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EQUIPPING STUDENTS OF CHAPARRAL HILLS BAPTIST  
CHURCH IN AMARILLO, TEXAS, TO  
MEDITATE ON THE BIBLE

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

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Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by  
Jimmy Clyde Chavedo  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

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I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful family at Chaparral Hills Baptist Church, who have invested in my spiritual growth through their teaching, service, and prayers over the past twenty years. You have taught me the meaning of church family.

To Dr. Alan Burkhalter, who has faithfully taught the Word of God week after week. You introduced me to the Scripture when I knew none; you introduced me to the savior when I was trying to save myself. You, more than anyone else, encouraged me to pursue this doctoral degree.

To my nieces, who did not always understand why I did not have time to play “family,” go to the park, or attend volleyball tournaments on every occasion they asked. My time is now yours.

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## PREFACE

This project exists because the Holy Spirit repeatedly used Alan Burkhalter to direct me toward doctoral studies, despite my reluctance. In His mercy, the Spirit has guided me through to completion. This experience has enriched my understanding of what it means to be a “good steward.” The books read, the lectures listened to, the papers written, and the conversations had over the past three years have all served to shape my understanding of biblical spirituality. I am grateful and thankful to have had this opportunity.

I am thankful to the faculty at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for being faithful to the Word, standing strong in their convictions, and providing a first-class education. I am especially grateful to my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Joseph Harrod, for his patience, his expertise, and his help in shaping this project. His insights and guidance were vital to my successful learning and implementation of this project.

To God be the glory,

Jimmy Chavedo

Amarillo, Texas

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Many Christians think of meditation as nothing more than New Age spiritualism—sitting cross-legged, practicing deep breathing techniques, and clearing the mind of all thought. Yet God commands meditation. The psalmist engages in its practice to focus on the Word of God, the works of God, and the attributes of God. For this reason, Chaparral Hills Baptist Church (hereafter abbreviated as CHBC) seeks to equip students to meditate on God’s Word.

#### **Context**

This project took place in the context of the student ministry of Chaparral Hills Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas. CHBC was founded in 1990 as a church plant of Paramount Baptist Church. CHBC sits roughly two miles outside the city limits of Amarillo, a town with a population approaching 200,000. Between 275 and 350 persons attend Sunday service at CHBC, though the current roster records close to 1,000 members in good standing. I am the student pastor at CHBC. The student ministry at CHBC ranges from 10 to 20 students, depending on the day and the event taking place, in grades 7 through 12.

CHBC’s strength lies in its commitment to the Bible. The teaching, preaching, and counseling contingents of the ministry are each based on solid biblical principles. All preaching performed at CHBC is expository in nature, with the purpose of understanding and applying what the original authors of the Bible were communicating, through the Spirit, to the original recipients of their messages. The positive results of consistent biblical preaching and teaching are reflected in the number and nature of mature

Christians who have attended CHBC for a significant length of time. Men and women who have attended CHBC for several years display the signs of mature Christians, including personal Bible reading and study as well as the fruit of the Spirit. Counsel at CHBC is given from a biblical perspective. Whether it be premarital, marriage, or some other type of counseling, the methods used to advise are those founded on biblical principles. Though some nuances of modern psychology are utilized, they are only done so if they conform to the Bible's counsel.

Despite the solid biblical foundation of CHBC's ministries, a major weakness exists—a lack of structured implementation of biblical practices. While those who have attended CHBC for years mature gradually by being consistently exposed to proper teaching and study, this process is much slower and less focused than it could be. Lack of a structured approach affects the youth of CHBC even more because they have not had the years of exposure to expository preaching as many of the adults have.

CHBC has no explicit structure in place to disciple believers, nor does it have a system to teach the personal spiritual disciplines. Students grow in their faith and understanding of doctrine through biblically based Sunday school lessons and expository preaching, but they are not given explicit instruction on how to practice personal piety on their own. Thus, students are graduating from high school and leaving CHBC's youth group without a structured method to continue in their pursuit of holiness.

### **Rationale**

While CHBC is dedicated to seeking God through his Word, the lack of a structured approach to discipling members in the spiritual disciplines is detrimental to the youth of CHBC. CHBC desires to intentionally train up students to know Christ and so that they can continue to mature in Christ even after leaving the youth group. The long-term vision of the student ministry is to train the youth in a variety of spiritual disciplines, beginning with the practice of biblical meditation. This project focused on a five-session

retreat series to equip students to meditate on the Bible. Equipping students in this manner fulfills the New Testament vision that churches care for and equip their members for spiritual growth (John 21:18; Acts 20:28–31; Eph 4:11–16).

God gives the church various practices or disciplines to foster personal and corporate spiritual growth (1 Tim 4:7). These disciplines vary in terms of impact and applicability through various seasons of the believer’s walk. Jesus prayed that the Father would sanctify Christians through the truth—his Word is that truth (John 17:17). As Donald Whitney states, “No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God’s Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from the diet of the milk and meat of Scripture.”<sup>1</sup> Whitney recognizes Scripture’s own self-testimony about its place in the life of believers (Isa 55:6–11; 1 Pet 1:23–25). This project focused on the disciplines most relevant for the intake of, and engagement with, Scripture. Among these disciplines, meditation is especially relevant as it bridges reading and prayer and serves to implant the Word deeply within the faithful (Pss 1; 63:6, 77:12; 119:27; 143:5).

Scripture plays a crucial role in keeping the spiritual disciplines tethered to the truth. If a Christian practices spiritual disciplines without incorporating the Bible, it becomes impossible for him to ensure that his practice aligns with God’s will. This is especially true with meditation since it involves deep thinking about a subject. If a Christian meditates without relying on Scripture to guide his thinking, then he runs the danger of relying on his own thoughts and desires leading him in a direction that does not coincide with God’s revealed will. The danger of relying on one’s own thoughts is still a reality even when one uses the Bible, it becomes much more probably when one meditates apart from the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. and upd. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 22.

The teenage years are a crucial time of development in one's life. Teaching students to meditate on Scripture at this crucial stage of development helps them learn how to take in the Bible and spend time in deep thought about God's revealed will. This project was an attempt to contribute to guiding students in the way they should go at a young age in order to help them remain on the path when they are older, as Proverbs 22:6 states.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip the middle and high school students of Chaparral Hills Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas, to meditate on Scripture.

### **Goals**

The following three goals were used to measure the effectiveness of this project. These goals are listed in progressive order, demonstrating that each section of the project built toward the next goal.

1. The first goal was to assess the current biblical meditation practices among the youth who attend CHBC.
2. The second goal was to develop a five-session retreat series for students to increase their confidence in the practice of biblical meditation.
3. The third goal was to increase the confidence of CHBC in the practice of biblical meditation by training them to meditate on the Bible.

The research tools and methods used are detailed in the following section. Successful completion of these goals was dependent upon the measurements defined below.

### **Research Methodology**

The following three goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess the current biblical meditation practices of the youth who attend CHBC. This goal was measured by administering a questionnaire to each youth who attends CHBC, which revealed the current practice of biblical meditation among CHBC

youth.<sup>2</sup> This survey was provided to the students three weeks before the retreat at youth group meetings or mailed to their homes. This goal was considered successfully met when fifteen students completed and returned the survey for analysis, and the results had been compiled for a detailed assessment. Only surveys returned by those who participated in the retreat were included in the data.

The second goal was to develop a five-session retreat series, based on the survey results, to introduce students to the concept of biblical meditation and the proper ways to practice it. To ensure the high quality of course materials, an expert panel consisting of godly men with several years of ministry experience measured the viability of the curriculum. This panel used a rubric to grade the biblical accuracy of the material, the teaching methodology, and effectiveness of each session.<sup>3</sup> This goal was considered successful when the combined rating of the four-member expert panel earned a 90 percent “sufficient” rating.

The third goal was to increase the confidence of CHBC youth in the practice of biblical meditation by training them to meditate on the Bible in a small-group retreat setting. Participants were chosen from those who attend CHBC youth and had completed the pre-retreat survey. The Saturday morning through afternoon retreat included multiple sessions of teaching on meditation, each followed by a time of the students practicing meditation.

Follow up after the retreat included three aspects. First, a daily reminder was sent to students on each weekday for the four weeks following the retreat. This reminder included three of the methods for practicing meditation that were discussed during the retreat as well as a section of Scripture to use during the time of meditation. Second, on

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1 for the questionnaire used. 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 this ministry project.

<sup>3</sup> See appendix 3 for the rubric used to rate the curriculum.

the Wednesday two weeks after the retreat, the students and I reviewed the methods discussed at the retreat, and students shared their current meditation practices in small groups. Third, students completed the same pre-retreat survey one month after the retreat. Pre- and post-retreat survey results were analyzed via a t-test for dependent samples to determine if any measurable change had occurred in students' personal spiritual lives in regard to meditating on the Bible.

### **Definition, Limitations, and Delimitation**

The following definition is used in this ministry project:

*Meditation.* While this word has several connotations in popular culture, for the purpose of this project, meditation is the act of focusing one's mind on the God of the Bible, his Works, and his law so as to influence one's mind, emotions, and soul. Regardless of the technique used, meditation involves the mind and the body. Puritan George Swinnock said, "Solemn meditation is a serious applying the mind to some sacred subject, till the affections be warmed and quickened, and the resolution heightened and strengthened thereby, against what is evil, and for what is good."<sup>4</sup>

One limitation was applied to this project. Those students who completed the pre-retreat survey must have also been faithful to attend the retreat. To mitigate this limitation, the pre-retreat surveys were administered, in advance, to all who attended the youth group, and the post surveys were administered only to those who attended the retreat.

Three delimitations were placed on this project. First, the project was confined to a five-session retreat setting. This setting ensured that those who participated would complete the entire series of teachings and exercises. This delimitation also provided time

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<sup>4</sup> George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 2:425.

for students to practice the methods of meditation taught in the series. Second, the project only utilized those meditation practices that have the Scriptures as their focus. If meditation is not tethered to the Bible, it cannot be called biblical meditation.<sup>5</sup> Third, the participants of the project were limited to students in grades 7 through 12.

### **Conclusion**

God commands meditation. He provides the focus for meditation in his Word. Given the responsibility of the church to educate her people in spiritual practices and CHBC's lack of a structural approach to do so, this project sought to begin to remedy this deficiency by equipping students to meditate on the Bible. The following chapters show how competency and confidence in biblical meditation are beneficial to the believer. Chapter 2 focuses on Scripture's sufficiency as the means and focus of Christian meditation. Chapter 3 reflects on historical and current practices of meditation within Christianity.

