surveys so that your material will be held in confidentiality. Your name will not be used in any of the research or reporting of findings in the doctoral project.

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your practice of spiritual disciplines and an assessment of your emotional health. This research is being conducted by Scott Frady for purpose of measuring the impact of spiritual disciplines on emotional health. In this research, you will participate in class lectures, discussions, and brief at home assignments. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research. Below, please indicate whether you are willing to participate in this course:

I agree to participate: _____ I do not desire to participate: _____
Your Name _____ PIN: _____ (for office use only)

Section 1: Demographic Survey

1. What is your gender? Male _____ Female _____

2. How long have you been a Christian? (Please check the appropriate blank)
1-5 years _____
6-10 years _____
11-25 years _____
More than 25 years _____
I am not sure I am a Christian _____

3. How often do you have a personal time of Bible reading? (Check the appropriate blank)
Five or more times a week _____
Two to four times a week _____
Once a week _____
Once a month _____
Occasionally _____
Never _____

4. How often do you have a personal time of prayer? (Check the appropriate blank)
Five or more times a week _____
Two to four times a week _____
Once a week _____
Once a month _____
Occasionally _____
Never _____

5. How often do you meet with other Christians for worship? (Check the appropriate blank)
Three or more times a month _____
About twice a month _____
About once a month _____
A few times a year _____
Never _____

6. Do you give a portion of your income to the local church or other Christian organizations? (Please check "yes" or "no")
Yes _____
No _____

Section 2: Survey on Spiritual Disciplines

The following questions are focused on what you currently understand.

Directions: Please respond to the statements using the following scale:

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

No.	Statement	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1	I have been taught about the spiritual disciplines prior to this course.						
2	The spiritual life is mostly a private thing.						
3	My mind often wanders when I try to pray.						
4	When I read the Bible, I take time to think deeply about what I have read.						
5	My times of personal devotion are usually enjoyable for me.						
6	My Bible reading often feels dry.						
7	Personal devotions are an essential part of being a mature Christian.						
8	What I do with my money is related to my spiritual maturity.						
9	Spiritual practices we do in relation to other people like worship, giving, and service are spiritual disciplines.						
10	The regular practice of spiritual disciplines can help a person's emotional health.						

Section 3: Survey on Emotional Health

The following questions are focused on assessing your current emotional health.

Directions: Please respond to the statements using the following scale:

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

No.	Statement	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11	In recent weeks I have struggled with feelings of anxiety.						
12	I am hopeful about the future.						
13	In recent weeks I have felt sadness over the losses in my life.						
14	In times of trial, I have trouble connecting with others.						
15	I often feel my spirits lifted after attending worship.						
16	Sometimes I feel bitter toward God because of the trials of my life.						
17	I often feel invisible to others.						
18	In recent weeks, I have found comfort through daily devotions.						
19	I feel like I have a support network of friendship in my local church.						
20	I feel joyful when I give (money or service) to those in need.						

APPENDIX 4

THE GRIEVING WITH HOPE CURRICULUM

The following pages contain manuscripts of each lesson in the *Grieving with Hope* curriculum taught at West Hickory Baptist Church. The handouts for each lesson are included at the end of the lesson. These lessons are intended to address emotional health in grieving members through the practice of select personal and corporate spiritual disciplines.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week 1: Wounded and Weary – The reality of hardship and the presence of God

Introduction

Welcome to our class, “Grieving with Hope.” For the next eight weeks, we will be looking at how God is with us in the ups and downs of life and the tools He has provided to help us to live lives of peace and strength.

We will be together for eight weeks, but this class has been a lifetime in the making. All you have experienced high points with God, moments of grief and pain, and days of boredom or delight. We will be looking at all our days, good and bad, in the light of God’s Word.

Most of us, when we stop to think of it, can give thanks for our lives. What are some things in your life you are genuinely thankful for? Let’s go around the room and answer that question. (Take answers and affirm class participants in their answers) Some of us have lived what others would consider charmed lives, while others among us have come up in environments of struggle and hardship. But short time or long, all of us eventually face situations in our lives that break our hearts. This is reality of life in a sinful world.

Sharing Our Grief

Right now, I ask you to think of a time in your life when your world was shaken by grief. Maybe it was the death of a loved one. Perhaps it was a particularly painful moment in a relationship. Maybe it was a financial trial or a physical hardship. Maybe it was regret over a past action.

Like most people, I have had my share of heartbreaks, but one that sticks out for me is Brian. It was sixth grade. Brian was a little slow and awkward. He was smart but socially inept and weak. I was by no means the king of the class, but I remember joining in with the other boys, picking on Brian incessantly. I remember being on a field trip and watching another boy hit Brian over and over with a thin reed. I remember many times watching Brian cry. I have always regretted being part of his pain. Yes, I was just a kid. But yes, I knew better. I knew I was wrong. But I did not have the courage to stand up for a vulnerable kid. It still hurts.

Things we do and things done to us are things we carry with us, shaping us and affecting us throughout our lives. As one recent popular book says in its title, *The Body Keeps the Score*.¹ Our lives are affected by our griefs through and through. Is there any way to healing? Where can we turn for help?

¹ Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

The Pathway through Grief: Relational Attachment

Over the course of the next few weeks, we are going to find that we can find healing if we turn to God and to each other. To turn to each other is to cultivate community with one another. We begin to trust one another. We begin to share our hearts with one another. We begin to encourage one another. We realize that there are other people who understand and who will listen to us. As Bessel Van Der Kolk says in *The Body Keeps the Score*, “Restoring relationships and community is central to restoring well-being.”²

But even more important than healthy relationships with others is our relationship with our Creator, the most important relationship in life. We probably all know the verse, *4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing* (John 15:5-4 ESV).

We need to move from knowing about God to living with God. And we need to move beyond knowing about one another to living life with one another.

But have you ever felt distant from God? Have you ever desired to abide with Him but not known how to abide? If so, I am glad you are here. I want to introduce you to a Psalm. Look with me at Psalm 88 . . .

(Let’s go around the room reading one verse each)

1 O LORD, God of my salvation,
I cry out day and night before you.
2 Let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry!
3 For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
4 I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am a man who has no strength,
5 like one set loose among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
6 You have put me in the depths of the pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves. *Selah*
8 You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
9 my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call upon you, O LORD;
I spread out my hands to you.

² Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 38.

- 10 Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the departed rise up to praise you? *Selah*
- 11 Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
- 12 Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?
- 13 But I, O LORD, cry to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
- 14 O LORD, why do you cast my soul away?
Why do you hide your face from me?
- 15 Afflicted and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.
- 16 Your wrath has swept over me;
your dreadful assaults destroy me.
- 17 They surround me like a flood all day long;
they close in on me together.
- 18 You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;
my companions have become darkness.

This psalm leaves us in the darkness. We are alone, feeling abandoned by God and without the support of others. This is where grief takes us. “No one cares. No one is here for me. I am left to face the night alone, even as I cry out to God. And even as I am surrounded by people, I am utterly alone.”

The psalmist believes God is God. His theology is correct. His prayer is sincere. But he is troubled in soul. He is out of strength, feeling like a dead man walking. He feels the hand of God heavy on him -- God is not answering his prayer. The psalmist is utterly overwhelmed.

This psalm is a portrait of grief. Feeling alone and feeling abandoned. Have you ever been there? Is anybody willing to share a time when they felt alone and abandoned? (Take one or two answers) I felt abandoned and alone when I first went to college. It was the first time I'd ever been away from home. I didn't know anyone. I wasn't sure I belonged. But God met me in that time and brought comfort to me. And it was in two ways: His own presence and the love of people. A couple of weeks after being on campus, I had not gotten any mail from home. One morning, I was feeling kind of down, and I just prayed, “Lord, it would be so nice to get a letter from home today.” After lunch that day I went to my mailbox and there were, if I remember correctly, ten letters from home, cards from family and from church family. Around that same time, God spoke to me through a very unusual means. I was looking out my window, feeling alone. And as I looked out I noticed out my window the telephone poles. And the way they were arranged it looked like three crosses. I haven't had these sorts of experiences very often, but in that moment I sensed that God was bringing me comfort through that sight. He was reminding me that He was with me.

Is there anyone who has experienced God meeting you in your time of grief or trial? Would one or two of you share about that time in your life? (Take one or two answers).

These stories are one of the reasons we are here. We want to hear from one another and really listen. We want to grow in love for one another as we get to know one another. Thank you for all of you who have shared today.

I want to close today by talking about what we do when we are in the dark valley. The one truth I take away from Psalm 88 is this: the psalmist knows he is in a dark valley, but he has turned his heart toward God, even though he can't sense God's presence and feels God is bringing about his difficult circumstances.

The late David Powlison, who was a powerful voice in Christian counseling, said, "And there may be times when you are not even moving – stuck in gridlock, broken down – but you're still facing in the right direction. That's Psalm 88, the "basement" of the Psalms. The writer feels dark despair – but it is despair oriented in the Lord's direction. In other words, it's still faith, even when faith feels so discouraged and you can only say, 'You are my only hope. Help. Where are You?' That kind of prayer counts – it made it into the Bible."³

The late Pastor Eugene Peterson said, "Neither our feelings of depression nor the facts of suffering nor the possibilities of defection are evidence that God has abandoned us."⁴

So our goal today is to take an honest look at our grief and turn toward God. That's what we are aiming to do today. Next week, we will look at how we understand ourselves. Sometimes, we can't sense God's presence because we have a wrong view of ourselves. Then, in week three, we will see how God works with us to help us grow. From there, we will be looking at one of the choice means God uses for spiritual growth: the spiritual disciplines. We will be looking at and practicing four of the spiritual disciplines together and the hope is that these disciplines will strengthen our emotional health.

As we close each week, we will sing a hymn that connects to our session that day. This week, our hymn is a recent hymn, *He Will Hold Me Fast*. Read through the lyrics as you listen to the hymn played on the piano.

Let's sing together.

He Will Hold Me Fast⁵

Each week we will also have a brief "Take it Home" assignment that is aimed at helping you connect with God. This week's assignment is ***A Day of Thanks. For this week, plan one day in the next seven where you will focus in a special way on being thankful for all you see, think, and experience.*** Go ahead and write on your sheet right now which day you will choose as your day of thanks.

Let's close in prayer (open time for participants to pray short prayers as we close our time together).

³ David Powlison. *Making All Things New: Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 64.

⁴ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 91.

⁵ "He Will Hold Me Fast," Words by Ada Habershon and Matt Merker, Music by Matt Merker (Getty Music Publishing, 2013).

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health
Week One: Wounded and Weary – The reality of hardship and the presence of God

Introduction

What are you thankful for?