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<sup>5</sup> Edmund Clowney observes, "Because the God of the Bible is a personal God who speaks in words of revelation, all Christian meditation must respond to this revelation of the Lord." Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2002), 12.



## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR THE PRACTICE OF BIBLICAL MEDITATION

Meditation is a crucial spiritual practice for believers. Several passages from the Old and New Testaments shed light on the practice and purpose of meditation. The passages are addressed topically. First, by means of meditation on the Word of God, God guides the righteous (Pss 1:1–6, 119:15–16, 23–24, 97–98). Second, meditating on God’s Torah fuels obedience to his Torah (Josh 1:6–9). Third, meditation is a means of seeking God and being satisfied in him (Ps 63:1–8). Finally, meditating on Christ—that is, beholding the glory of the Lord—transforms believers “into the same image [of Christ] from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18).<sup>1</sup>

#### **Meditating on the Torah for Guidance**

Psalm 1 contrasts the characteristics of the wicked and the righteous. The wicked make their own path, but the righteous follow the path God sets forth. Psalm 119 is a godly man’s expression of gratitude to God for God’s life-giving Torah. Exegesis of Psalm 1:1–6 and Psalm 119:15–16, 23–24, 97–98 show that by means of meditation on the Torah, God guides the path of the righteous.

#### **Guided by the Torah through Meditation (Ps 1:1–6)**

Hans-Joachim Kraus classifies Psalm 1 as wisdom literature and, more specifically, as a Torah psalm—psalms “which celebrate the revelation of Yahweh’s will

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

as the source of all knowledge and as the indispensable guide (cf., above all, Psalm 19B and 119, but also Psalms 34; 37; 49; 73; 11; 112; 127; 128; 139).”<sup>2</sup> Konrad Schaefer, too, notes the importance of the Torah in Psalm 1, calling the Torah “the open door to praise through which one has access to interior rooms.”<sup>3</sup> To correctly understand Psalm 1 and its discussion of the “two ways,” one must first comprehend the use of the term “Torah.”

Some scholars believe the term “Torah” refers to the Pentateuch, others believe it refers only to the 613 laws of the Pentateuch, and yet others believe it refers to all of Scripture. Daniel Block makes a strong case that the phrase “the Torah of YHWH” refers specifically to the book of Deuteronomy, with its laws, narratives, and the gospel it presents. The law is a burden, he says, and nothing to delight in without the context of the gospel and narratives in Deuteronomy.<sup>4</sup> Block argues that the narratives in Deuteronomy provide a gospel setting for the law, making the law more than merely rules to follow—it is the covenant between God and his people. Thus, to believe the Torah only refers to the laws—of either Deuteronomy or the entire Pentateuch—would make it difficult to believe that one is supposed to delight in it, as indicated in Psalm 1:2. Viewing the laws in light of the narratives and gospels that surround them in their presentation makes more sense because it provides life and reason to the laws—which they do not have when considered alone.

Though the term “Torah” by itself does mean “instruction,” when used in the phrase “Torah of Yahweh,” it has a more particular meaning—the Sinai revelation, as Block notes. He argues that the phrase “Torah of Yahweh is never used in the generic

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<sup>2</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 114.

<sup>3</sup> Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Isaac Block, *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), xii. For further study on the gospel and grace in Deuteronomy, see chap. 1 of this book.

sense of “instruction”; it always refers to the Sinai revelation and/or the book of Deuteronomy (Exod 1:9; 2 Kgs 10:31; 1 Chr 16:40; 22:12; 2 Chr 12:1; 17:9; 31:3–4; 34:14; 35:26; Ezra 7:10; Neh 9:3; Isa 5:24; Jer 8:8; Amos 2:4).”<sup>5</sup>

Block strengthens his argument by describing the special treatment Deuteronomy receives: “The Deuteronomic Torah is the only part of the Pentateuch that is accompanied with instructions for its liturgical use—it is to be read regularly in the hearing of the entire community.”<sup>6</sup> According to Deuteronomy 31:9–13, the priests are to read the book to the community every seven years at the Festival of Booths. Block notes a second special treatment of Deuteronomy, this one prescribed for future rulers of Israel. In Deuteronomy 17:18–20, Moses commands future kings of Israel to write a copy of “this Torah” and read from it all the days of their lives. Block notes that ““this Torah” refers to Moses’ speeches in Deuteronomy, addresses that he committed to writing, [and] handed to the Levitical priests as custodians of the Torah.”<sup>7</sup> This special attention given to the Deuteronomic Torah, combined with Block’s argument about its narrative setting, supports Block’s assertion that the phrase “the Torah of YHWH” refers to the book of Deuteronomy.

Psalm 1 begins with what Kraus calls the congratulatory formula *‘esher*—a well-wishing of happiness—based on the plural construct of the word blessed.<sup>8</sup> This happiness is not based on feelings as Psalm 1 teaches that the reason for the blessed man being happy is his delight in, and meditation on, the Torah (v. 2), which reveals the way of life Yahweh sets forth and watches over (v. 6). Schaefer notes, “Happiness results

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<sup>5</sup> Block, *How I Love Your Torah*, xii.

<sup>6</sup> Block, *How I Love Your Torah*, xiv, xv.

<sup>7</sup> Block, *How I Love Your Torah*, xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 115.

from a choice to participate in the divine life.”<sup>9</sup> Further, Willem VanGemeran explains,

The word “happy” is a good rendition of “blessed,” provided one keeps in mind that the condition of “bliss” is not merely a feeling. Even when the righteous do not feel happy, they are still considered “blessed” from God’s perspective. He bestows this gift on them. Neither negative feelings or adverse conditions can take his blessing away.<sup>10</sup>

The blessed man follows the way of the Lord through his positive actions (i.e., delighting in and meditating on the Torah; v. 2) and his negative actions (i.e., avoiding the company of evildoers; v. 1). The blessed man is happy because he is following the way of the Lord and not merely because he feels happy.

After declaring the man to be blessed, verse 1 describes the evil that this man is to avoid. Peter Craigie contends that the remaining lines of verse 1 provide a view of the totality of evil, and not progressive levels of evil, that the blessed are to avoid. He argues that these three lines “are poetically synonymous and thus all describe in slightly different ways the evil company, which should be avoided by the righteous.” He stresses that reading these lines as progressive levels of evil conduct and deterioration of character in a person “would be stretching the text beyond its natural meaning.”<sup>11</sup>

While these lines do represent “slightly different ways the evil company should be avoided by the righteous,” an examination of the words used to convey this idea reveals a more complete understanding of exactly what and who the righteous should avoid. Kraus provides insight into what the blessed man avoids by discussing the terms used to describe those who the blessed man avoids—the wicked, the sinners, and the scoffers. The wicked are those who are excluded from the sanctuary because they have

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<sup>9</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Willem VanGemeran, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1991), 53.

<sup>11</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 60.

been found guilty by the court and before the Torah of God. The sinners are those who are recognized for what they have continuously done against Yahweh's commands. The scoffers are those who prefer their association "in which [they are] incited to emit strong, mocking words directed at God."<sup>12</sup>

Schaefer adds a unique perspective to the discussion of verse 1 by examining the verbs that describe the actions of the wicked. Based on these verbs, Schaefer suggests that "the psalmist outlines progressive levels of collusion with the wicked."<sup>13</sup> The lines, Schaefer argues, may not describe progressive levels of evil action, but they do demonstrate progressive levels of action taken in agreement with the wicked. First, the person who is not the blessed would collude with the wicked by walking in the way of the wicked—that is, he would follow the advice of the wicked. Moving beyond merely following advice, the next level of involvement with the wicked consists of standing in the path of sinners—conforming to their ways. Schaefer concludes his discussion by stating, "The most corrosive evil would be to 'sit' in the scoffers' assembly and participate in their mockery [of God and the blessed man]."<sup>14</sup>

Though these lines present an overview of a totality of evil that the righteous should avoid, Schaefer and Kraus present strong arguments for this "totality of evil" being fully represented by progressive levels of collusion with evil, which the righteous are to avoid. In the end, these lines communicate that those who seek Yahweh's path avoid interacting with evil in any and every manner.

Verse 2 describes how the blessed man can avoid colluding with evildoers at every level—by delighting in, and meditating on, the Torah. According to William Wilson, the word "meditate" (*hagah*) means "to murmur, to mutter, to make a sound with

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<sup>12</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 116.

<sup>13</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 8.

the mouth,” and “when understood therefore, of meditation, it implies what we express by one talking to himself.”<sup>15</sup> The righteous talks to himself about the Torah—he meditates on it—“day and night.” This constant meditation and attention given to the Torah results in delight. And such delight leads to the righteous spending more time in meditation on the Torah, which, in turn, brings him even more delight. Schaefer observes that people will spend a good deal of time thinking about what they delight in, and they are thus formed by the object of their delight. “What delights us,” Schaefer says, “invades us.”<sup>16</sup> The psalmist’s delight in the Torah of Yahweh has allowed the Torah to “invade him.”<sup>17</sup> Kraus adds that it is the psalmist’s experience with the Torah that gives rise to his delight. The Torah is the medium of divine revelation, which is why the Torah delights the blessed. Taking delight in the revelation of the divine will determines whether one has a happy disposition in life.<sup>18</sup>

In verses 3–4, the psalmist uses metaphorical language to describe the differences between the blessed and the wicked. The blessed is like a tree with roots that keep him firmly in place and seek out nourishment for growth, which produces fruit. The wicked are like chaff, untethered and unable to look for, or process, nourishment. They are, therefore, unable to produce fruit. Craigie notes that a tree’s ability to flourish corresponds with its proximity to water; its flourishing is not a reward for being near water but the result. This result, Craigie argues, reflects the theological point made by the psalmist, that the blessedness he receives is not a reward from God but, rather, the result of living a life in accord with the teaching of Yahweh’s Torah.<sup>19</sup> Mitchell Dahood adds to

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<sup>15</sup> William Wilson, *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 271.

<sup>16</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 117.

<sup>19</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 60–61.

the conversation, highlighting the term *satul*, which conveys that the tree in question has been transplanted to be near the water. Left in its original location, the tree would not receive the nutrients it needs to thrive.<sup>20</sup> Krauss adds that the water itself is an artificial irrigation system created specifically to provide nourishment.<sup>21</sup>

Keeping with the metaphor, therefore, by delighting in, and meditating on, the Torah (v. 2), the blessed transplants himself near the irrigation God provides through the Torah to receive nourishment from it, which results in his prospering—the yielding of fruit (v. 3). The wicked do not transplant themselves to be near the Torah; they do not meditate on it. They do not receive nourishment from it, and they do not follow the path Yahweh has set forth; therefore, they cannot yield fruit or prosper.<sup>22</sup>

Verse 5 refers back to verse 1. Those who follow Yahweh do not stand in the congregation of the wicked in a temporal manner (v. 1), and those who do not follow Yahweh’s path temporally will not be allowed to congregate in eternity with those who did (v. 5).<sup>23</sup>

Verse 6 describes the contrast between the “two ways.” Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, and the wicked are left to their own way. Kraus notes that “know

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<sup>20</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms*, vol. 1, 1–50, Anchor Bible Series, vol. 16 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 117.

<sup>22</sup> Craigie explains that comparing the wicked with chaff demonstrates their lack of substance and worth. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 61. Kraus notes that this drastic comparison of the wicked as chaff (1:4) and the blessed as a fruitful tree (1:3) solidifies a black-and-white distinction between their two ways of life; there are only two ways of life to choose from, and they are opposites. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 119.

<sup>23</sup> Craigie proposes that the two lines in v. 5 hold only temporal meaning. He argues that in synonymous parallelism, these lines demonstrate that the wicked “hold no weight or influence in the important areas of human society.” Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 61. However, the tares are allowed to grow with the good seed in this world (Matt 13:24–30). Kraus comments that the original setting for v. 5 was the sanctuary and concerned sacral judgment. He stipulates that it is only because the “sacral-legal and cultic institutions” have been spiritualized and no longer point to practical things that v. 5 refers to the eschatological judgment of the wicked. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 119–20. Schaefer agrees that the final judgment of the wicked is being described in v. 5. However, he arrives at this conclusion based on the allusion of final judgment conveyed in the chaff imagery of v. 4 as well as the overarching structure of Ps 1 being reminiscent of the “liturgy of blessing and curse” found elsewhere (Deut 27:11–28:68; Josh 24). Schaefer, *Psalms*, 5. Exegesis of v. 6 reveals that an eternal meaning is a better understanding of v. 5 than a temporal one.

here has the meaning ‘to take care of a person,’ ‘to attend to a person with affectionate concern,’ ‘to be close to a person,’ ‘to provide for a person.’”<sup>24</sup> Those who are rooted in the Torah are cared for by Yahweh because they have chosen the path for which Yahweh cares. This choice is demonstrated by their meditation on the Torah. The wicked are not attended with affectionate concern by Yahweh because they have not chosen his path.<sup>25</sup>

### **Meditation Displays a Desire to be Led by Yahweh (Ps 119:15–16)**

Leslie Allen calls Psalm 119 a “literary tour de force.”<sup>26</sup> He points out that though Deuteronomy and even Proverbs seem to have inspired Psalm 119, the concept of Torah goes beyond merely the law, as noted above. He declares, “It is hailed as Yahweh’s communication of moral truth and demonstration of his grace and guidance.”<sup>27</sup> Allen also notes, after reviewing scholarship on the topic, that the term “Torah” may not have been used to refer specifically to Deuteronomy in Psalm 119 as it was in Psalm 1. Allen cites Alfons Deissler’s research and provides two points to substantiate his claim.<sup>28</sup> First is the dating of Psalm 119; the majority opinion is a post-exilic date for the psalm. Allen concurs with this dating based on “the presence of pronounced Aramaisms and terms characteristic of late or post-biblical Hebrew.”<sup>29</sup> As John Hamlin points out, the Jews did not begin using the term “Torah” to refer to the Pentateuch until after the

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<sup>24</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 120.

<sup>25</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 120. Schaefer adds that these two paths are diametrical opposites, and when the end comes, one cannot choose to change paths. Schaefer, *Psalms*, 4. Craigie concurs with Schaefer. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 61.

<sup>26</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 180.

<sup>27</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 184.

<sup>28</sup> Alfons Deissler, *Psalm 119 (118) Und Seine Theologie: Ein Beitrag Zur Erforschung Der Anthologischen Stilgattung Im Alten Testament* (Munich: K. Zink, 1955).

<sup>29</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 141.



exile.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, if Psalm 119 was written after the exile, then “Torah” most likely refers to, at minimum, the Pentateuch in its entirety and not just the book of Deuteronomy. Added to this late date is the fact that Psalm 119 reflects several Old Testament books. Allen agrees with Deissler’s definition of “Torah” in Psalm 119 as “an anthology of sacred books including prophetic and sapiential elements as well the Pentateuch.”<sup>31</sup> In Psalm 119, “the Torah” and its synonyms most likely refer to a broader sense of God’s revelation, including all of Scripture up to the point of Psalm 119’s writing—as opposed to it meaning the book of Deuteronomy in Psalm 1 and Joshua 1:8.

In Psalm 119, the term translated as “meditate” is *siyach*, as opposed to *hagah* in Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2, and Psalm 63:6. However, the concept is essentially the same in all instances. Warren Backer and Eugene Carpenter define *siyach* as “a verb meaning to ponder, to converse, to utter, to complain, to meditate, to pray, to speak.”<sup>32</sup> *Siyach*, or its derivative *sihat*, is used eight times in Psalm 119, and it always refers to meditating on the Torah.<sup>33</sup> Schaefer writes, “The word *siyach*, ‘meditate,’ urges the disciple of wisdom to linger upon and mutter the Torah repeatedly (vv. 15, 23, 27, 38, 78, 148). The repetitive structure is intended to help the reader ruminant and thus enable him or her to fully appreciate the Torah and apply it to daily life.”<sup>34</sup> Schaefer is correct that ruminating on the Torah helps one fully appreciate it and apply it to daily life. However, stating that Psalm 119 was purposefully written monotonously to assist in this exercise is speculation

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<sup>30</sup> E. John Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land: A Commentary on the Book of Joshua*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 141.

<sup>32</sup> Warren Baker and Eugene E. Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, Word Study Series (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2003), 1130.

<sup>33</sup> Though some instances refer to the synonyms of Torah, each of the synonyms itself is referring to the Torah, as Schaefer points out. Schaefer, *Psalms*, 292. Therefore, each instance of *siyach* refers to meditation on the Torah.

<sup>34</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 292.

on Schaefer's part.<sup>35</sup>

Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger propose that "Psalm 119 has an overall dynamic that shapes it throughout . . . . [I]t is a petition for rescue from a multifaceted threat, or more precisely, for salvation through YHWH's Torah."<sup>36</sup> They note that verses 15–16 answer how a young man can keep his way pure—"seek the joy of life in YHWH's statutes (Ps 119:15–16)."<sup>37</sup> They go on to say, "He [the psalmist] concludes in v 16 that he will draw pleasure, delight and vitality from and with YHWH's statutes—and therefore he will never forget them, for to forget YHWH's commandments would ultimately mean forgetting YHWH himself (on this, cf. Deut 6:12; 8:11, 19; 26:13)"<sup>38</sup> Derek Kidner clarifies this delight, saying it is "a disciple's, whose joy is in obedience."<sup>39</sup>

By meditating on the Torah, revealed in verse 15a by the term "precepts," the psalmist is "keeping his eyes on your [Yahweh's] ways" (Ps 119:15b). His meditation on the Torah guides him in Yahweh's ways in life. Dahood points out that the chiasmic

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<sup>35</sup> Some scholars agree with Schaefer's sentiment of the monotony of Ps 119, and admittedly, many of the motifs and themes are repeated throughout. Artur Weiser, *Psalms: A Commentary*, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 739. However, other scholars see purpose, depth, and structure in its form. See Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 139; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, *Forms of the Old Testament Literature 15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 314; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms*, vol. 3, *A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 257, 261.

<sup>36</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 3:262. As Dahood notes, many commentators either give Ps 119 a superficial gloss or bypass it altogether. Dahood, *Psalms*, 1:172. See also Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 257. Also, consider the length of some commentators' entries on Ps 119. For example, Weiser gives less than two full pages to the 176 verses of Ps 119, while he writes nearly one full page on the 2 verses of Ps 117. Weiser, *Psalms*, 721–22, 739–41. Hossfeld and Zenger provide a thorough consideration, examining the structure and providing exposition of each strophe rather than mere grammatical notes. Therefore, this exegesis will follow their guidance. Three bicolons containing either *siyach* or *sihat* in Ps 119 demonstrate that meditation on the Torah provides guidance for life (119:15–16, 23–24, 97–98).

<sup>37</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 3:266.

<sup>38</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 3:267.

<sup>39</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: A Commentary on Books III–V of the Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 420.

structure of verse 15 reveals that Yahweh’s precepts and his ways are one in the same.<sup>40</sup> Allen comments that the two verbs in verses 15–16 reveal the psalmist’s wish: he desires to meditate—keep his eyes—on Yahweh’s statutes, which reveal Yahweh’s ways (v. 15); he wishes to delight in the Torah and always remember it (v. 16).<sup>41</sup> Erhard Gerstenberger calls this bicolon a promissory statement “expressing the willingness and desire to perfect the ideal behavior and stature of the faithful one.”<sup>42</sup> The psalmist expresses his desire to be guided in Yahweh’s way through meditation on Yahweh’s precepts, delighting in his statutes, and remembering his Word (vv. 15–16).

### **Meditation on the Torah Gives Guidance against Enemies (Ps 119:23–24, 97–98)**

Hossfeld and Zenger point out that in the second half of the Gimel strophe (Ps 119:17–24), the psalmist calls for help against his foes, begging Yahweh to act.<sup>43</sup> Verse 23 reveals that despite the plans of his enemies and his distress (represented by his calling upon Yahweh for help), the psalmist is determined to stay faithful to God by meditating on the Torah. Hossfeld and Zenger contend, “His dignity is that he is YHWH’s ‘servant,’ and his life’s energy, even his joy in life, is from reciting and meditating on the Torah of his ‘master’ (Ps 119: 23b); he lets himself be led by it.”<sup>44</sup> The psalmist belongs to Yahweh and will serve him, meditate on his “statutes,” and remain loyal despite the plotting of his enemies (v. 23). While his enemies plan together against him, the psalmist remains loyal and faithfully seeks counsel from Yahweh’s testimonies via meditation (vv. 23–24). Gerstenberger calls verse 24 one of several “assertion[s] of keeping loyalty to

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<sup>40</sup> Dahood, *Psalms*, 1:175.

<sup>41</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 141.

<sup>42</sup> Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 314.

<sup>43</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 3:268.

<sup>44</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 3:268.