Sharing Our Grief

The Pathway through Grief: Relational Attachment

John 14:4-5
Psalm 88

TODAY'S GOAL: Face Your Grief and Turn to God

David Powlison

“And there may be times when you are not even moving – stuck in gridlock, broken down – but you’re still facing in the right direction. That’s Psalm 88, the “basement” of the Psalms. The writer feels dark despair – but it is despair oriented in the Lord’s direction. In other words, it’s still faith, even when faith feels so discouraged and you can only say, ‘You are my only hope. Help. Where are You?’ That kind of prayer counts – it made it into the Bible.”*

Eugene Peterson

Eugene Peterson said, “Neither our feelings of depression nor the facts of suffering nor the possibilities of defection are evidence that God has abandoned us.”*

TAKE IT HOME – A Day of Thanks. For this week, plan one day in the next seven where you will focus in a special way on being thankful for all you see, think, and experience.

NEXT WEEK: Body and Soul – Seeing ourselves as whole persons in need of healing.

*David Powlison. *Making All Things New: Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 64.

*Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2000), 91.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Two: Body and Soul – Seeing ourselves as whole persons in need of healing.

Introduction

How many of you did our “take it home” assignment last week? Are there a couple of you who would share what difference a day of gratitude made to you? (Take one or two responses). Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts.

It is good to be thankful, but it is not always easy. Life in a fallen world means there is so much hurt in every room, including this one. From abuse to tragic accidents, from personal offenses to relational breakdowns, from physical illnesses to emotional struggles, all of us are wounded and weary. We began to face our griefs last week. And we concluded that the best and first thing we could do in this challenging world is to turn toward God. Even if the answers don't come, even if we don't feel His presence, we still should turn to Him. He is the Creator and our Redeemer, He knows our needs, and in His mercy, He meets them, even when we can't see it or feel it.

But all of us would like to experience God more fully, wouldn't we? As I think about times when I have felt especially close to God, it often involves being in a beautiful place or sharing fellowship around the table or participating in worship with others or serving the Lord with others. I have noticed through the years that when I am engaged with my body and soul in loving and serving God that His presence to me is often very real and powerful and transformative.

The Great Divide

Going way back into the days of Greek philosophy, there was an idea called “dualism.” This idea said that matter was evil but spirit was good. This idea infiltrated Christian thinking and even secular thinking up to the present day. So we have become divided people. What I feel versus what I do. What I believe versus how I act. Worship on Sunday versus my life the rest of the week. Private religion versus public life. Science versus religion. Sacred space versus secular space. Body versus spirit. Much of the misery of our lives, much of the cultural upheaval that is taking place, and much of our sense of distance from God is owing to our tendency to live in dualistic terms.

We see it in the person who hears another person use a curse word while they are in the Fellowship Hall. And they say, “Don't talk like that, we're in church.” Or you see it in the person who was in church on Sunday posting a profanity laden rant on Facebook on Monday. You see it in the hypocrite who prays every morning and then deliberately sins against God through adulterous relationships. You see it in the person who is very “spiritual” but is also filled with bitterness and anger and can't get along with their family. You see it in politicians who say they believe one thing religiously but do another thing politically. The Great Divide between body and soul is at the heart of so many of our problems. And it is one of the core reasons we do not deal with the trials of our lives very well.

Biblical Evidence for an Integrated Life

What does the Bible say? This is always the right question. Does God point us in a different direction than the secular/sacred, body/soul divisions we so commonly embrace? The answer is yes and the truth of God's Word is liberating on this issue and illuminating to us as we face the challenges of our lives.

We begin with the fact that God is the Creator. God created a material world and He created people in His image as the high point of creation. Genesis takes two chapters to describe in detail all the different elements of material creation. The Bible makes clear from its opening chapters that God created matter and that the physical world has great value. C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, "There is no good trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it."⁶

At the same time, the opening chapters of Genesis also show us that being made in God's image meant that man became a living soul by the power of God. "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."⁷ So we are not like the angels (spirit without body), nor are we like the animals (bodies without souls). We are integrated beings. We see this integration in the Old Testament:

Get with the person to your left and look up the verses that are listed on your sheet. Try to note how each verse shows the connection of body and soul. In a few minutes, I'll ask you what you found in these verses.

- Psalm 63:1 "*My **soul** thirsts for you, my **flesh** yearns for you.*"⁸
- Proverbs 4:21-22, "*My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your **heart**. For they are life to those who find them and health to all their **body**.*"⁹
- Psalm 44:25, "*For our **soul** has sunk down into the dust; our **body** cleaves to the earth.*"¹⁰

⁶ C. S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1952), 64.

⁷ Genesis 2:7 (KJV).

⁸ Psalm 63:1 (NASB).

⁹ Proverbs 4:21-22 (NASB).

¹⁰ Psalm 44:25 (NASB).

And we see this integration in the New Testament as well:

- Romans 12:1-2 *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your **bodies** as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your **mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*¹¹

Thank you for those who shared answers. I hope you can see that the Bible views us as whole persons, body and soul. But we have not yet talked about the greatest example in the Bible of the integration of body and soul. Someone look up John 1:14 and read it for us.

We see the true integration of body and soul in the incarnation, the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. When God wanted to fulfill His plan to save a people for His very own, God the Son came to earth and took on human flesh. “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”¹² For thirty three years Jesus ate and drank, walked and lived and breathed in a body of flesh. And then He was crucified, offering His body as a sacrifice for sin. And many people might think that is the end of the story. They think He shook off that body on the cross. But no. On the third day, He rose from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection was the resurrection of His body. He ate and drank and walked about in His post-resurrection body. And He ascended to heaven, showing that His body was not something He laid down when He fulfilled His earthly ministry.

All Things New

We, too, will have resurrection bodies when Jesus comes again to make all things new. Remember the promise of a new heaven and a new earth in Revelation 21.¹³ God will make all things new, including our bodies. We will have bodies forever. This is why it is not good to talk about a dead person becoming one of God’s angels. No. We will have new bodies.

How does the biblical truth that we are integrated persons, body and soul, and that our bodies will go on forever renewed, affect your present view of your body? (Take one or two answers).

Thank you for sharing. Our bodies will go on, but in the present time, there is a problem. Our bodies break down. Our souls are troubled. Why? Because we live in a fallen world. Sin has corrupted everything. The problem is not that we have bodies, the problem is that sin has ruined both body and soul. And even as believers in Jesus, we

¹¹ Romans 12:1-2 (ESV).

¹² John 1:14 (ESV).

¹³ Revelation 21:1-7.

continue to wrestle with the effects of sin in daily life. This sin affects us body and soul. Our bodies react to temptation. Our souls are bound with shame over our thoughts and actions. So our tendency to divide our lives into spiritual and physical realms is an attempt to deal with our sin apart from the gospel. We are trying to make ourselves feel better and/or trying to make a space for us to sin without guilt and shame. But we are not made to live a physical/spiritual split. That is what we call dis-integration. The disintegrated life is destructive and devastating and dehumanizing and demonic.

The Integrated Life

In Christ, we are intended to live an integrated life. And the good news is, as you embrace a biblical view of body and soul, your ability to navigate hardships is greatly increased. Your sense of contentment and peace and joy grows. Does anyone know why living with a biblical view of body and soul will help you face hardship? (We are living according to our design rather than in opposition to the way we were made).

How then do we live an integrated life? We recognize that what we do in the body affects the soul and that the life of our soul affects life in the body. The two are integrated. So if I indulge in pornography with my eyes, my heart will be darkened. On the other hand, if I give my mind to meditation on God's Word, my soul will be strengthened. My daily choices with body and soul shape who I am. And increasingly, there is scientific proof of this integration of body and soul.

Rob Moll is a journalist who has studied this body/soul integration extensively. He writes, "But it may encourage you toward deeper, longer prayer when you learn that twelve minutes of attentive and focused prayer every day for eight weeks changes the brain significantly enough to be measured in a brain scan."¹⁴

A Look Ahead

In the weeks ahead, we are going to look at spiritual practices that I believe will strengthen us to face the difficult circumstances of our lives. What we are learning from brain science is that consistency in such practices can re-wire our brains so that our attitudes and behaviors are changed. This does not mean spiritual growth is just a matter of behaviors. It does mean that the Holy Spirit works through body and soul to make us like Jesus. The Spirit works in us and the Spirit works among us. Have you ever noticed in the book of Acts that the Holy Spirit always shows up and works among the gathered people of God? We experience God individually, but we experience God most meaningfully when we are with other believers. Have you ever thought about the fact that times we feel especially close to God often involve two things: physical sensations and other people? I can still remember how it felt at the *Urbana* conference on world missions to sing praises to God with 18,000 other college students in the coliseum at the

¹⁴ Rob Moll, *What Your Body Knows About God: How We Are Designed to Connect, Serve, and Thrive* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 15.

University of Illinois. I can still remember how close to God I felt. We are integrated persons, body and soul. Is there anyone who would share a time when the people of God brought you closer to God? (Take one or two answers).

We will want to keep our true nature in mind as we go through the next few weeks, and we will want to remember that the world, the flesh, and the devil will constantly tempt us to choose dis-integration over integration. But when you can, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, “Do everything to the glory of God” your life takes on a power and purpose that can see you through a thousand storms and enable you to point the way for others as well. So are you ready for that journey? I hope so.

What does it mean to you when I call our lives with God a journey? (Take several answers). A journey has a destination. A journey takes time. A journey takes equipment to get through the journey. A journey takes endurance and perseverance. A journey is often an exciting adventure. That last one is especially true of our walk with God. Next week, we are going to look at what God does in our journey to make us like Jesus. We are going to look at the question of how we grow as Christians.

For our *Take it Home* assignment this week, I want to ask you to meditate at least three times this week on 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. We will talk about meditating on the Bible later in week four, but for now, just take time to think carefully and turn over in your mind the truth of this passage. If, on at least three different days this week you will take time to think deeply about 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, I believe God will use this passage in your life to bring home many of today’s key truths.

Let’s close with a great hymn, *This is My Father’s World*

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Two: Body and Soul – Seeing ourselves as whole persons in need of healing.

Introduction

The Great Divide

In the Beginning

C.S. Lewis -- “There is no good trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it.”

Biblical Evidence for an Integrated Life

Old Testament

Genesis 2:7 “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

Psalm 63:1

Proverbs 4:21-22

Psalm 44:25

New Testament

Romans 12:1-2

The Ultimate Picture of Body and Soul

All Things New

The Integrated Life

A Look Ahead

TAKE IT HOME – This week, meditate at least three times on 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Three: Saved and Changed – How sanctification works

Introduction

We live in a world that is beautiful and broken. I have made two columns on your sheet, one labeled “Beauty” and one labeled “Brokenness.” I want you to help me fill in the columns. What are some aspects of life you believe reflect the beauty of the world? What aspects reflect the world’s brokenness? (Take answers) It didn’t take much effort to find many answers to both columns did it? We live in a beautiful but broken world. But as we saw in our first week together, as we turn to God we find He is with us to comfort us, give us a sense of meaning in the madness, and lead us to bless others. But turning to God is only the beginning. Trusting in Jesus is only the first step. Over the course of our lives, God works in us to change us, to heal our brokenness by conforming us to the image of His beautiful Son. But how does God change us? And what role, if any, do we play in that process of change? That is what we want to look at today.

Let’s Pray. **Pray Ephesians 2:8-10.**

⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Pray through these verses after reading them)

Saved and Changed – The Story of Sanctification

The theological word that describes our growth in Christ is **sanctification**. This word describes the process of becoming holy. That process begins when we trust in Christ for salvation. In saving us, God does not just forgive us of our sins on the basis of Jesus’ death in our place, He counts the perfect life of Christ to our account, so that now God sees us as holy and acceptable in His sight. Since God is perfectly holy, this righteous standing before God opens the way for us to have an intimate relationship of fellowship with God. God has given us a new identity. From sinner to saint. From one who lived in darkness to light in the Lord.

Romans 6:17, But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

And note Paul’s prayer for the church in Colossians 1:9-14,

⁹ For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

¹⁰ That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

¹¹ Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulnes;

¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

¹⁴ In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

The New Testament consistently calls believers “saints.”¹⁵ The saint is not an elite Christian or one who has attained some special spiritual significance. Every Christian is a saint, in that every Christian has been forgiven of their sins and granted the righteousness of Christ.

But you might remember I described sanctification in the beginning of this session as a process. If we have already been granted Christ’s righteousness, why speak of it as a process? The reason we speak of sanctification as a process is that the Bible speaks of it in this way. The New Testament gives us many commands about living a righteous life and the New Testament letters directly urge us to “grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ So the Bible affirms that we can grow in holiness as we live the Christian life. This growth happens as we follow the long-standing biblical pattern of forsaking and pursuing. The pattern goes back to Abraham, who was called to leave his father’s house and go to the land God would show him. Someone read for us Genesis 12:1-3, *Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: ² And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: ³ And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

There is in Abraham’s story a forsaking of his past life and a pursuit of God’s will. This same pattern is repeated throughout the Old Testament. Israel was called often to forsake idols and worship God alone. Joshua’s closing words to Israel in Joshua 24:14-15 provide a good example: *“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*

God’s call by its very nature is a call to a new way of life, characterized by this leave and follow pattern. In the New Testament, we see this pattern most clearly illustrated in Jesus’ calling of His disciples. Time after time we see disciples leaving their former way of life (whether their fishing gear or the tax collector’s booth) to follow Jesus. Let’s look at one example. Will someone read Matthew 4:18-22? *¹⁸ And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a*

¹⁵ See 1 Corinthians 1:2, for example.

¹⁶ See 2 Peter 3:18.

net into the sea: for they were fishers. ¹⁹ *And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

²⁰ *And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.* ²¹ *And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.* ²² *And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*

The clearest example of this principle in the New Testament letters is Colossians 3.¹⁷ It is printed there on your sheet. Will someone read verses 5-11? (Volunteer reads) Now, will someone read verses 12-17? (Volunteer reads). Do you see the “put off, put on” the “leave and follow”?

The book of Hebrews has a similar flavor in chapter 12, where we are told to “lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us and run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”¹⁸ So this idea of leave and follow is clear throughout the Scriptures.

But why does God want us to grow like this if we are already counted righteous in Christ? The best way to understand this, I think, is that God calls us to become like Jesus so that we can personally experience the righteousness He has already given us in His Son. Through the years, many theologians have spoken of “becoming what we already are.” I think of it as entering into a true appreciation of what we have been given. It is like a child who has a great inheritance. The inheritance is sure, it is unchanging, and it is a source of security. But the inheritance is only truly appreciated when it is put to use in everyday life. God’s changing us through sanctification causes us to appreciate His saving work even more because we experience it in a very personal way. Remember from last week, we are whole persons, body and soul. So God cares about our lives in the here and now. He cares that we are transformed through and through.

The other reason God is intent on changing us is that a transformed heart and life leads to love, love for God and love for people. We are sanctified in order to declare the excellence of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.¹⁹

But we all know that even on our best days, the pull of sin and the influence of darkness remains with us. We live in a fallen world and our souls have been marred by sin. God’s work of change is lifelong, and will only be completed in eternity. We are waiting for the day when our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like His glorious body.²⁰ It is only when Jesus returns and makes all things new that we will be fully sanctified, because only then will our earthly bodies be transformed. As we read in 1 John

¹⁷ Colossians 3. It is especially important to note verses 1-4, which root the “put off, put on” language in our identity in Christ.

¹⁸ Hebrews 12:1-3.

¹⁹ See 1 Peter 2:9.

²⁰ Philippians 3:21.

3:2, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

So one day, we will become what we are, fully and completely, body and soul. In the meantime, we rest in our identity as righteous in Christ, and pursue a life of holiness befitting of our identity, confident that one day we will be in experience what we are in our identity. This pattern for life is how we can hold the words of the Bible together in an understandable way. On the one hand, Jesus calls us to rest in Him and Hebrews urges us to enter the rest Jesus has provided.²¹ On the other hand, we are called to pursue holiness and to press toward the goal of Christlikeness. Thus, the Christian life is a restful race. And these rhythms of soul rest and spiritual pursuit should be evident in the life of a growing believer.

How Does Sanctification Work? – God’s Tools for Our Holiness

So how do we live this restful race? The late counselor David Powlison, in his wise book *How Does Sanctification Work?* gently points his readers to the biblical realities of how God changes us. He makes it clear that there is no one answer for how we are changed but that God uses all kinds of elements to change us.²² This is important for us to remember because we are going to be talking about the spiritual disciplines for the next four weeks and how they can help us grow in Christlikeness. We must remember as we look at these practices that can help us hope in God that they are not a cure all. We need other gifts from God in order to grow. We need saving faith in Christ, to be vitally connected to God. We need to remember our status as saints and all that God has done for us in Jesus. We need other people to encourage us and help us on our way. We need the local church in its teaching and preaching and praying and serving and singing. And we need the spiritual disciplines that the Bible lays out for us that help us to grow and mature spiritually and emotionally.

Powlison helps us see that we are changed primarily through five means: Truth changes us, God changes us, wise people change us, struggle and suffering change us, and we change ourselves.²³ These five means interweave throughout our lives, working transformation in our lives. So we are not looking for a magic bullet. But at the same time we realize that nothing is wasted. God is working in and through everything in our lives to make us like His Son. That means that your grief is not empty. God is in it. Whether He is bringing home to you the truth that He is with you or whether through your grief He is inviting you to a closer relationship with Him, in whatever case God is in it. Has anybody seen God speak to you through the kindness of a friend during a time of grief? (Take answers). Did the Bible come alive to you in your grief? (Take answers). I am almost

²¹ See Matthew 11:28-30 and Hebrews 4:1.

²² David Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 12.

²³ Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work?*, 63.

certain that you came through your time of grief as a changed person. This example of grief is just one example of the many ways God works in our lives to bring change. Of course, the Word of God and the work of God in us are the primary factors that bring change. But the other means of change are very important and not to be ignored. So I think it is very important for us as we look at the spiritual disciplines to remember that God changes us through people and through circumstances and not just by behaviors.

Where Do We Go From Here? The Spiritual Disciplines

For the next four weeks, we are going to look at four key spiritual disciplines that God has given us to live in this beautiful and broken world. We find in meditating over the Bible, in praying, in worship, and in giving four practices that can draw us near to God and play a part in seeing us through the darkest valleys of our lives. The great danger of teaching about the spiritual disciplines is that we can begin to see them as the keys to sanctification and that if we just do these few things everything will improve. Our time together today shows us that this is not true. We live in a fallen world. We need other people, not just some different behaviors. So before we get into the study of the spiritual disciplines I want to close today with a few points to ponder as we head into our study next week:

1. We don't earn salvation by the practice of the spiritual disciplines but by the perfect life and saving death of Jesus.
2. Our identity in Christ (being saved, united with Him) is the basis for living out our faith.
3. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives makes the difference between real spiritual transformation and going through the motions.
4. Since we are whole persons, body and soul, the spiritual disciplines can be a useful way for the Spirit to change us, as the disciplines involve the whole person.

CONCLUSION

When we see how God changes us, we can understand how the spiritual disciplines fit into the picture. God uses His Word, His work, circumstances, people, and our own hearts to bring change in our lives. The spiritual disciplines touch on each of these areas. God's Word is integral to the practice of the spiritual disciplines. God's Spirit works through the spiritual disciplines to change me. The spiritual disciplines involve other people. I pray for others, I worship with others, I give to others. The spiritual disciplines are used by God to shape my understanding of my circumstances even as my circumstances shape me. And as I walk with God through the spiritual disciplines, He changes me. So for the next four weeks, give yourself to these things. Trust God to change you, to shape your life. I believe if you will walk in these ways with a heart of faith, God will work powerfully in your life in these next few weeks.

Let's close with a hymn that speaks to my heart and I hope will speak to yours. It is a newer hymn but its lyrics are powerful. It is called *When Trials Come*.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Three: Saved and Changed – How sanctification works

Introduction

Beauty

Brokenness

Saved and Changed – The Story of Sanctification

How Does Sanctification Work? – God’s Tools for Our Holiness

Where Do We Go From Here? The Spiritual Disciplines

Conclusion:

***TAKE it HOME:* This week, pray through Colossians 3:1-17 at least two times.**

Next Week: We begin to look in depth at the spiritual disciplines and how they can help us toward emotional health as we look at the topic *Hearing from God*.

TAKE it HOME -- Colossians 3:1-17

3 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:

7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Four: Hearing from God– Pursuing healing through biblical meditation.

Introduction

We are whole persons, body and soul, made to glorify and worship God. But in this fallen world, we wrestle with the reality of our brokenness and the brokenness of the world even as we trust Jesus to save us and to change us.

About ten years ago, I lost about sixty pounds. Over time I have gained it all back and added a few pounds. Many people think that overweight people are lazy gluttons. But I rarely eat more than the standard three meals a day and snack very little. My problem is not that I eat too often but that I eat the wrong things. Too many soft drinks. Too much fried food. Too much bread. This diet led to too many calories but the problem wasn't that I was just constantly stuffing my face with ice cream and such. No. I was just eating the wrong things. When I lose weight it is because I change what I eat and I put together a system that helps me eat well and move a little bit each day. My success or failure in weight loss, barring something like disease or an accident, will depend on my sticking with my system. If I eat mindlessly, I will be obese. So again, the issue for me is not really how much I eat, but what types of food I consume.

Now, no one likes to talk about their weight, but I thought it applied so well to our subject today that I just had to bring it up. You see, the issue of weight loss is a lot like the spiritual disciplines. And the gaining of weight is often like the spiritual mindlessness that characterizes so many Christians.

To just go with the flow, not reading your Bible, spending a lot of time taking in social media and entertainment, feeding on empty entertainment every day, rarely praying, all this is a way to spiritual lethargy and weakness. We become spiritually fat rather than spiritually fit. On the other hand, if we practice the spiritual disciplines, like making good choices about diet and exercise, we will develop a system in our lives that the Holy Spirit will work in to bring us to spiritual and emotional health.