God” within Psalm 119.<sup>45</sup>

It is the psalmist’s focused consideration of Yahweh’s revealed will that allows him to delight in Yahweh’s “testimonies” and receive counsel from them (v. 24). Kidner adds that meditation on the Torah provides stability for the psalmist; it helps the psalmist focus on “the best advice (thy testimonies are my counselors)” and on “the will and promises of God, more real and more relevant than the plots of men.”<sup>46</sup> The psalmist receives stability and resolve from his meditation on the Torah. Again in verse 24, the psalmist declares his delight in God’s testimonies, just as he did in verse 16. As Kidner notes, this is a delight in obedience to Yahweh’s Torah.<sup>47</sup> In verse 24, this delight occurs amid the psalmist’s enemies plotting against him.

The psalmist demonstrates his love for the Torah by meditating on it “all the day” (v. 97). In doing so, he gains insight into the divine will as revealed in the Torah. This insight leads to the psalmist being “wiser than all his enemies” (v. 98). The bicolon containing verses 97–98 mirrors the sentiment expressed in verses 15–16. The psalmist declares his love for the Torah and his commitment to it (v. 97). Hossfeld and Zenger write, “The petitioner makes the words of Torah his ‘life’s melody’ (the ‘meditating, reflecting on’ addressed in v. 97b is carried out as ‘reciting, murmuring, humming, speaking internally’) that accompanies him ‘all the day long,’ that is, throughout his whole life.”<sup>48</sup> In verse 98, the psalmist reveals one of the results of his life-long dedication to meditating on the Torah—wisdom superior to his enemies. Hossfeld and Zenger note that verse 98 begins a section of three verses (vv. 98–100) which reveals the benefits of meditating on the Torah—wisdom and understanding. Being that Yahweh has

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<sup>45</sup> Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 314.

<sup>46</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 422.

<sup>47</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 420.

<sup>48</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 3:277.

revealed himself in the Torah and that the Torah is what the psalmist meditates on, Hossfeld and Zenger claim, “His [the psalmist’s] wisdom is YHWH himself.”<sup>49</sup> Schaefer adds that beginning in verse 98, the psalmist “places the law [Torah] above wisdom,” communicating that “the highest wisdom is to know the divine will.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Meditating on God’s Word Fuels Obedience (Josh 1:6–9)**

Joshua 1:6–9 records God’s repeated command to Joshua to “be strong and courageous.” For Joshua to respond courageously to the responsibilities God gave him, he must obey. For Joshua to obey, he must meditate. God commands Joshua to meditate on the book of the Torah to fuel his obedience to it.

The command for Joshua to “be strong and courageous” encapsulates this section of Scripture (1:6, 9) and is repeated three times. Richard Hess claims the second occurrence of the command overshadows its first proclamation. The initial command in verse 6 is associated with leading the people of Israel, while the repetition of the command in verse 7 is tied to the Joshua’s obedience to the law. Joshua’s obedience to the law is the requirement for him to be able to be strong and courageous in leading Israel. The law serves “as the object of study and the key to practical success.”<sup>51</sup> Marten Woudstra agrees, noting that the repetition of the command “to be strong and courageous” is not superfluous but “a divine injunction to act strictly according to the whole law of Moses.”<sup>52</sup> Daniel Hawk concurs; the first issuance of the command is oriented toward leading Israel into the promised land, but the second occurrence is

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<sup>49</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 3:277.

<sup>50</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 295.

<sup>51</sup> Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 60.

<sup>52</sup> Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 62.

directly related to the Mosaic law. The second utterance, Hawk argues, is inseparable from Joshua's obedience to the law.<sup>53</sup> Thus, in order to be strong and courageous in leading the people of Israel into the Promised Land, Joshua must be diligent in his obedience to the Torah (v. 7). Thomas Dozeman affirms that the study of the Torah is the context for Joshua to be strong and courageous.<sup>54</sup>

For Joshua, his creed and his life must be synchronized. Alberto Soggin says this obedience is “the requirement which Deuteronomy has, in common with all the prophets, of making life correspond with the confession of faith in a coherent fashion.”<sup>55</sup> Woudstra supports this claim by pointing out that the law is God's covenant—a covenant of grace.<sup>56</sup> Joshua's obedience to the law reveals his faith; his faith is how he can be strong and courageous in leading Israel.

The Septuagint translates the term “Torah” as “law” in Joshua 1:7–8. Hamlin argues that this translation is inaccurate because the Hebrew word “Torah” “has the basic meaning of guidance, instruction, teaching” and not simply “law.” The Torah would include both the law and the narrative sections of Moses's teaching.<sup>57</sup> Block's argument for the Torah representing the book of Deuteronomy applies here as well. While the phrase in Joshua 1:8 is “this book of Torah” and not “the Torah of Yahweh,” after investigating Block's claims about the latter term, it is evident that his reasoning most likely applies to Joshua 1:8 as well. Block admits that Joshua himself is never recognized as royalty, but he points out that in verse 8, “YHWH seems to apply to him the

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<sup>53</sup> L. Daniel Hawk, *Joshua*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Joshua 1–12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 6B (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 197.

<sup>55</sup> J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 32.

<sup>56</sup> Woudstra, *Joshua*, 62n43.

<sup>57</sup> Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land*, 6.

instructions for a king” noted above.<sup>58</sup>

In verse 8, the phrase used is “this book of Torah” and not “the Torah of Yahweh.” However, for several reasons, explanations by Block and Hamlin described above also apply to Joshua 1:8. First, the term “law” is too limiting for a proper translation of “Torah.” Second, Joshua is Moses’s successor, and the events of Sinai described in Deuteronomy would be fresh in his mind as well as in the minds of the Israelites.

Third, the terminology in Joshua 1:8 (“this book of the Torah”) reflects Moses’s speech to future kings in Deuteronomy 17:18–20. Though Joshua was not recognized as king, or commanded to write a copy of the Torah as Moses prescribed for kings (Deut 17:18–20), Yahweh nonetheless commands Joshua’s faithfulness to the Torah—“this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night” (Josh 1:8). In fact, Joshua’s success or failure as the leader of Israel hinges upon his obedience to the Torah—just as Moses described it would be for future kings of Israel.

Finally, as Hamlin states, the Jews did not use the term “Torah” to speak of the Pentateuch until after the exile, around eight centuries after the writing of Joshua. The combination of these explanations implies that the phrase “this book of Torah” in Joshua 1:8 is speaking of the revealed will of God, specifically the book of Deuteronomy, including the laws, narratives, speeches, and gospel contained therein.<sup>59</sup>

In Joshua 1:8, God explains how Joshua can be obedient to the Torah—“this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night.” This verse highlights Joshua’s key to success—meditating on the Torah is what

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<sup>58</sup> Block, *How I Love Your Torah*, xiv.

<sup>59</sup> Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land*, 6.

leads to his obedience. Joshua's obedience leads to his success. Joshua's meditation on the Torah will fuel his obedience to it, and only through his obedience will he have success in the endeavors God commanded him to do. Hess claims, "Unless Joshua makes meditation upon, and obedience to, God's law his first priority, his leadership will fail."<sup>60</sup> The rest of verse 8 supports Hess's claim: "for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."<sup>61</sup>

As in Psalm 1, the word *hagah* is translated as "meditate" in Joshua 1:8. David Howard clarifies that this Old Testament idea of meditating is not the one common today, which is indebted to Eastern mystic religions and consists of emptying one's mind and focusing on nothing. Instead, the idea of meditation presented in the Old Testament is concerned with filling one's mind with God (Ps 63:6), his works (Ps 77:12), or his law (Ps 1:2).<sup>62</sup> Robert Hubbard describes meditation as a "focused study free of distraction."<sup>63</sup> He elaborates,

The reader's posture pictures the text's importance: the reader hunches over it, eyes riveted on every syllable in order to not miss any detail. The posture also mirrors how critical is the law's guidance; only rigorous reflection can mine its depths. To "skim" the law is to imperil one's future by missing something crucial. Indeed, it is not enough simply to read it, think about it, or even talk about it. Joshua must "be

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<sup>60</sup> Hess, *Joshua*, 80.

<sup>61</sup> Some commentators propose that the law not departing from Joshua's mouth indicates Joshua's responsibility to teach it to the people and that the Book of the Law is to be read during every worship service, including Calvin, Bratcher, Newman, and Hamlin. These commentators may be correct in saying the Torah should be read to the people; however, their claim that Joshua is to do it is faulty. The grammar in Josh 1:8 reflects a command directly to Joshua and only through assumption can one assert an application that goes beyond personal devotion. In vv. 1–8, Joshua is the focus. In Josh 1, the pronoun is always plural when God includes Israel, and it is singular when God is speaking to Joshua only. Each occurrence of "your" or "you" in v. 8 is in the second-person singular masculine form, referring only to Joshua. Block argues that the Torah should be read aloud in the worship service, according to Deut 31:11, but it is the priests who are commanded to read it to the people, and that command was to be carried out every seven years at the Feast of Booths (Deut 31:9–13). Block, *How I Love Your Torah*, xiv.

<sup>62</sup> David M. Howard, *Joshua*, New American Commentary, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 83.

<sup>63</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, *Joshua*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 82.



careful to act” on it—to put Moses’ instruction into practice.<sup>64</sup>

The phrase “you shall meditate on it day and night” indicates the importance of daily meditation (Josh 1:8). God commands Joshua to meditate daily to fuel his obedience to the Torah. John Calvin recognizes that if even a short time passes without meditating on God’s law, errors will creep in, and people will live life as if practical business were its only occupation.<sup>65</sup> Woudstra agrees, saying that daily meditation is a part of covenant fellowship with God.<sup>66</sup> Ignoring this command to meditate on the Torah, even for one day, is the same as ignoring one’s covenant with God. Hawk points out that the “charge that he must ‘meditate on it day and night’ places the book of the Torah at the center of all reflection and decision-making.”<sup>67</sup>

In sum, Joshua’s obedience to the Torah allows him to be strong and courageous in leading the people of Israel into battle to take the Promised Land (Josh 1:6–9). His meditation on the book of the Torah fuels his obedience to it (v. 8).

### **Meditation Is a Means of Seeking God and Being Satisfied in Him (Ps 63:1–8)**

Psalm 63:1–8 describes David longing for and earnestly seeking God, drawing closer to him, and being satisfied in him. David seeks God by recalling his experiences with God and meditating on them. Through his meditation, he draws closer to God.

The psalm is intense and personal. Schaefer affirms the intimate tone and intense feelings in Psalm 63 as heightened by the many personal pronouns that refer to the psalmist and God.<sup>68</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger point out that the intimate tone begins in

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<sup>64</sup> Hubbard, *Joshua*, 82–83.

<sup>65</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 32.