The word “system” here is intentional. I was helped to see this from a very unusual source, a self-help book from a cartoonist. Scott Adams, the cartoonist behind the well-known *Dilbert* comic strip, wrote a book that affirmed the value of systems over goals.²⁴ In weight loss, for example, whenever I put a number out there, a goal weight that I want, I always fail. But when I put into place a day-by-day system of right eating and a little exercise, the results are different. Systems over goals. That is an important life principle. And I don't think it is original to Scott Adams. I think the Bible is the source this idea. While Christians are called to remember God's past faithfulness and live in hope of a great future with God, God calls us to live in the present. Jesus specifically says

²⁴ Scott Adams, *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big: Kind of the Story of My Life* (New York: Portfolio, 2014).

in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not worry about tomorrow.”²⁵ We should be intentional about our lives. And the spiritual disciplines play a part in this. As we said last week without the work of the Holy Spirit the spiritual disciplines are just empty exercises. But confident that He is at work in us, the spiritual disciplines become a means for His working. So for the next four weeks, we are going to look at four different spiritual disciplines that we can practice that will help us see real change in our lives.

Now as with right eating and exercise, spiritual disciplines may feel difficult or undesirable at first. But just as an athlete performs most effectively when he has devoted himself to training, so the Christian lives a godly life when he trains through the spiritual disciplines. The goal is Christlikeness, right response to the trials and the joys of life. Spiritual disciplines are not the goal. Paul tells Timothy, “Train yourself to be godly.”²⁶ Spiritual disciplines are the training ground of the Christian life.

Professor Don Whitney’s definition of spiritual disciplines is helpful: “The Spiritual Disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.”²⁷ As we consider this definition, we see a variety of spiritual disciplines in the Bible. Various means of taking the Bible into our hearts and minds are among the spiritual disciplines. Prayer is a biblical spiritual discipline. Fasting likewise is a discipline seen in Scripture. Worship is also seen as a discipline. We also can see service and evangelism as disciplines. While there is no standard list of agreed upon disciplines, these disciplines are accepted by most scholars. In looking at these disciplines, we can see that some of the disciplines are personal and others are corporate. We do some things, like reading the Bible, on our own, while we do other things, like serving, with others. A few disciplines, like prayer, may be either personal or corporate. So over the next four weeks, we are going to look at four disciplines, two personal and two corporate, and try to put them in practice in our lives. Today, we start with what I believe is the foundational spiritual discipline, the one that informs all the others. This discipline is like having a right diet where the others are more like exercise. Most weight loss experts say dietary choices are more important than exercise. And I say that Bible meditation is the nutrition of the Christian life. If we feed on the Bible, we will likely be spiritually strong. If we feed constantly on the sinful messages of the world, we will be spiritually weak.

²⁵ Matthew 6:34 (ESV).

²⁶ 1 Timothy 4:7 (NIV).

²⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 4.

So let's take a few minutes to look at this foundational discipline of Bible meditation.

We read in 1 Peter, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation."²⁸ The pure spiritual milk in this passage is the Word of God. The Bible must be our regular diet.

Meditating on God's Word

When many people hear the word "meditation" they think about gurus and people in robes with their legs crossed and their eyes closed. But biblical meditation is not about emptying our minds but about filling our minds with God's Word. When we meditate, we think deeply about what we read in Scripture, turning it over in our minds, reflecting on it, and thinking about what we should do in light of what we have read.

How to Meditate

First, aim and arrive. Pick out a specific passage of Scripture that you want to meditate on. It may be a Scripture about something you are struggling with. It may be a passage from the gospels that you use to gain more insight into the person of Jesus. It may be a psalm that you look to for inspiration. Usually, you will meditate over one chapter of Scripture or less, just because of the constraints of time and our ability to think deeply for an extended period. The best type of meditation for me is just a few verses. Meditation often works best when coupled with daily Bible reading. After I have done my reading for the day, I will often choose a section or verse from something I have read for further meditation.

Once you have chosen your verses, begin to roll them over in your mind. Put stress on different words. For example, the first line of the 23rd Psalm proves fruitful for meditation when we emphasize words. Each word in, "The Lord is my shepherd" can be emphasized to great effect and with great meaning. Continue in this pattern of rephrasing until the message of the passage is well-fixed in your mind.

You might then consider restating the passage in your own words. Again, in the case of the 23rd Psalm, I might think to myself, "The Creator is my keeper." This brings across the idea of the verse in different words, which might awaken me to its meaning.

You can also pray through the text, combining the spiritual discipline of prayer with the spiritual discipline of meditation. In this way, you can pray without ceasing, you can carry on praying all through the day over the passage you've meditated on. With Psalm 23:1, you might pray a prayer of thanks that the Lord is your shepherd, or you might praise God for His loving care to you a needy sheep of His flock. You might pray for someone you know who does not know the Lord, asking God to become the shepherd of your loved one. The possibilities are endless and prayer comes alive when you couple it with Scriptural meditation.

²⁸ 1 Peter 2:2 (ESV).

If you are artistic person, a sketch of a truth might bring it home to your heart. Sometimes thinking about how the passage relates to the rest of Scripture can be a good topic for meditation. In Psalm 23, we might make the connection to Jesus, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. This would set us on a whole path of reflection about who Jesus is and what He has done.

For many of you, it will help to bring a notebook and a pen to your times of Bible meditation. By writing down what you are meditating on you may find yourself more focused on God's truth. In addition, you may find yourself better able to remember what you write down. You may also in the process of writing down what you are meditating about be able to make note of questions that arise from your time of meditation. You will have a record of these questions so you can go back to study them later. To keep a journal or a notebook is to not just write down your thoughts but it is to reflect on God's Word, to think about His thoughts. The psalmist says, "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds."²⁹

Practice in Meditation

I want you to take the Scripture passage on your sheet, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, and meditate on it, using the methods we have just talked about. You can spread out around the room if you need to. But let's come back together in fifteen minutes and talk about what this time of meditation has meant to us.

*Participants Have Time of Meditation and Share Their Thoughts Afterwards
(A few questions to stimulate discussion: What was something someone remembers from their time of meditation? Do you think you will remember this better than just reading your Bible? What was the most challenging part of this exercise?)*

Conclusion

Many people who have been Christians for a long time do not really grow as they would like. I believe Bible meditation is the missing ingredient for many of these believers. I also believe seeing Bible meditation as a privilege and a joy is the key to engaging in it with the consistency needed to see real change. Much as a person eating right and exercising eventually comes to value and even enjoy their new lifestyle, so it is with those who meditate on Scripture. One of the authors I like on spiritual disciplines is David Mathis. He puts it this way in his book, *Habits of Grace*: "Much has been said in terms of duty, and too little said about joy. And the seeming proliferation of long lists of disciplines can leave young Christians overwhelmed by what they're not practicing, and in some cases contribute to a low-grade sense of guilt which threatens to keep us from

²⁹ Psalm 77:11-12 (ESV).

fully engaging with the rest of our everyday lives for which these practices should be preparing us.”³⁰ So don’t worry about what you are not doing or what you have not done up to this point. Just begin today to practice the spiritual discipline of Biblical Meditation. You will be glad you did. And I want you to know that I am glad you are here and that I am learning right along with you. I have much growing to do in this area. I hope we can encourage one another on this journey together.

Let’s close with a hymn about the value of God’s Word . . .

How Firm a Foundation

³⁰ David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 33.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Four: Hearing from God– Pursuing healing through biblical meditation.

Introduction

A Personal Story and Its Connection to Spiritual Disciplines

Meditating on God’s Word

But biblical meditation is not about emptying our minds but about filling our minds with God’s Word. When we meditate, we think deeply about what we read in Scripture, turning it over in our minds, reflecting on it, and thinking about what we should do in light of what we have read.

How to Meditate

Practice in Meditation

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Conclusion

Take it Home: This week, meditate on Psalm 1, Psalm 19, and Psalm 103, using some of the meditation methods we discussed.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Five: Talking to God – Pursuing healing through personal prayer.

Introduction

In Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck speaks for a lot of people when he talks about his frustrations with prayer: "Then Miss Watson she took me in the closet and prayed, but nothing come of it. She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It warn't any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work. By and by, one day, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she said I was a fool. She never told me why, and I couldn't make it out no way. I set down one time back in the woods, and had a long think about it. I says to myself, if a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Winn get back the money he lost on pork? Why can't the widow get back her silver snuffbox that was stole? Why can't Miss Watson fat up? No, says I to myself, there ain't nothing in it. I went and told the widow about it, and she said the thing a body could get by praying for it was "spiritual gifts." This was too many for me, but she told me what she meant—I must help other people, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself. This was including Miss Watson, as I took it. I went out in the woods and turned it over in my mind a long time, but I couldn't see no advantage about it—except for the other people; so at last I reckoned I wouldn't worry about it anymore, but just let it go."³¹

Many people think of prayer just like Huck. Prayer is a way to get things. It is a way to have the things you want and need. But is this really what prayer is all about? Most Christians know that spending time in God's Word and in prayer form the foundation of true spirituality. But what is prayer? And how do we pray in a biblically-faithful way?

When we think about the great privilege we have, because of Jesus and what He has done for us, to go to God in prayer any time of day or night and anywhere we are, what longing to pray should fill our hearts. Most of us would jump at the chance to have dinner with a famous person, or play golf with a famous athlete, or be the special guest of a powerful politician. How much more should we jump at the opportunity we have every day to spend time in prayer with our Creator and Redeemer? We should never write off prayer like Huck Finn did. Prayer is the highest privilege of life.

³¹ Mark Twain, *Mississippi Writings: Tom Sawyer, Life on the Mississippi, Huckleberry Finn, Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Library of America 5 (New York: Library of America, 1982), 635.

Learning Prayer from Paul – Philippians 4:1-7

One of the greatest biblical instructors on prayer is the Apostle Paul. He is the one who told us to “pray without ceasing”³² and he lived a life of prayer in his ministry.³³ Let’s take a few minutes today to look at one of his great passages on prayer, Philippians 4:1-7, to see what it can teach us about the spiritual discipline of prayer and our emotional health.

The power of the personal spiritual discipline of prayer to foster emotional health is seen in this passage. Written from prison but permeated with joy, Paul’s brief letter to Philippi has blessed Christians for two millennia. Many believers are familiar with Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” This prayer promise has been a particular comfort to followers of Jesus through the ages.

Paul loves the church in Philippi deeply, but he recognizes at the time of the writing of this letter, the church is divided.³⁴ There have been signs throughout the letter that there was division at Philippi. The exhortation of 2:1-11, with its insistence on single-mindedness, unselfishness, and humility shows that there were relational difficulties within the congregation.³⁵

The combination of exhortation and comfort so common in Paul shines through in verse 1. The Philippians, in spite of their troubles, are his beloved brothers and sisters. In his imprisoned state Paul longs for those he loves so much. They are his dear friends. More than that, they are his joy and crown. In a letter that is centrally about joy, Paul roots his joy not only in the gospel of Christ but, through the gospel of Christ, in the people of God. Paul says the Philippians are his “crown.” Here he likely has in mind the laurel crown of the athletic victor. These precious believers in Philippi are a sign to Paul that he has “fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7-8).³⁶

³² 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV).

³³ See D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015).

³⁴ Walter G. Hansen, *Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 278.

³⁵ Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word, 2015), 238. The exhortation to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel is replete with calls to oneness (see 1:27-30). Phil 2:14, with its command to do all without grumbling or arguing, likewise seems to point to an unsettled church. The positive example of Timothy in chap. 2, as contrasted in v. 21 with those who look out for themselves, hints at problems at Philippi.

³⁶ Though Paul often expresses his love to the people of God in the various churches of his ministry, the church in Philippi seems to receive the most effusive expressions of love. For example, Phil 1:7-8 reads, “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am

With the overflow of love Paul expresses to the Philippians in 4:1, there is also a word of exhortation: “Stand firm in the Lord.” Paul describes the believers at Philippi as soldiers who are called to stand at their post even under great pressure.

The pressures of the church at Philippi were common to the churches of Paul’s day and included external persecution, the threats of false teachers, and internal conflict among the body of believers. What is unique about the church in Philippi is that Paul names the individuals involved in the conflict. Even in 1 Corinthians, in the case of horrific sexual sin, Paul did not name the perpetrator. But in Philippians, Paul names those at the center of the conflict: “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil 4:2). The fact that Paul calls these women by name in a letter that would be read to the entire church shows that this was not some minor dispute but was a conflict that had major ramifications for the whole church.³⁷ Paul valued these women as trusted co-workers in the gospel. This is why their conflict is so concerning to him: the power and reputation of the gospel is at stake. There is here, then, a clear rebuke of two valued associates.

The serious nature of the issue between Euodia and Syntyche is often lost on readers and hearers today. Those who preach this passage often frame the dispute as a petty argument between two women with too much time on their hands. However, the fact that church in Philippi began under the auspices of faithful women like Lydia means that this dispute must have been quite substantial and significant.³⁸

Though the precise nature of the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche is unknown, Paul’s admonition to them is known. He calls them to “agree with each other” or to “be of the same mind.” But how can this reconciliation take place? Only “in the Lord.” Only through a living relationship with Christ can these women find the resources they will need to forgive one another.

However, the resources of Christ are often administered through the people of God, so Paul calls on a third party to intervene to help these women reconcile. These women had struggled with Paul to spread the gospel, like athletes on the field of competition. Now Paul asks the loyal companion to struggle to help these women come back together. The identity of the true companion is not stated but he is commanded by Paul to deal with this conflict lovingly, directly, and quickly. Leaving disagreements and disputes to fester in the dark is not an option for the people of God. The tension in the church in Philippi must have been thick, as would be the case in any church where there is

in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Jesus Christ.”

³⁷ Frank S. Thielman, *Philippians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 216.

³⁸ Moises Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 192. See also the story of the church in Philippi in Acts 16:11-15.

significant conflict between key members. The admonitions, then, of the next section, should be viewed with the backdrop of the conflict between these key women of the church in mind. In other words, Paul's words about prayer are given in a context of emotional upheaval.

And it is into this environment that Paul's words in verse four break through: "Rejoice in the Lord always." New Testament scholar Moises Silva declares, "Neither Paul's difficult circumstances nor the frightening dangers faced by the Philippians can be allowed to eclipse Christian joy as the mark of faith."³⁹ Paul's idea of joy in the Lord is a deep-seated confidence in God in spite of circumstances. Because of this, we are to rejoice always, because our rejoicing does not depend on changing times but on an unchanging God.

But we are not only called to a rejoicing heart, we are also called to a gentleness of spirit. Even as we hope in God, we deal with one another with sensitivity and care. Silva says, "Paul expects believers to be guided by a frame of mind that does not put priority on personal rights. Believers whose primary concern is whether or not they are being dealt with fairly will fail to exercise a fundamental element of Christian behavior: preferring others above themselves."⁴⁰

We can deal with one another gently because "the Lord is near." This phrase probably points both to the Lord's second coming and to His presence with the people of God. Because He is coming again I need not fear the hardships of this life, for eternity awaits. And because He is present with me, I need not fear the present moment because I know He will keep me in His care.

Rejoicing in the Lord and walking in gentleness make a good beginning on the path of emotional stability and spiritual health, but it is with verse 6, and the call to prayer, that the real power for overcoming anxiety is found. Paul writes in verse 6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

Paul echoes the teaching of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount by telling his readers to "not be anxious about anything" (Matt 6:25-34). The Philippians had good reason to be anxious. Not only were they going through a significant church conflict between two of their most valued members, but they were a church that had known poverty, and a church under threat of false teachers (2 Cor 8:1-2). When Paul's own experience of constant persecution and imprisonment is considered, the true power of the command to not be anxious about anything is seen.

Importantly, Paul anchors the power of prayer to the necessity of thanksgiving. Without thanksgiving, believers are prone to complain and to treat God as a dispenser of personal desires rather than a faithful Lord. In this way, prayer not only answers the human

³⁹ Silva, *Philippians*, 194.

⁴⁰ Silva, *Philippians*, 194.

tendency to worry but also addresses the temptation to grumble and complain, which Paul has already highlighted in Philippians 2:14. Prayer turns the heart of the believer away from anxiety and toward the heart of God.

The result of this life of prayer is the “peace of God, which transcends all understanding.” This peace “will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). The peace Paul is speaking of in verse 7 is not the peace of God that has come to the Philippians through their justification. He is also not describing a peace that is merely a matter of good feelings. Paul describes a peace that guards heart and mind. He describes a peace too vast to understand and too perfect to ever devise.

This peace will stand like a guard over the prayerful believer. This word “guard” is a military term referring to a group of soldiers standing guard over a city to protect it from an assault.⁴¹ Paul says the peace of God will guard both the minds and the hearts of believers.

The answer to anxiety, then, is the peace of God through prayer. This peace is the peace of God. It is not the peace of changed circumstances, though sometimes God is merciful to bring relief from trying circumstances. It is a peace that is beyond knowledge. As believers in Christ seek unity and take Paul’s exhortations in Philippians 4:4-7 to heart, peace and stability of mind and heart will result. Therefore, the practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer, of gratefully casting anxieties on the Lord, is essential to emotional health.

How to Pray to Foster Emotional Health

How then do we pray in such a way that we will grow spiritually and see God work to bring the kind of peace Paul talks about? On one level, we pray by praying. Most of the time we fail in prayer just by a failure to pray. Other things distract us, we lose heart, or we don’t think we can pray well enough to make a difference. But we can learn to pray. The disciples said to Jesus in Luke 11:1, “Lord, teach us to pray” so we can see through this request that prayer can be learned. And the best way to learn is by doing. I can study all about the guitar but it is of no value to me unless I attempt to play the instrument. In the same way, a bookshelf filled with books on prayer will not make you a person of prayer. So the first way to learn to pray is to pray.

We also learn to pray by praying with others. You have opportunities at West Hickory to be part of prayer groups and we have a prayer ministry. Many of the members of the prayer ministry are seasoned prayer veterans with a deep walk with the Lord. You can learn from them just by listening.

You can also learn to pray by studying the prayers of Scripture. There are many prayers in the Bible, especially in the book of Psalms. Look at what the saints of God in the Scriptures asked for, notice how they approach prayer, and begin to pattern your prayer life after what you read in the Bible.

⁴¹ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 247.

And this is the place where these first two disciplines can come together. The Puritan, Thomas Manton, said, “Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the word and prayer... The word feeds meditation, and meditation feeds prayer. These duties must always go hand in hand; meditation must follow hearing and precede prayer. To hear and not to meditate is unfruitful... It is rashness to pray and not to meditate. What we take in by the word we digest by meditation and let out by prayer. These three duties must be ordered that one may not jostle out the other.”

So, one helpful thing we can do to improve our prayers is to read Scripture before we pray. After reading, meditate on what we have read and then pray. As we read, look for what we can praise God for. Look for what we can thank God for. Let the Word convict us of our sins and lead us to confession and repentance in our prayers. Notice God’s promises and purposes in Scripture and allow these to shape our prayers.

On a practical level, here are a few tips for prayer. First, have a set time for prayer. Jesus had a custom of going out to meet with God early in the morning. Find what works for you, that time when you are least interrupted and most mentally fresh. Make a priority of prayer. Make your time with God the most important appointment of your day. I recommend for those starting out or for those getting back on track to start with just 15 minutes of Bible reading and prayer every day. After two weeks, slowly begin to add time until you have time to adequately read and meditate on Scripture and pray. Second, pray as if God is really there and is really listening, because He is. The psalmists pour out their hearts to God and so should we. Don’t worry about whether your feelings are intense enough, but try to avoid just praying out of routine. Avoid the same old phrases and realize that you are in conversation with God.

I have found that the most helpful practice for me is to use the Scriptures as a basis for prayer. Donald Whitney’s book *Praying the Bible* is a helpful resource for learning more. He encourages us that praying the Scriptures will keep us from praying “the same old things about the same old things.” We generally do pray about the same key issues in life, but praying the Bible enables us to pray about them in ways that are enriching and helpful. This week, take a few minutes to meditate over the following passages and then pray them to the Lord. I think you will find your prayer life greatly enriched:

Day One: *Colossians 1:9-14*

Day Two: *Ephesians 1:15-23*

Day Three: *Ephesians 3:14-21*

Day Four: *Philippians 1:9-11*

Day Five: *1 Thessalonians 3:9-13*

Pray Without Ceasing

Let me encourage you as we close that your prayer life is so much bigger than your time of personal devotions. The reason I am making this point now, after having

talked about daily devotions, is that praying outside of daily devotions can become pretty empty unless you are having regular devotions. In other words, I want to urge you to avoid the approach that says, “I don’t do daily devotions, I just pray all through the day.” That is a harmful approach because it makes daily devotions optional when they are really essential and it is harmful because you really don’t pray all through the day. If you can’t pray for a few minutes in a concentrated way, I seriously doubt you pray all through the day.

But with that said, having met with God in a time of daily devotions, if you can cultivate the discipline of praying as you go through your day, your life with God will be greatly enriched. How can you do that? One way is to keep a verse in mind from your morning reading that you can reflect upon and pray about all day. Another way to pray without ceasing is to make every encounter an opportunity for prayer. So as you begin a new task, take a moment to pray. As you prepare to answer the phone, take a moment to pray. As you do your work, pray. When you observe a mother frustrated with her children in Wal-Mart, offer a prayer for her and the kids. When you begin to tune in to prayer like this, life begins to be a great adventure, as you move through this world like a secret agent of grace, bringing blessing to the world through prayer.

CONCLUSION

I hope you can see from our time together that Huck Finn was wrong. Prayer is meaningful. There is something to it. I hope God will use the discipline of prayer in your life to encourage your heart each day.

Let’s close by singing the great hymn, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Five: Talking to God – Pursuing healing through personal prayer

Introduction

Learning Prayer from Paul – Philippians 4:1-7

How to Pray to Foster Emotional Health

Passages for Meditation and Prayer for This Week

Day One: *Colossians 1:9-14*

Day Two: *Ephesians 1:15-23*

Day Three: *Ephesians 3:14-21*

Day Four: *Philippians 1:9-11*

Day Five: *1 Thessalonians 3:9-13*

Pray Without Ceasing

Conclusion

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Six: Worshiping God – Pursuing healing through praise with God’s people.