<sup>66</sup> Woudstra, *Joshua*, 63.

<sup>67</sup> Hawk, *Joshua*, 12.

<sup>68</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 152.

verse 1 with the psalmist's words "you are my God." The second person singular pronoun "you" notes the "singularity and exclusivity of this relationship" between the psalmist and his God.<sup>69</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger also discuss how the verb "seek" reveals the psalmist's priority to search for his God above all else.<sup>70</sup> Marvin Tate adds that in its context, "seek" means "to seek eagerly, or to attentively anticipate."<sup>71</sup> Thus, the psalmist eagerly and intensely searches for God above all else while anticipating a response from God (v. 1).

The remaining lines of verse 1 utilize metaphorical language to reveal how desperate the writer is for his God. Hossfeld and Zenger propose that this description of longing in verse 1—the soul thirsting and the flesh fainting for God—demonstrates the psalmist's looking for God to fulfill "his elementary life needs."<sup>72</sup> Schaefer sees more of a spiritual meaning; he articulates the seriousness of the psalmist's plea, stating, "without the divine presence the soul cannot live."<sup>73</sup> Verse 5 is a comparison between the best food bringing satiation and God's *hesed* bringing satiation. This comparison is more of a metaphorical and spiritual equating of one to the other; therefore, Schaefer's understanding of a spiritual nature is more accurate than Hossfeld and Zenger's physical understanding.

Verse 2 describes the psalmist's experience with God, beholding his power and

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<sup>69</sup> Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms*, vol. 2, *A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 123

<sup>70</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, vol. 2, *A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, 123. Hossfeld and Zenger admit the term *shachar* can mean "to seek early—yearning for the dawn that ends the night." They also acknowledge that this term could be related to v. 7's discussion of meditating in the watches of the night. But in the end, they are reluctant to confirm with certainty that this verse contains the idea of seeking early, as if looking for the dawn is opposed to the proposed "seeking above all else."

<sup>71</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 127.

<sup>72</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:123.

<sup>73</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 152.

glory while standing in the sanctuary. Interpreters differ on the meaning of the verse. Schaefer suggests that it refers to an encounter with the divine presence in the sanctuary that has previously met the psalmist's need. Previous experience, Schaefer argues, can be the foundation upon which the psalmist builds future praise. He believes the psalmist is reflecting nostalgically on this previous experience and drawing hope for the future from it.<sup>74</sup> Tate concurs with Schaefer, suggesting that the verse recounts "past experiences of the strength and glory of God in the sanctuary"; but, he claims that it refers to a visionary experience based on the use of the verb *haziti*, which can mean "to see a vision."<sup>75</sup> The psalmist has a supernatural vision from God in which he recalls past experiences with God. Tate adds that this visionary experience might differ among worshipers; it may have included fire, smoke, and blowing horns for some, or it could have been more of a mental and verbal experience for others.<sup>76</sup>

Artur Weiser, on the other hand, insists that verse 2 is describing the psalmist's current location—standing in the sanctuary at that very moment and beholding God's power and glory quenched the psalmist's thirst.<sup>77</sup> However, David's claim in verse 6—that he remembers God upon his bed in the watches of the night—indicates that he is not always in the sanctuary when he meditates. Thus, verse 6 goes against Weiser's argument. Also, the verb "I have seen" is in the perfect tense, indicating that this event has already taken place and is not happening now. Recalling God's past help leads David to praise based on a realization that God's *hesed* is better than life (vv. 3–4).

The psalmist's experience of "beholding [God's] power and glory" in verse 2

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<sup>74</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 152.

<sup>75</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 123.

<sup>76</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 127.

<sup>77</sup> Weiser, *Psalms*, 454–55. Weiser does not indicate any grammatical, structural or philological reasons for his belief of the function of the word "so"; he simply makes the claim.

resulted in his acknowledging the lovingkindness of God being greater than life (v. 3) and praising God for it (v. 4). This realization concerning God's *hesed* led to the psalmist's declaring his soul as being satisfied (v. 5). Hossfeld and Zenger assert that in verse 3, "the petitioner emphasizes the 'power' and 'glory' of this God are his 'kindness and love' (*hesed*), which give to life an incomparable happiness."<sup>78</sup> The concept of divine food in verse 5 reflects what the psalmist has understood about God's *hesed*; he compares experiencing God's *hesed* to eating the best food (v. 5) after having felt like his flesh was fainting (v. 1). Tate elaborates on the rich food that satisfies the longing soul: "'Fatness' (*deshen*) represents the best and richest foods (Gen 45:18; Job 36:16), which according to Lev 7:23 should not be eaten: 'all fat is Yahweh's' (Lev 3:16)."<sup>79</sup>

In verse 6, the verb *hagah* is translated "meditate," as it was in Joshua 1:8. Here, the psalmist meditates on God by recalling his previous help (Ps 63:7). David recalls God's previous actions and through them murmurs, mumbles, and talks to himself about—that is, he meditates on—God in private devotion (v. 6).<sup>80</sup> By meditating on his past experiences with God, David has drawn closer to God in the present. Hossfeld and Zenger note that it is through this looking back and recollecting on God that God has become the psalmist's help. Schaefer agrees, proclaiming that the experience transcends the physical—by remembering God's help in the past, God is spiritually near already.<sup>81</sup> VanGemeran puts it this way: "He [David] meditates by opening the record of God's acts

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<sup>78</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:124.

<sup>79</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 128.

<sup>80</sup> Tate and Gerstenberger believe v. 6 is describing private devotion. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 128; Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 16. Schaefer and VanGemeran argue that v. 6 indicates worry on the psalmist's part. They insinuate that worry about enemies or adversity has left the psalmist unsettled and that is why he is choosing to meditate on God. Schaefer, *Psalms*, 153; VanGemeran, *Psalms*, 427. However, the text does not indicate worry and these scholars have read worry or uneasiness into the passage based on the circumstances—the timing of night and lying on the bed. Their understanding might be valid, but the text is not explicit in revealing worry as the motive for meditation.

<sup>81</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 153.

in his spiritual reflection.”<sup>82</sup> Through meditating on God, by thinking about his past help, David’s soul is satiated in God’s *hesed* as if he was currently standing in the sanctuary beholding God’s glory and power. This satiation is the answer to David’s longing and searching in verse 1.

David again expresses closeness to God, proclaiming, “In the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy” (v. 7). Though intimacy and assurance are almost universally recognized in verse 7, commentators disagree on the meaning of the phrase “shadow of your wings.” Schaefer insists that these wings are those of the cherubim who sit atop the ark of the covenant<sup>83</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger oppose Schaefer’s interpretation. They acknowledge that the cherubim on the top of the ark are symbols of God’s power; however, other occurrences of this phrase in the Psalms always speak of the wings belonging to Yahweh himself (see Pss 17:8; 36:8; 57:2).<sup>84</sup> Therefore, verse 7 refers to Yahweh’s wings and not the cherubim’s casting the shadow of protection upon the psalmist.

Meditating on God’s past actions helps the psalmist draw closer to God; here he obtains security in the shadow of Yahweh’s wings. Dahood proposes that the refuge found in the shadow of Yahweh’s wings is “a description of the afterlife in heaven, for which the psalmist prays.” He bases this proposition on the likeness of terminology (i.e., “shadow of your wings”) found in both Psalm 36:7 and Psalm 63:7.<sup>85</sup> Though this connection appears to correlate with Dahood’s reasoning, he ignores other cross-references containing the same phrase (Pss 17:8; 57:1) as well as the context of the phrase in Psalm 63 itself. The context Psalm 63:7 and the cross-references in Psalm 17

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<sup>82</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 427.

<sup>83</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 152.

<sup>84</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:126.

<sup>85</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms*, vol. 2, 51–100, 3rd ed., Anchor Bible Series, vol. 17 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 100.

and Psalm 57 indicate temporal—not eternal—security. The first section of Psalm 63:7 clearly refers to past help that God has provided to the David. David sings for joy regarding this past help in the shadow of Yahweh’s wings. David is not indicating that he will wait until heaven to praise God for his past help. Hossfeld and Zenger rightly state, “The one praying the psalm knows that, in the midst of crisis, his or her ‘remembrance of God’ places her or him under the protection of that God.”<sup>86</sup>

Verse 8 describes the result of the psalmist meditation—intimacy with his God. In the midst of his meditation, the psalmist declares his commitment to Yahweh as he draws close to Yahweh. Tate explains that the expression “clings to” in verse 8 means “to follow hard after” and reflects a commitment to Yahweh and his commandments, which will not fail.<sup>87</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger add that this expression is also used to describe the relationship between husband and wife (Gen 2:25) as well as the “exclusive loyalty and fidelity of Israel to its God (cf. Deut 4:4; 10:2; 11:22; etc.).”<sup>88</sup>

Although he expressed desperation for God in verse 1, David reveals that he has faith God will uphold him (v. 8b). Tate comments, “V 8b moves from the opposite direction [of 8a] and affirms that Yahweh’s right hand upholds the speaker.”<sup>89</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger note that David understood this “special form of divine favor” to be experienced in this life (Ps 63:5) and the next (Ps 73:23–24).<sup>90</sup> Schaefer adds, “Exquisitely tender is the image of the soul clinging to God whose right hand steadies him or her (Ps 63:8).”<sup>91</sup>

Thus, David seeks God by meditating on God’s past help (vv. 6–7). In his

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<sup>86</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:126.

<sup>87</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 128.

<sup>88</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:126.

<sup>89</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 128.

<sup>90</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:126.

<sup>91</sup> Schaefer, *Psalms*, 152.

meditation, he remembers God’s power, glory, and *hesed*. This remembrance allows him to feast on God’s *hesed* and be satisfied (v. 5). By meditating on God’s past help and support (vv. 6–7) and feasting on his *hesed* (v. 5) in private devotion as he lays upon his bed (v. 6), David clings to God and, in return, is upheld by God (v. 8).

### **Meditating on Christ Transforms the Believer into the Image of the Glory of God (2 Cor 3:16–17)**

Second Corinthians 3:18 describes how believers “are being transformed into the same image [i.e., Christ’s image] from one degree of glory to another” by beholding—meditating on—“the glory of the Lord” with unveiled faces. Though the term “meditate” does not occur in this verse, the idea of contemplation is present in the term *katoptrizomenoi*.<sup>92</sup> The image of the glory of the Lord is the object of this contemplation, and becoming more like him is the progressive result of such contemplation.