Introduction

Worship. I love the Puritan Thomas Watson’s description. Worship is appreciation, adoration, affection, and subjection. We give thanks for what God has done, especially what He has done in sending Jesus. We adore God for who He is, praising Him for His person. We love God with all our being because He is wonderful. And we submit to Him in readiness to serve.

Worship is the greatest expression of the devoted life. But how do we worship God? And how does this worship help us deal with the trials and griefs of life? Those questions are our focus tonight.

How Do We Worship God?

We worship the triune God through the mediating work of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we worship God because the way has been opened to God through the work of Jesus. Our sins separated us from God. Our sins made worshiping God impossible. Instead, we were at enmity with God. We resisted His will and scorned His love. We were foolish at heart, given to satisfying ourselves, worshiping false gods of success or money or pleasure. But in saving us, God opened our hearts to His love. He showed us that He is not against us, but profoundly for us. In sending His Son Jesus, God the Father opened the way through Jesus’ perfect life and His death in our place for us to have eternal life. Through Jesus, we know that God loves us, that we will face no condemnation in judgment and no separation from His love. But it is the Spirit that takes these truths and makes them real in our hearts. As we read in Romans 8:14-15, *“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*

Because we have been so well loved by such a great God, our response is to live for His glory. And so we worship. Praise is the response we have for anything we love. And when we are talking about the great God of the universe, praise is particularly fitting. We worship God because of His greatness as Creator and because of His goodness as Redeemer. Revelation 4 points to our need to worship God as Creator -- "The twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.'"

Revelation 5 points to our need to worship God as Redeemer -- "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.' Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!' And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to

the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!' And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshiped."

Worshipping God as Creator and Redeemer reminds us that we belong to God. He made us and through Christ He saved us. God's saving work is His work of redeeming sinners who will turn from their sin and trust in Jesus and become worshipers. In Jesus' words to the woman at the well he says the Father is seeking true worshipers. A true worshiper is one who worships in Spirit and truth (see John 4). John Piper puts it this way: "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't."⁴² So the ultimate aim of ministry is that people would worship God with appreciation, adoration, affection, and subjection.

In the Old Testament, worship is focused at the sanctuary appointed by God, the tabernacle at first and then the temple. God gave His people rituals to follow and priests to administer the service. But in the Old Testament, the heart still mattered. Outward forms were not sufficient. Believers were to worship God with sincerity.

In the New Testament, the outward forms of worship from the Old Testament find their fulfillment in Christ. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' death is the once for all sacrifice that enables us to come before God in worship. Jesus is our great High Priest. Our worship is not focused on a place but on a people, as God's people gather to praise Him.

Did you notice both of those passages in Revelation described worship as the gathering of God's people for His praise? Worship is not only a personal activity but is most often in Scripture given as the gathering of God's people to praise and adore Him.

The Spiritual Discipline of Gathered Worship

When we gather to worship, the Bible, God's Word, is central. Pastor Ligon Duncan says that when we gather for corporate worship, we read the Bible, hear the Bible, pray the Bible, sing the Bible and see the Bible (as it is displayed in baptism and the Lord's Supper).⁴³ Southern Baptist Seminary Professor Don Whitney writes, "Bible reading and preaching are central in public worship because they are the clearest, most direct, most extensive presentation of God in the meeting." We gather, then, around the Word of God as we worship. We don't worship the Bible, but we worship the God revealed in the Bible.

Worship is a spiritual discipline but it is also a part of all the other spiritual disciplines, when they are practiced rightly.

We are talking about the discipline of corporate worship. But this doesn't mean that personal worship is unimportant. Don Whitney writes: "Can we expect the flames of our worship of God to burn brightly in public on the Lord's Day when they barely flicker

⁴² John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 15.

⁴³ Ligon Duncan, "What Does Biblically-Directed and Informed Public Worship Look Like?" July 11, 2014, <https://ligonduncan.com/what-does-biblically-directed-and-informed-public-worship-look-like/>.

for him in secret on other days? Isn't it because we do not worship well in private that our corporate worship experience often dissatisfies us?"⁴⁴

But once we understand the importance of personal worship, we should also acknowledge the emphasis the Bible places on gathered worship. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." This passage gives us some clue to why gathered worship is so valuable: it is a means of encouragement. We build each other up as we worship together. And we need that encouragement, because Christians are not intended to live in isolation. This is why the Bible says the church is like a family and like a body.

We don't have to come to church, we *get* to come to church to worship the Lord. So let us gather on Sunday morning and evening to read the Word and hear the Word and sing the Word and pray the Word and see the Word. So let us give glory to God through appreciation and adoration and affection and subjection.

How Does the Spiritual Discipline of Worship Help Us in Our Grief?

The joy of gathered worship is a great help to us on our journey through grief. Let me emphasize that we need not try to use worship to manufacture feelings. Sometimes we will worship through heartbreak. Sometimes we will worship through tears. But we will still worship. This is the key. If we will gather with God's people week after week we will find that it will profoundly affect our lives.

We see the intersection of gathered worship and grief in Psalm 40. I want to read it today and I hope you'll see how worship heals us.

*I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
3 He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.
4 Blessed is the man who makes
the LORD his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after a lie!
5 You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.*

⁴⁴ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 112.

⁶ *In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
 but you have given me an open ear.
 Burnt offering and sin offering
 you have not required.*

⁷ *Then I said, "Behold, I have come;
 in the scroll of the book it is written of me:*

⁸ *I delight to do your will, O my God;
 your law is within my heart."*

⁹ *I have told the glad news of deliverance
 in the great congregation;
 behold, I have not restrained my lips,
 as you know, O LORD.*

¹⁰ *I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart;
 I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
 I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
 from the great congregation.*

¹¹ *As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain
 your mercy from me;
 your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
 ever preserve me!*

¹² *For evils have encompassed me
 beyond number;
 my iniquities have overtaken me,
 and I cannot see;
 they are more than the hairs of my head;
 my heart fails me.*

¹³ *Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!
 O LORD, make haste to help me!*

¹⁴ *Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether
 who seek to snatch away my life;
 let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
 who delight in my hurt!*

¹⁵ *Let those be appalled because of their shame
 who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"*

¹⁶ *But may all who seek you
 rejoice and be glad in you;
 may those who love your salvation
 say continually, "Great is the LORD!"*

¹⁷ *As for me, I am poor and needy,
 but the Lord takes thought for me.
 You are my help and my deliverer;
 do not delay, O my God!*

Psalm 40 is a psalm of King David. Pastor and author John Piper describes David's perspective at the beginning of the Psalm:

"The king of Israel is in "the pit of destruction" and "the miry bog"—descriptions of his spiritual condition. The song of praise is coming, he says, but it is not now on his lips. It is as if David had fallen into a deep, dark well and plunged into life-threatening

mud. In this pit of mud and destruction there is a sense of helplessness and desperation. Suddenly air, just air, is worth a million dollars. Helplessness, desperation, waiting in darkness, apparent hopelessness, the breaking point for the overworked businessman, the outer limits of exasperation for the mother of three constantly crying children, the impossible expectations of too many classes in school, the grinding stress of a lingering illness, the imminent attack of a powerful enemy. It is good that we don't know what the experience was. It makes it easier to see ourselves in the pit with the king."⁴⁵

The pit of trauma, hardship, and inner conflict runs throughout the psalm and it runs throughout our lives. The Psalms are a place where our struggles as believers are exposed. This is good because the psalms also offer a way through trauma to happiness for those who read and pray them.⁴⁶ Psalm 40, given in the context of public worship to the people of God, is among the most realistic and powerful portrayals of life's harsh realities and God's sufficient grace.

The psalm begins with a recollection of God's past faithfulness (40:1-10). This remembrance is not given to God but to the congregation and all those who would later read the psalm. The second section of the psalm (40:11-17) is David's direct petition to God. True worship has a horizontal and a vertical dimension. This is seen in modern congregational singing. Many hymns and choruses are directed to God (for example, the hymn "How Great Thou Art"). On the other hand, some songs are proclamations of believers to one another (the hymn "How Firm a Foundation" fits this description). Worship concerns the revelation of God's nature and works, and the relationship believers have with him by his grace. Believers praise God and testify to one another every time they gather together in God's presence.

David's testimony is initially an expression of his cry to God: "I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry." Piper exclaims,

One of the reasons God loved David so much was that he cried so much. "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping" (Ps. 6:6). "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" (Ps. 56:8). Indeed they are! "Blessed are those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4). It is a beautiful thing when a broken man genuinely cries out to God.⁴⁷

Even more beautiful is the kindness of God to turn toward his people who call on him. Throughout his life, David found God faithful. David says in verse 2, "He lifted

⁴⁵ John Piper, *When the Darkness Will Not Lift: Doing What We Can While We Wait for God—and Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 34-35.

⁴⁶ Brent A. Strawn, "Trauma, Psalmic Disclosure, and Authentic Happiness," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 144. Strawn mentions numerous studies that confirm the idea that speaking out about one's trauma is a key element to overcoming it, while pushing it down is usually unproductive.

⁴⁷ Piper, *When the Darkness Will Not Lift*, 35.

me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.” While David could be referring to a literal pit, it is more likely that he speaks metaphorically, intending his readers to understand that his struggles made him like a man stuck in a miry hole. Interestingly, in the Old Testament, the pit often refers to the grave and to Sheol, the place of death. In today’s language, David is expressing the idea that he has been through a hellish trial.

As is so often the case in the Bible, God does not merely deliver his people from trouble, he leads them into newness of life. David recounts this deliverance as that which made him sing a hymn of praise to God. The song is new because it is David’s way of expressing the fresh work of God in his life. But David does not see himself as merely an individual. He sees himself as one who is connected to other believers. David here affirms that his song is a song of praise to “our God.” Further, he says, “Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in God.” The people of God, when seeing the hand of God, tremble and believe.

In verses 4 and 5, David shifts from recounting God’s past deliverance to praising God for his power and blessings. The individual deliverance of David forms the backdrop for congregational praise. This is because we are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.⁴⁸ So what God does in any of us is something to be entered into by all of us. God’s powerful works show that the true and living God is greater than the idols of verse 5, idols that sway the hearts of the proud but not those who trust in the Lord. The people of God have come to see that God is incomparable in his majesty and in the multitude of his deeds.

Gathered in worship with God’s people, David praises God for his deliverance and his majesty. In verses 6-8, he discusses how believers ought to relate to this great and powerful God. Surprisingly, David does not advocate coming to God through sacrifice, although sacrifice is not being criticized in Psalm 40. Instead, David is saying that whole-hearted devotion to God is the true sacrifice, the giving of oneself to God.

Like a beautiful symphony in two movements, Psalm 40 reaches the climax of the first movement of praise in verses 9-10. The joyful conclusion to this first section is David’s affirmation that he speaks in praise of God in the midst of the assembly. Spiritual leadership was his responsibility as King of Israel, but now this same responsibility—this call to declare the praises of God to one another—falls to every believer (see Eph 5:18).

After speaking to the people of his kingdom in verses 1-10, David now speaks to his Lord and King in verses 11-17. David had been in a miry pit of external trials at the beginning of the psalm and he recounted God’s deliverance. But now David is facing a different kind of trial. He needs mercy, love, and faithfulness from God. David is not threatened by an army or illness or any other external threat. This time, David’s own heart is the problem. Rather than feeling abandoned by God, David acknowledges that he has abandoned God. David admits that he is struggling with sin and that this state of sin has

⁴⁸ See Romans 12.

rendered him blind to reality. The man who was confident that his deliverance would cause many to see and fear God now struggles to see God himself.

David's move from praise to prayer, from trial to deliverance to other trials is true to the experience of believers through the ages. Life is not an unbroken upward climb of spiritual progress. Believers move from desperation to dependence as they draw near to God in worship.

The closing words of this psalm remind readers that the man who was mightily delivered once will soon again find himself in need of deliverance. In verse 10, when David says, "I am poor and needy, may my LORD take thought for me!" he is speaking words that could be applied to all believers at one time or another. It is critical for believers today to recognize that life is filled with challenges and blessings and that God is in the midst of all of life. Corporate worship helps to remind believers of their true identity, of God's true nature, and of God's power to deliver. It is evident from Psalm 40 that believers dealing with grief will be blessed as they join together with other believers to recount the goodness of God and call on him for mercy.

So when you don't feel like coming to church, come anyway. When the words of the Bible seem dry as dust to you, listen anyway. When your prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling, keep praying. When your cheeks are stained with tears as the notes begin to rise, keep singing. In the midst of your grief, you will be reminded of God's power and love. Your heart will be lifted, your soul will be helped, and you will find closeness with God's people like you've never known before.

Conclusion

This week, as you gather to worship with the people of God on Sunday morning, take the handout I gave you with you into the worship service. Read over it before the service begins as a way to prepare your heart.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Six: Worshiping God – Pursuing healing through praise with God’s people

Introduction

How Do We Worship God?

The Spiritual Discipline of Gathered Worship

How Does the Spiritual Discipline of Worship Help Us in Our Grief?

Preparing Yourself for Worship

1. Preparation for Worship begins with a good night's sleep. You can't guarantee that you will sleep well, but as much as it is up to you, go to bed at a time that will enable you to get up and be awake when you come to church.
2. Come early. If you arrive well before the service begins, you can have a moment to greet others while still having ten minutes or so to prepare for the service.
3. Prepare in body: Do you need water or a restroom break? Be practical before the service so that you can focus.
4. Prepare in heart: As you are seated in preparation for worship bow your head for a moment of silent prayer. You might pray a verse of Scripture. "Lord, you said we are to worship in spirit and truth. So help me today to open my heart to your work and to your Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen." Or you could pray "Open my eyes, that I may see wonderful things from your Word." This time of preparation may also be a time for you to confess sin and to draw near to God.
5. Prepare in mind: Use your bulletin to preview the service. Consider reading the Scripture that will be used in the sermon. Read thoughtfully through the lyrics of the hymns or songs. Pray for those who surround you (for families, for physical needs, for God's work among you).
6. Rejoice, Learn, Sing, and Pray. And as you leave SHARE with someone else something God did in the time of worship.

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Seven: Giving to God – Pursuing Healing through the Grace of Giving

Introduction

Can anybody share about a time when someone gave to you in a way that was really meaningful? (Share several responses. Share story of my grandmother’s visit and how she helped me clean my room).

There was a group of churches in the New Testament that found joy through obedience. The churches of Macedonia were noteworthy for their giving. But this giving came out of a time of great trials. So I want to begin today by looking at this church and its practice of the spiritual discipline of giving.

The Corporate Discipline of Giving for Emotional Health: 2 Corinthians 8:1-6

The pain of emotional distress often has a paralyzing effect on the soul because the troubles we face tend to cause us to look inward and become self-focused. When we give, we focus on others for God’s glory. Paul’s account in 2 Corinthians 8:1-6 affirms the value of the corporate spiritual discipline of giving. Let’s read the text together:

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.⁴⁹

Take a few minutes to meditate on these verses. Try to sum them up in one sentence. (Take five minutes to meditate on these verses). Share thoughts with one another in the large group.

Paul’s second letter to Corinth was written in a period of great trial for the apostle and real tension with the church in Corinth. An earlier visit had gone poorly, and an earlier letter had been poorly received. Therefore, Paul spent the first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians defending his apostolic authority. Likewise, the last four chapters of this letter were concerned with Paul taking on his theological foes and upholding his calling as an apostle sent by Christ. However, in the middle of the book, with chapters 8 and 9, Paul discusses the issue of giving. New Testament scholar Murray Harris further notes, “While the focus of chapters 1-7 is Paul’s defense of his apostolic authority, and the

⁴⁹ 2 Corinthians 8:1-6 (NIV).

focus of chapters 10 and 11 is Paul's opponents, chapters 8 and 9 tie the two sections together because it was Paul's opponents who were hindering the giving project that Paul endorsed."⁵⁰

Paul wanted the church in Corinth to join with other churches in a giving project to bring relief to the Christians in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem collection is mentioned in many places in Paul's writings, including Romans, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians. The collection was more than simple charity. Paul's motivation was deeply theological. He wanted the Corinthians to experience God's sanctifying work through the grace of giving to others. Paul wanted the saints at Corinth to be like their Savior who, "though he was rich became poor, that through his poverty we might become rich" (2 Cor 8:8). Paul also saw the collection as a way to open the door to fellowship between believers of Gentile background and those of Jewish background. The collection would provide an opportunity for the two to be made one in Christ not only in identity but in practice (Eph 2:11-22).

As chapter 8 opens, Paul is aware that his relationship with the church at Corinth is on shaky ground with many church members actively opposing his ministry. Titus has had an encouraging encounter with the church (7:7) and Paul himself has expressed "complete confidence" in the church (7:16), but Paul still comes at the issue of the collection in a roundabout way, by pointing to the extraordinary generosity the Macedonians have already demonstrated in their giving.

From the beginning of chapter 8, Paul emphasizes the word "grace," a word that appears ten times in these two chapters with varying nuances. This grace has come to the churches of Macedonia. This would include churches like Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, churches that have been commended elsewhere in the New Testament for God's work through them. Grace does not take away the Macedonians' hardships, instead it frees them up to give. This grace was not manufactured by the Macedonians but was God's gift to them. So, Paul leads off warmly, calling his fellow believers in Corinth "brothers and sisters" for the first time since 1:8, thus affirming his love for them and his confidence in them. Ultimately, Paul is not just writing about the collection, his focus is on God's grace at work in God's people.

The description of the Macedonian churches in verse 2 is remarkable. These churches, tried and tested, poor and needy, out of abundant joy overflowed in rich generosity. According to Acts 16:15-17:11, the churches in Macedonia had faced harsh persecution from the beginning from both Jewish and Gentile opponents. The Macedonian churches in Philippi and Thessalonica were noted in Paul's letters for their joy (Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 1:6).

What explains the Macedonians acting contrary to all human expectation? How could they give beyond their natural ability and even plead for the privilege of

⁵⁰ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 553.

giving to other saints in need? The simple answer is that they were a gospel people. The church in Macedonia had grasped the message Paul will take up at the end of this letter, which he had learned from the Lord: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9-10). The grace of God at work through humble hearts can bring about results above and beyond what believers can ask or imagine.

Paul seems almost dumbfounded by the transformative service of the Macedonians. He notes that it was “entirely on their own” (8:3) that they urgently pleaded to be part of the Jerusalem collection. Paul so often had to cajole, urge, and prod those he worked with, but with the churches in Macedonia, though unimpressive in the world’s eyes, he found evidence of God’s grace and spiritual growth.

Giving is the end result of a heart of worship, an expression of love for God’s people. Paul hopes the example of the Macedonians will inspire the Corinthians to excel in the grace of giving. Paul was not setting up a rival competition to see which church could give the most. Instead, Paul is trying to inspire the Corinthians for their own joy and the good of the church in Jerusalem. For a church that had struggled with sin and been plagued with infighting and disputes, focusing outside their own circumstances to the needs of others would be a great benefit to them. At the same time Paul knew that if left to themselves, the Corinthians would probably overlook the needs of the church of Jerusalem and become occupied with their own issues. Therefore, he charged Titus with securing a commitment to giving from the church at Corinth. Paul is not trying to force the Corinthians into giving; he is encouraging them simply to let the grace of God flow through them in acts of love toward others.⁵¹ About five months after Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he wrote a letter to the church in Rome. In that letter, he states that the churches in Macedonia and Achaia have given to the collection for Jerusalem (Rom 15:26-27). Corinth was located in Achaia, which means they heeded Paul’s instructions here and got involved in the service of giving to the church in Jerusalem.⁵²

The grace of giving is a corporate activity that can greatly strengthen the lives of believers. The Macedonians, in a time of great personal hardship, banded together to financially support others in need. They had little to offer but gave all they could, and God was honored. May we as believers, particularly those struggling with grief, follow their example by taking up the corporate spiritual discipline of giving as a way of life.

Let’s take a few minutes to pray over what we have just studied. (Take five minutes to let several people lead out in prayer).

⁵¹ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word, 2015), 435.

⁵² Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 557.

How to Grow in the Grace of Giving

If giving is a grace, how can we grow in it? The Bible is clear that all the good we have is from the Lord (James 1:17) but the Bible also urges us to “grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). We can grow in the grace of giving by remembering and walking in several key truths:

Remember that God Owns Everything and We are His Stewards

Author Randy Alcorn says, “God owns it all. I’m just His money manager.”⁵³ We read in Haggai 2:8: “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts.” This means that our decisions about money should revolve around God’s kingdom and not our own desires. Our aim should be, as John Wesley famously said, “Save all you can, spend all you can, and give all you can.” Our first impulse should not be our own bottom line but how I can utilize the money God gives me for His glory.

Remember that When Give, We Worship

Paul, writing in Philippians 4:18, says this: “I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.” Paul uses the language of sacrifices, of burnt offerings, of Old Covenant temple offerings in talking about giving. When we recognize that giving is an act of worship, we who love Jesus want to give more as an expression of love for Him.

Remember that When We Give, We Express Trust in God

The Bible urges us toward both wisdom and sacrifice. Each believer should prayerfully considered how they give and what proportion of their income they will give. But we should recognize that an unwillingness to give may reflect a heart that doesn’t trust God. When our giving is sacrificial, it increases our faith, as we trust God with that thing we most fear: the future. We need to remember the words of Jesus here from Matthew 6: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The Macedonian Christians were not rich, but they gave generously, sacrificially. We should follow their example, whether we are rich or poor.