### **The Lord Is the Spirit: The Spirit Brings Freedom (3:16–17)**

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul builds a case that the new covenant is more glorious and permanent, while the old covenant was temporary (vv. 7–11). He then discusses how his boldness differs from Moses’s in that Paul does not use a veil when speaking to people on behalf of God (vv. 12–13). The apostle explains that Moses used a veil and that he is still read by some as if they are wearing that same veil due to the hardness of their hearts (vv. 14–15). Paul then teaches that this veil can be removed when one turns to the Lord (v. 16).

Verse 17 is a difficult verse to interpret. Victor Paul Furnish recognizes, “Commentators are divided over whether the Lord in v. 16—and then in vv. 17 and 18 as

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<sup>92</sup> Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 96.

well—is to be regarded as God or Christ.”<sup>93</sup> Margaret Thrall writes almost as much about the excursus concerning the meaning of Lord in verse 17 as she does in exegeting the entire verse. She points out that commentators do not just choose between God and Christ as the meaning of Lord in this verse; in fact, some commentators believe it could mean “the risen Christ is identical with the Holy Spirit” or that Paul is declaring the divinity of the Spirit.<sup>94</sup> Two questions must be addressed to understand what Paul is saying in verse 17: What does Paul mean by “the Lord is the Spirit,” and what does he mean by “freedom”?

Thrall notes that in verse 17, Paul is commenting on the meaning of “Lord” in verse 16. She bases her position on the anaphoric and introductory article *dé*, which refers to something previously stated—in this case, the word “Lord” in verse 16.<sup>95</sup> Because verse 17 is Paul’s comment on the term *kyrios* used in verse 16, a proper understanding of the term *kyrios* in verse 16 is necessary to exegete verse 17.

Furnish proposes that “Lord” in verse 16 refers to God and not to Christ, reasoning that beginning in 2:1, Paul’s emphasis is theological (proper) and not Christological. Furnish claims that Paul’s Christology is subject to his theology (proper). Christ is how God reconciles the believer to himself. “To turn to the Lord then,” Furnish proposes, “would mean, in the context of Paul’s preaching, to acknowledge and receive

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<sup>93</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible Commentaries, vol. 32A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 234.

<sup>94</sup> Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 273–82. See also Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina Series 8 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 54.

<sup>95</sup> Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 274, 281. See also Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 196–97; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 235; Ralph P. Martin, *Second Corinthians*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 212–13; Matera, *II Corinthians*, 96.



one's reconciliation with God through Christ."<sup>96</sup> Thus, in verse 16, the term *kyrios* refers to God, as opposed to Christ or the Holy Spirit. In verse 17, Paul is commenting on what he meant by *kyrios* in verse 16. The question now is what did Paul mean by "*kyrios* is the Spirit"?

According to Thrall, the best exegesis of 17a reveals that "the 'Lord' of the text in Exodus stands for the Spirit, when Exod 34:34 is seen as prefiguring the events of Paul's own day."<sup>97</sup> That is, the Spirit is the new dynamic part of the second covenant; Paul's contemporaries—Jews and Gentiles alike—must now turn to the Spirit in the same way that Moses turned to the Lord in Exodus 34:34. She says that Paul is "interpreting his Exodus text in terms of the salvific events of his own day."<sup>98</sup> Thrall argues against the view that Paul is defining the Holy Spirit as the person of the Trinity to whom one must turn to have the veil removed. She contends that such a view is anachronistic, reading clear dogmatic categories into Paul's thinking that would not come until centuries later.<sup>99</sup> Martin agrees, adding that it is the Holy Spirit's dynamic action, not his personhood, that Paul has in mind in verse 17: "When we seek 'the Lord' by the Spirit, it is the Spirit of the Lord that grants us access to God, Paul concluded."<sup>100</sup>

Furnish provides clarity by focusing on the context of verse 17. He points to Paul's argument in verse 6 (i.e., the Spirit brings life, while the letter kills) to demonstrate that Paul is continuing, in verse 17, with his contrast between the life-giving Spirit and the death-bringing law, as opposed to introducing a new concept—the Spirit's divinity. Furnish also notes that 3:12–4:6 discusses the hope and boldness the apostles have due to

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<sup>96</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 235.

<sup>97</sup> Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 274.

<sup>98</sup> Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 281.

<sup>99</sup> Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 274, 280–81.

<sup>100</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 214. See also Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 310–11.

the surpassing glory and permanence of the new covenant. Verse 17 falls within that pericope; Paul is clarify that it is through the Spirit and not the letter that Jews and Gentiles can turn to Christ.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, it is through the Spirit that Paul has hope and boldness. Furnish writes,

When Paul now declares that “the Lord” is the Spirit (v. 17a), he is emphasizing that the Lord to whom the Corinthians turned at their conversion is the God of that new covenant which operates through the Spirit and not through the letter—thus for life and righteousness rather than for death and condemnation. It is not his purpose here to “define” the Spirit or to indicate anything very precise about the relationship of the Spirit to “the Lord.”<sup>102</sup>

Matera restates verse 17, noting that Paul is neither saying that the Holy Spirit is divine nor identifying Christ as the Spirit. Instead, Paul is commenting on his own use of the word “Lord” in verse 16, saying, “Now in this passage from Exodus, to which I have just alluded, *ho kyrios* stands for the Spirit of the new covenant about which I have been speaking.” Matera correctly argues that Paul is continuing in his theological and pneumatological focus that began chapter 3. Paul’s point is that his ministry and the removal of the veil from believers are both brought about by the Spirit of the Lord.<sup>103</sup>

When one turns to the Lord via the Spirit, the veil is removed and freedom is found (2 Cor 3:16–17). Paul Barnett submits that the freedom mentioned in verse 17 refers to freedom from the letter of the law, which leads to death (v. 6). Such freedom is not permissiveness; rather, “it is a ‘freedom’ from the ‘condemnation’ arising from inability through ‘the flesh’ to keep the Law of God.”<sup>104</sup> Thrall acknowledges this interpretation, but she contends that the main argument of this passage goes beyond the “adverse results of life under the law” mentioned in verses 7–11. She proposes that rather

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<sup>101</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 236

<sup>102</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 236. See also Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 199–201; Matera, *II Corinthians*, 96.

<sup>103</sup> Matera, *II Corinthians*, 96.

<sup>104</sup> Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 202–3.

than speaking about freedom *from* something, Paul here is talking about freedom *to* something. She postulates that Paul may have in mind the allegory of Hagar and Sarah that he discusses in Galatians 4:21–31. The slave woman produces slave children, and the free woman produces free children. According to Thrall, it is the freedom to be God’s children that Paul has in mind in 2 Corinthians 3:17. The believer is free in that he or she is a child of God. Paul explains in Romans 8 that being a child of God holds the hope of future glory, and he has just explained the surpassing glory of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:7–11). Verse 18 reveals this same hope. That hope, Thrall argues, is what Paul is building to by stating, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (v. 17). Believers have the freedom, under the new covenant, to behold “the glory of the Lord” (v. 18).<sup>105</sup>

Matera agrees with Thrall over Barnett, stating,

Although notions of freedom from the law, sin, and death undoubtedly lie in the background of Paul’s thought, here they are not in the foreground. Rather, Paul seems to have in mind freedom from the veil that lies over the heart of his contemporaries as they read “Moses.” Such freedom allows the people of a new covenant to gaze on the glory of the Lord.<sup>106</sup>

Though Paul has mentioned the life-giving aspect of the Spirit over the letter, Thrall and Matera are correct in arguing that this notion is a background thought in Paul’s statement concerning freedom in verse 17. Jan Lambrecht reminds readers that glory is the topic of verses 7–11, while the removal of the veil is the topic of verses 12–16.<sup>107</sup> Paul brings these two motifs—glory and the removal of the veil—together in verse 18. Exegesis of verse 18 shows that Paul is speaking of a freedom that goes beyond freedom from the results of life under the law; he is speaking of a freedom that allows Christians to behold the glory of the Lord and leads to transformation from one degree of glory to another.

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<sup>105</sup> Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 274–76.

<sup>106</sup> Matera, *II Corinthians*, 96.

<sup>107</sup> Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, 62.

### **Contemplating Christ Brings about Transformation (3:18)**

According to Barnett, verse 18 summarizes Paul’s argument concerning new covenant ministry, which goes back to 2:14. In verse 18, Paul includes the phrase “we all” to demonstrate that all who are under the new covenant have unveiled faces, behold the glory of the Lord, and are being progressively transformed into that image of glory. The plurality of unveiling here stands in contrast to the singular character of Moses removing his veil in Yahweh’s presence but keeping it on in the presence of the Israelites. Only Moses could look upon the glory of God with an unveiled face because the Israelites of his day—similar to those unconverted Jews in Paul’s day—had hard hearts and thus remained veiled. Paul is declaring that all who turned to the Spirit under the new covenant have the ability to “behold the glory of the Lord” just as Moses did.<sup>108</sup>

To correctly understand Paul’s teaching in verse 18, special attention must be given to the term *katoptrizomenoi*. Specifically, two questions must be addressed: What does the term mean, and how is it to be understood in this context? In other words, why does Paul use this term here when he does not use it in his other epistles?

Gerhard Kittel defines *katoptrizomenoi* as “to see oneself in a mirror” when it is used in the middle voice, as it is in verse 18.<sup>109</sup> When written in the active voice, the term’s meaning is “‘to show in a mirror’ or ‘to reflect’ while in the passive voice it can mean ‘to be reflected.’”<sup>110</sup> Thrall provides a thorough examination of proposed interpretations of *katoptrizomenoi* and the reasoning behind each proposal.<sup>111</sup> She, too, concludes that the best translation is “behold as in a mirror” rather than simply “behold”

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<sup>108</sup> Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 204–5.

<sup>109</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:696–97.

<sup>110</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 696.

<sup>111</sup> Given the limited scope and length of this project, only Thrall’s final conclusions are addressed and evaluated alongside those of other commentators. For an in-depth examination of the differing ways of translating *katoptrizomenoi*, see Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 290–97.

or “reflect.” She suggests that Paul draws the mirror metaphor from Wisdom 7:25–26 and that while “the general use of the image of the mirror in the Greco-Roman world” must be kept in mind, it is only a minor consideration in this instance.<sup>112</sup> Thrall insists that though the vision in verse 18 may be indirect, there is no reason to believe that Paul’s readers would have assumed that the vision was defective.<sup>113</sup> She admits that Paul does use the idea of a mirror giving an indirect image in 1 Corinthians 13:12; however, she rightly observes that there, the idea of the image being defective is only communicated by the phrase *en anigmati*, which does not occur in 2 Corinthians 3:18.<sup>114</sup>

Martin, too, believes “behold as in a mirror” is the superior translation, but he arrives at this conclusion based on contextual evidence in verses 12–17: “The translation ‘we reflect’ removes the contrast of the Christians and the Jews, who because of their veil cannot see.” Paul has been building on this contrast in verses 12–17; therefore, Martin holds that the context leans toward the translation “behold as in a mirror.”<sup>115</sup> Matera strengthens the argument for this translation and provides insight into why Paul may have chosen this word by highlighting a unique contrast. Specifically, he points to the word *atenizō* (“looked intently”) in verse 13. Matera argues that Paul is using the phrase “behold as in a mirror” to explain that Christians look upon the glory of God and contemplate it, as opposed to the Israelites who “‘looked intently’ on Moses’ face but could not see the glory of the Lord because of the veil.”<sup>116</sup>

Considering Thrall’s argument regarding the background of Paul and his

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<sup>112</sup> Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 293–94.

<sup>113</sup> Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 293. See also Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 205–6 (esp. 205–6n41). For Furnish’s discussion of two passages from Philo, see Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 237–40. For a discussion on classical writers’ use of mirror imagery, see Murray J. Harris’s comments on A. L. Connolly’s observations; Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 315.

<sup>114</sup> Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 293.

<sup>115</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 215.

<sup>116</sup> Matera, *II Corinthians*, 96–97.

audience, as well as the contextual evidence presented by Martin and Matera, *katoptrizomenoi* is best translated “behold as in a mirror.” Paul may have chosen this word based on a combination of Wisdom 7:26 and the language interplay it provides with *atenizō*. Matera adds that this “beholding” carries the idea of contemplating. He notes, “The notion of transformation seems to require the sense of contemplation.”<sup>117</sup> This idea of contemplation is an elaboration of “behold as in a mirror.”

Two questions remain: What is the “glory of the Lord” that Christians are “beholding as in a mirror,” and what effect does such beholding (or contemplating) have on them (2 Cor 3:18)? Barnett points out that a few verses later, Paul calls Christ the image of God (4:4) and says that the glory of God is in the face of Christ (4:6). Therefore, Christians behold the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ and are progressively transformed into his image.<sup>118</sup> Thrall agrees, noting that the terms *doxa* and *eikōn* are similar concepts for Paul. She states, “It is by beholding Christ that believers behold God’s glory.”<sup>119</sup> Barnett clarifies that the predicate of 3:18 is “are being transformed” and that “with unveiled face” and “beholding the glory of the Lord” are both qualifying phrases of the subject “we all.” The removing of the veil and the beholding of God’s glory as if in a mirror are prerequisites that lead to transformation into the same image—that is, becoming more Christ like—from glory to glory, with the Spirit of the Lord being the source of this transformation.<sup>120</sup>

Harris clarifies that this transformation is into the same image as Christ, not into the same image as other Christians, as some interpreters argue. Rather than becoming like one another as Christians, Harris argues that the “recovery of the divine

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<sup>117</sup> Matera, *II Corinthians*, 96–97.

<sup>118</sup> Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 204–5.

<sup>119</sup> Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 283.

<sup>120</sup> Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 204–5.

image” from Genesis 1:26 is the goal in 2 Corinthians 3:18. According to Harris, Paul is saying that this transformation, in part, is a process of recovering the divine image, in which man was created, by being transformed into the likeness of the perfect man—Christ Jesus—who is the image of God.<sup>121</sup> Matera provides a succinct summary of verse 18:

When members of the new covenant contemplate the glory of God, they are transformed into the same image of God’s glory, which is Christ. The process of transformation, as Paul will explain, does not occur instantaneously, as if by magic; and so Paul writes, “from glory to glory.” The final phrase, “as from the Lord who is the Spirit” echoes the point that Paul made in verse 17, where he identified “the Lord” in the text from Exodus as “the Spirit.”<sup>122</sup>

In sum, Paul develops the idea that the glory of the new covenant is superior to the old because it is permanent (vv. 7–11). He also explains how believers under the new covenant have the same ability to contemplate the glory of the Lord, in Christ, and be transformed—progressively—into the image of God’s glory, which is Christ, because their veil has been removed (vv. 12–18).

### Conclusion

The five passages studied above (Pss 1:1–6; 119:15–16, 23–24, 97–98; Josh 1:8; Ps 63:1–8; 2 Cor 3:17–18) reveal the importance of meditation for the believer. Psalm 1 delineates the path of the righteous and that of the wicked. The righteous meditate on the Torah to choose the path of Yahweh. In Psalm 119, the psalmist meditates on the Torah for guidance in life, especially when his enemies are near. Joshua 1:8 details how meditation on the Torah fuels obedience to it. Psalm 63 describes the psalmist seeking and growing closer to God through meditation on God’s previous help. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul teaches that believers can meditate on Christ because the Spirit

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<sup>121</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 315.

<sup>122</sup> Matera, *II Corinthians*, 97.

has removed their veils, which previously blinded them. This meditation leads to progressive transformation into greater Christlikeness—the image of God.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> One would benefit from considering numerous other verses for further study on the topic of meditation, including the verses of Ps 119 not addressed in this paper, Ps 77, Luke 2:19, Phil 4:8–9, and Col 3:1–15. One might also consider studying how “meditating on God’s work in and through creation produces a response of worship for God’s glory” in Psalm 8:3–4; Proverbs 6:6–8, and Luke 12:24–28,” as recommended by Christopher Österbrock. Christopher E. Österbrock, “Teaching Biblical Meditation at Mount Washington Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio” (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 41–46.



## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

The above exegesis clarifies the Bible’s teaching on meditation. The definitions, purposes, and practices of meditation have varied greatly throughout the life of the church. To better understand the practice of biblical meditation, this chapter reviews relevant literature from three perspectives: writings about the Puritan practices of meditation, *lectio divina*, and current articles discussing contemplation.<sup>1</sup> This chapter first considers what meditation is from a Christian perspective and how that differs from other forms of meditation. Second, it examines the purposes of meditation, with special consideration given to the concept of contemplation. Third, it surveys various methods for practicing meditation. Fourth, it discusses the subjects of meditation recommended in the literature reviewed. This chapter concludes by looking at the benefits of meditation acknowledged by the literature reviewed.

#### **Meditation from a Christian Perspective**

The 2014 Religious Landscape study performed by Pew Research revealed that 40 percent of adults in America meditate weekly.<sup>2</sup> This number includes atheists, agnostics, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, and Christians.<sup>3</sup> If Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Resources regarding the Puritan practices of meditation include primary sources from the Puritans and secondary sources that describe their practices. Though only books about *lectio divina* written in the last one hundred years are reviewed, each of these resources draws extensively on the understanding and practice used by Guigo II (d. c. 1188), Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), John of the Cross (1542–1591), and other older monastic practices.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research, “2014 Religious Landscape Study,” accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/frequency-of-meditation/>.

<sup>3</sup> In this study, the designation of “Christian” is broken down into further subgroups: Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Historically Black Protestant. Pew Research, “2014

meditation aids the believer in seeking and being satisfied with God, becoming more Christ like, and utilizing God’s Word, then meditation among the groups in this study cannot refer to the same practice. If meditation is nothing more than thinking deeply about something, then perhaps one could meditate upon almost anything. However, Christian mediation differs from the practices of other religions in its purpose, practice, subjects, and benefits.

Edmund Clowney, late president of Westminster Theological Seminary, provides an overview of meditation from a Christian perspective in his book *Christian Meditation*. This book is a reflection on what the Bible teaches about meditation written in response to the influx of Transcendental Meditation (TM) in North America during the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> TM is a secularized self-help movement grounded in Hindu practice.<sup>5</sup> Clowney discusses three distinctions of Christian meditation: “It is centered on the truth of God, moved by the love of God, and directed to the praise of God.”<sup>6</sup> Clowney emphasizes a significant distinction between biblical meditation and secular/Eastern forms like TM—while the latter often use repeated mantras to block, or move beyond, conscious thoughts, Christian meditation is grounded in responding to the revelation of the personal God of the Bible and thinking upon the truths of God as revealed in his

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Religious Landscape Study.”

<sup>4</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2002), v.

<sup>5</sup> The founder of TM, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s description of absolute Being (“the unmanifested reality of all that exists, lives, or is”) mirrors the Hindu teaching of *brahman*, or ultimate reality. Maharishi proposes that TM is the way to contact Being: “The Science of Being not only postulates a theory of one absolute element as the basis of the entire creation, but also provides a systematic way whereby any man may have direct experience of the essential nature of transcendental absolute Being.” Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living: Transcendental Meditation* (New York: MUM Press, 2008), “How to Contact Being,” Kindle. The result of TM is not only the bliss of Being, but, as Maharishi claims, “those who start the practice of Transcendental meditation feel more energy, greater clarity of mind, and better health.” Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living*, “How to Live Being,” Kindle.

<sup>6</sup> Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 91.

Word. Thus, Christian meditation “stimulates thought and deepens meaning.”<sup>7</sup>

A second distinctive of Christian meditation is that it is done as a response to the love of God, who desires to have personal relationships with those he created. This response to God’s love is an opportunity for communion with God, as opposed to the goal of Transcendental Meditation, which is “to actualize in our own consciousness a divine existence that is ours.”<sup>8</sup> Christians meditate in response to God’s love to have fellowship with God and learn who he is, not to become one with the cosmic absolute.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Clowney proposes that Christian meditation culminates in the praise of God. Clowney writes: “The truth and love of God lead us to worship him; Christian meditation is an exercise in praise. Its supreme glory is not in being lifted up ecstatically, but in lifting up the name of God in the adoration of spiritual worship.”<sup>10</sup> The focus of Christian meditation is not the self but God, his truth, his love, and praising him.

The introductory session of this project presented the differences between Christian and non-Christian meditation to students.<sup>11</sup> Students were also encouraged to approach meditation with adoration for God and an intent to be obedient to his will. Each time of meditation included a reminder to students that they can bring joy to God in their meditation when they approach it with the correct hearts and follow God’s Word in obedience.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 31.

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

<sup>10</sup> Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> These differences were modified from Clowney’s book, making them easier for students to grasp.

<sup>12</sup> Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 63. As students already had a great deal to read during their times of meditation, this encouragement was given verbally during the retreat.