Remember that Giving is About Gratitude for Grace, and is Not About Earning Grace

We can’t bribe God with our giving. He owns everything already. Giving is an act of gratitude. It is never a way to impress God or earn His favor. It is also never to be an

⁵³ Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001), 23.

effort to impress people or become well-known for our generosity. I have noticed through the years that many of the most generous people I have come to know as a pastor were known for their generosity behind the scenes but were never public about their generosity.

Remember that Obeying the Great Commandment is Our Calling

We are called to love God and love our neighbor (Matt 22:37-39). This means the focus of our lives ought to be vertical and horizontal, on loving God and on loving people. As we look upward and outward, we will often find our own sense of inner sadness diminished. Healing can come as we contribute good to the lives of others as an act of worship to God. As we bring light into the world, our own darkness begins to fade. The spiritual discipline of giving is a wonderful means of helping others. As a by-product, we are helped inwardly as we help others materially.

Conclusion

I hope our time together today has encouraged you to excel in the grace of giving. This week, I hope you will take some time to work through the handout you received earlier. This handout will give you an opportunity to assess your current giving and to continue to grow in giving in the days ahead. I hope it will be a blessing to you.

Today's hymn is *Take My Life and Let it Be*. Let's finish today by singing this great hymn . . .

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Seven: Giving to God – Pursuing Healing through the Grace of Giving

Introduction

The Corporate Discipline of Giving for Emotional Health: 2 Corinthians 8:1-6

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.

How to Grow in the Grace of Giving

Remember that God Owns Everything and We are His _____.

Remember that When Give, We _____.

Remember that When We Give, We Express _____ in God.

Remember that Giving is About Gratitude for Grace, and is Not About _____ Grace.

Remember that _____ the Great Commandment is Our Calling.

Conclusion

Evaluating Your Giving

This worksheet is for your use only. It is designed to be a help to you as you think about how you are doing in practicing the spiritual discipline of giving. Pray through it and consider any changes God might be leading you to make as you consider the grace of giving.

Meditate for a few minutes on 2 Corinthians 8:1-6 . . .

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.

Do you give from a heart of joy or under a sense of obligation?

Is your giving generous or is it limited by a certain percentage that doesn't really affect your finances?

Do you ever give beyond your ability? Why is this sometimes a good practice?

Do you eagerly desire to give to the Lord's work?

What is the connection between giving yourself to the Lord and giving yourself to the Lord's work?

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Eight: Grieving with Hope – A conclusion and a way forward.

Introduction

As students come into class, direct them to take a few minutes to fill out the two slips of paper on their tables: 1) What has been the best part of the *Grieving with Hope* class for you? and, 2) Do you have any questions about grief or the spiritual disciplines that we did not fully cover in the class? After students fill in sheets, collect the questions for later in the class and ask them to keep the other slip of paper handy for later sharing.

For sixteen years, I have been here at West Hickory as your pastor. During this time, we have walked through many seasons of grief as a church. Precious saints have died of cancer. Accidents have happened that led to death. Beloved family members have suffered strokes and heart attacks. I have been at the bedside of several members when they took their last breath. I have gotten the wake-up call in the middle of the night. The first couple of years I was here I was afraid when the phone would ring. Over 100 people have gone on to be with the Lord in these last sixteen years.

And then there has been the struggle of marital and family problems. Sadly, people have gotten divorced during my time here. Others have seen their children wander from the Lord. All of this is happening just here in this local church. We are familiar with grief. And we haven't even touched on the grief that is evident in the world, where war, politics, and disease dominate the headlines of the daily news.

We are all hurting in various ways. What can be done? How can we deal with all this pain? First, we remember that God is real. And we remember that He loves us. And we know that He loves us because in Jesus, God has entered personally into our suffering. We remember that Jesus came not only to enter into my suffering but to give us new life. And He came to make all things new. The creation will one day be renewed. So one day, grief will be done and we will be done with grief. Hoping in these truths helps us through the trials of life.

I have also seen through the years how valuable we are to each other as people in the local church. We all have flesh and blood families, but we are also a part of a great family of believers here at West Hickory. When we are going through hard times, how comforting it is to know we have friends who will support us, listen to us, pray for us, and help us. How many of you in this room have felt the love of your church family through the years? (Share a few responses).

We have talked a lot over these last few weeks about the feedback loop of grief. We have discussed how common it is for us to get stuck in our thinking, dwelling on our hurt, stewing in our suffering. But we have also said that there is a way to break that loop. As we turn toward God and toward one another, we begin to break that loop. We bring turning toward God and turning toward another together when we practice the biblical spiritual disciplines God has given us to help us grow as disciples of Jesus.

A Brief Review of the Spiritual Disciplines

We have looked at four spiritual disciplines over the last few weeks but there are many other biblical practices that are available to us as well to help us grow spiritually. Fasting, service, sharing our faith, silence and solitude can all be disciplines God uses to help us grow. But we chose four disciplines for special attention during this time. We did this very intentionally. I believe the four disciplines we looked at are the most essential disciplines for us as we think about growing in faith during times of grief. We chose two

personal disciplines and two corporate disciplines very intentionally as well. In our corner of Christianity, many people see personal activities as spiritual disciplines but do not see group activities in the same way. By choosing two corporate disciplines, we are emphasizing the importance, not only of the presence of God, but of the presence of God's people. We need Jesus and we need each other.

The discipline of Bible meditation is essential for us in times of grief because more than anything, when we are going through a time of struggle, we need to hear from God. And just reading the Bible often does not help us when we are grieving. As we read, all sorts of confusion and distraction comes to us. Have you ever read the Bible and gone away from reading unable to remember a single thing you read? When this is the case we need the attention and time Bible meditation brings.

Just as we need to hear from God when we are struggling, we also need to talk to God. This is why we emphasized prayer as a key spiritual discipline that helps us in times of grief. When we draw near to God in prayer intentionally and seriously, we find He often meets us with His presence. In times of grief, the presence of God is what we need. More than anything, we need to sense God's comfort in our hearts, reminding us that He is with us, that He loves us, and that He will see us through our trials. We focused in particular on praying the Bible because sometimes when we are going through a trial, the only thing we pray about is the trial itself. Some have called it "sanctified worrying." We don't want to do that. Instead, we want to pray in fresh ways about the things God has laid on our hearts.

But there is a danger in stopping with Bible meditation and prayer. More often than not, we fail to meditate and pray as we should but the truth is we can also be in danger of only meditating and praying. In other words, our personal relationship with Jesus can be one part of isolating ourselves from others. If I am content with meditation and prayer only I am avoiding one of God's choice means of comfort: the people of God. Remember our key verses from week one. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4: ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

We need each other. We need the comfort both of the presence of God and the people of God. This is why we talked about two corporate spiritual disciplines: worship and giving. But why did we choose these two? Why not evangelism or service or another corporate discipline? We chose to focus on worship for the same reason we chose Bible meditation: we need to hear from God. In worship, we hear from God together, as we gather to sing the Word and hear the Word and read the Word and pray the Word and see the Word (in the ordinances). As we worship together, we proclaim God's excellence to one another and we draw near to God, reminding ourselves that we are not alone. So many times through the years I have heard grieving members speak words of gratitude for the church family. The comfort that comes from drawing near to God in worship is almost inexpressible. So we wanted to focus on worship and be more intentional about worship when we come together.

The spiritual discipline of giving was also chosen as a way to battle the isolation and focus on self that often comes during times of grief. When we are in pain, we tend to focus on our pain. But sometimes, focusing on the pain only makes things worse. At the same time, ignoring our pain is impossible. The idea of gritting our teeth and pushing through is not a worthwhile long-term strategy. So many believers find the best path is not to wallow in pain or ignore pain but to channel pain for the good of others. A believer may find help by turning their eyes upward to God, asking for His help and strength. But believers may also find help by turning their eyes outward to others, asking them how

they might help. In the immediate aftermath of a great trial, sometimes one just needs to sit and cry. That's ok. But when the dust settles, when the trial begins to sink in, the best course is often to begin to find outlets of giving and service. How can I help someone else with a gift that will really benefit their life? Giving is a spiritual discipline that allows us to participate in God's kingdom work on a worldwide scale. If I have lost a loved one, I might donate to missions in the memory of my loved one. I might donate to a soup kitchen or an educational program. I can carry on in honoring God through my time of trial.

As we close our time together, I just wanted to thank each of you for your participation and effort. I hope this time has been valuable to you. When you came in, you got two sheets of paper, one to write down your reflections or testimony about this class and another to ask any questions you still have. I wonder if a few of you might share with us your testimony of what this time has meant to you, and then I will take a few minutes to try to answer the questions that have been turned in.

TIME OF DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Have a few students share their thoughts about the class. Try to answer any questions that were turned in from the beginning of class.

I want to close our time with a time of prayer. I would ask you just to group up with the people at your table. Everyone turn to Psalm 46. And I would ask someone in your group to read slowly through the psalm. Everyone listen as your person reads. Then go to a time of prayer, praying the ideas in this psalm, applying the psalm to the ongoing spiritual and emotional health of the members at your table, to everyone in this group, and to our whole church. I'll close us in prayer in a few minutes.

TIME OF PRAYER

We're going to finish our time with an old favorite, *I'd Rather Have Jesus*

Grieving with Hope: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Emotional Health

Week Eight: Grieving with Hope – A conclusion and a way forward

Introduction

A Brief Review of the Spiritual Disciplines

Verses to Remember from *Grieving with Hope* – 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

TIME OF DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

TIME OF PRAYER (Psalm 46)

CLOSING SURVEY

A PSALM FOR THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵ God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.

⁶ The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.

¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"

¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

A great Psalm for Bible Meditation

A great Psalm for Bible Memorization (Psalm 46:1-3; 10)

A great Psalm for Prayer

A great Psalm for Journaling

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ABSTRACT

UTILIZING PERSONAL AND CORPORATE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TO FOSTER EMOTIONAL HEALTH AT WEST HICKORY BAPTIST CHURCH, HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA

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This ministry project was designed to help a group of members at West Hickory Baptist Church grow in emotional health through the practice of select biblical spiritual disciplines. Chapter 1 explains the ministry context and rationale of the project. The chapter also lays out the purpose and goals for the project, defines key terms used in the project, and chapter 1 explains the methodology used in the project's implementation. Chapter 2 describes the connection in Scripture between spiritual disciplines and emotional health. The overarching passage for the whole curriculum, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, is explained and then other passages are discussed in relation to each of the disciplines covered in the project curriculum: Psalm 1 (Bible meditation), Philippians 4:1-7 (prayer), Psalm 40 (worship), and 2 Corinthians 8:1-6 (giving). Chapter 3 considers evangelical approaches to the spiritual disciplines and emotional health. After defining the key terms of "evangelical," "spiritual disciplines," and "emotional health," evangelical approaches from the last forty years, when the study of spiritual disciplines became prominent in evangelicalism, is the focus of this chapter. The works of key teachers in the areas of spiritual disciplines and emotional health are considered. Chapter 4 is about the implementation of the project. The chapter describes how the curriculum was developed, implemented, and evaluated. Chapter 5 is an evaluation of the project's purpose and goals, along with personal and theological reflections on the project.

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