## Subjects of Meditation

The subjects fit for Christian meditation are as numerous as the concepts presented in the Bible.<sup>13</sup> Most of the reviewed works on meditation discussed several topics that were considered for the retreat curriculum (e.g., God’s attributes, Christ, the love of God, Richard Baxter’s book focusing on rest in heaven). However, given the limited time for implementation of this project, the topics of sin, redemption, and the joys of heaven were the ultimate focus of the one-day retreat.<sup>14</sup> The retreat was designed to have five times of individual meditation—sin, reconciliation with God, God’s love, salvation, and heaven were the focuses.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, English Puritan and theologian Richard Baxter (1615–1691) offers a practical approach for his readers to practice heavenly contemplation. Baxter explains that heavenly meditation admits believers “into the presence of God; a beginning of thy eternal glory on earth.”<sup>16</sup> He counsels that meditation, like prayer, is a daily duty for Christians. The point of meditation is to arouse the affections, and the direction of meditation is heaven. For believers, meditation is fellowship with, and rest in, God—or “walking in the garden and paradise of God.”<sup>17</sup> Baxter teaches that meditation consists of “cogitation” and “soliloquy.”<sup>18</sup> In cogitation, one draws upon one’s previous understanding from memory, exposes that memory to judgment, draws upon the truths of Scripture regarding the subject, and then meditates on

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<sup>13</sup> Beeke lists fifty suggested topics of meditation he discovered in researching the Puritans, along with eighty-seven listed by Joseph Hall. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 87–89.

<sup>14</sup> At the time of this project’s writing, the other topics were to be used throughout the year in follow-up sessions of meditation.

<sup>15</sup> This limit on topics covered was influenced by the analysis of weaknesses from other doctoral projects. See pp. 73–76 of this ministry project.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest: Or, A Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints in Their Enjoyment of God in Glory* (London: T. Tegg, 1839), 570.

<sup>17</sup> Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 553.

<sup>18</sup> Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 592.

its goodness to excite particular affections (e.g., love, desire, hope, courage, and joy).<sup>19</sup> One then takes all one has learned and preaches it to oneself, pleading, debating, and urging himself to embrace it in a soliloquy.<sup>20</sup> Each session of meditation included guidance for students to “preach to themselves,” as Baxter calls it. This preaching to oneself followed Scudders contribution of focusing one’s meditation on oneself. Together these two practices were intended to allow students to think about how the subject of their meditation affects them and then to urge themselves to be obedient to what they had learned.

In order to meditate on heavenly things, Christians must know heavenly things. English Puritan Lewis Bayly (1575–1631) argues that piety consists of knowing God (as he has revealed himself in his essence, as Trinity, and through his attributes), knowing oneself (in corruption and renovation), and using such knowledge to glorify God.<sup>21</sup> Bayly encourages Christians to meditate on life from birth to death and beyond—from both a saved person’s perspective and an unsaved person’s perspective.<sup>22</sup> He also supplies the Christian with a detailed schedule for daily piety.<sup>23</sup> He gives examples of written meditation and prayers for all times of the day, with particular considerations given for the Sabbath and special occasions.<sup>24</sup> *The Practice of Piety* has revealed the power of written meditations and prayers. Students were provided with sample written meditations to think through, and they were encouraged to write down some of their meditations.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 576–91.

<sup>20</sup> Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 592–95.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian How to Walk, That He May Please God* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Bayly, *The Practice of Piety*, 28–75.

<sup>23</sup> Bayly, *The Practice of Piety*, 102–58.

<sup>24</sup> Bayly, *The Practice of Piety*, 193–206, 220–62.

<sup>25</sup> These meditations were gathered from Bayly and other literature reviewed in chap 3. However, they were modified to make them more reader-friendly for CHBC students. Swinnock’s

Any number of subjects could have been chosen for the CHBC youth meditation retreat. With only five sessions of meditation during the retreat, topics were chosen carefully. Bayly's practice of meditating on the life of the believer and Baxter's focus on rest in heaven both influenced the topics of the retreat. A Christian needs to know how sin affects one's life, how one can be reconciled to God, what God's love is like, how special salvation is, and what heaven will be like. The final session was a condensed experience of meditating on heaven as Baxter has presented in his work.

### **Purposes of Meditation**

Bringing joy to the heart of God is a noble and worthwhile pursuit, but such joy is the outcome of obedience to the truths upon which one has meditated. Joy in God's heart is the result, but how is this joy achieved? The literature reviewed reveals how the authors have practiced meditation in order to be guided by God (Pss 1, 119), to be obedient to his Word (Josh 1:8), and to seek him and be satisfied in him (Ps 63). God guides Christians through meditation by the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:1) to the point that the heart is affected (Col 3:2) and obedience is the outcome (Josh 1:8).

### **The Guidance of God in the Mind, Affections, and Will**

Among Christian reflections on meditation, the English Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced a rich and extensive body of writings that emphasized the link between meditation and communion with God: meditation begins in the mind and moves to the affections (heart) to achieve a change in a Christian's behavior.<sup>26</sup> Two Puritan works are discussed in this section, along with three contemporary works that have reviewed the Puritan practice of meditation.

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meditation on sin was used during the retreat and two from Bayly were used in the follow-up letter to the retreat.

<sup>26</sup> For the purpose of this project, the term communion is defined as spending time in the presence of God which includes our speaking to God in prayer and him speaking to us through his Word.

Contemporary author David Saxton mines the depths of Puritan writings to present a case for biblical meditation, including their view of meditation, beginning with the mind for the purpose of moving one's affections to the point of taking action. Saxton writes that Christianity has become superficial. He advocates for "a return to true biblical spirituality—a serious focus on putting God's Word to practice in one's own experience."<sup>27</sup> Saxton declares that personal meditation is the path to this return and that the Puritans serve as superb guides along this path. He presents the majority Puritan view on topics such as occasional and set meditation, benefits of meditation, choosing topics for meditation, and hindrances against meditation. This resource's list of hindrances drawn from several Puritan writers served as the topic of session 5 of the meditation retreat. Students were guided through many of their excuses for not meditating (e.g., it is too difficult, they are too busy, they are no good at it, and the distractions that entertainment brings in a digital age, feelings of guilt, living for passing pleasures, influence of ungodly friends, and failure to decisively separate from the world).<sup>28</sup>

Meditation, from a biblical sense, ought to bend one's heart toward God. In *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, long considered a spiritual classic, Scottish theologian Henry Scougal (1650–1678) proposes that meditation is a "means for begetting that holy and divine temper of spirit."<sup>29</sup> The purpose of this "deep and serious consideration of the truths of our religion," per Scougal, is that a Christian ought to think upon these truths until he is utterly convinced of them and affected by them.<sup>30</sup> Scougal gives several examples of subjects for meditation, along with the desired outcome they

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<sup>27</sup> David W. Saxton, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Saxton, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind*, 115–27.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Boston: Nichols and Noyes, 1868), 101, Google Books.

<sup>30</sup> Scougal, *Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 101–2.

produce.<sup>31</sup> This resource provides a streamlined approach that reveals the relationship between meditation and the affections. Its format of providing a topic for meditation, along with its desired outcome, has shaped each session in the curriculum. Students were provided not only with the subject of meditation but also the purpose and desired effect pertaining to that specific subject. For example, the first time of meditation focused on sin, and students were guided to consider the results of sin, God’s wrath against sin, God’s judgment of sin, and the consequences of sin.

Meditation is one significant way that Christians experience the Holy Spirit’s guiding presence. As the preeminent English theologian John Owen (1616–1683) reminds readers, everyone is either under the rule of the Spirit or under the rule of the world. Owen describes what it means to be spiritually minded, and he cautions his readers against assuming they are so merely because they sometimes think upon spiritual things, get excited by the preaching of the Word from time to time, or respond to external crises by turning to spiritual thoughts though they do not engage them otherwise.<sup>32</sup> The affections are the seat of sin, and if they are not changed, one will continue to avoid godly things and cling to earthly things.<sup>33</sup> Owen notes that it is by faith in God’s grace that one comes to delight in spiritual duties and participate in them in order to communicate with Jesus. Owen’s insistence that Christians be spiritually minded, like a

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<sup>31</sup> These subjects and desired outcomes include the following: meditating on God’s excellent nature, his love, and his kindness toward man inflames the souls of men with the love of God; meditating on man’s relationship with God—that God has pressed his image on man—enlarges one’s heart in love toward others; meditating on the joys of heaven or man’s unique status in God’s creation (i.e., his excellency and dignity above animals) aids in keeping one from becoming entangled with worldly pleasures; consideration of one’s faults brings humility—as does meditation on God’s purity and goodness. Scougal, *Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 104–20.

<sup>32</sup> Owen says these people are like the water from a thunderstorm; it comes on heavy but vanishes quickly. Those who are genuinely spiritually minded are more like a river, constantly flowing at all times. According to Owen, to be like a river requires not only continually turning one’s thoughts to spiritual things—Jesus, heaven, sin, graces given by God—but also changing one’s affections. John Owen, *Sin and Grace*, vol. 7 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 280.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, *Sin and Grace*, 331.



river constantly flowing, encouraged an extension to this one-day project. Effort was made to follow up with participants on a regular schedule to ensure continued practice even after the timeframe for the project had elapsed to aid them in continually flowing like rivers.<sup>34</sup>

Pastor and Puritan scholar J. Stephen Yuille suggests that nonconformist practical theologian George Swinnock's (c. 1627–1673) practice and understanding of Scripture meditation can help believers bridge the gap between the head and the heart when it comes to their knowledge of God. Yuille discusses Swinnock's faculty-focused approach to meditation and his insistence on the necessity of the Holy Spirit's involvement in meditation. For Swinnock, meditation is dependent upon the Holy Spirit and "begins in the understanding, extends to the affections, and ends in the will."<sup>35</sup> Yuille ends his article with three practical implications: preparation of the self before meditation, "carriage" of the self during meditation, and behavior after meditation. Each session was written to include a time for students to prepare themselves by emptying their hearts of evil, remembering with whom they are meeting during their time of Scripture reading and meditation, and to end their time by thinking of how their experience will influence their behavior going forward.

In *From Mind to Heart*, historical theologian Peter Toon insists that Christians meditate "to receive and digest the Word of God, spoken to us by the Lord Jesus in and through the Holy Spirit, using the sacred text."<sup>36</sup> For Toon, meditation differs from reverent study but builds on it, intending to assimilate what has been learned into the

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<sup>34</sup> These efforts included text messages, posts to the youth group's social media, and a night designated to practice meditating together after the retreat.

<sup>35</sup> J. Stephen Yuille, "Conversing with God's Word: Scripture Meditation in the Piety of George Swinnock," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 38.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 16.

whole person. This assimilation affects not only the mind and heart, as reverent study does, but also goes beyond to affect the individual's will as well.<sup>37</sup> With this understanding of meditation in mind, Toon surveys both the biblical teaching on meditation and the historical practices used by the Reformers, the Catholic Counter-Reformers, the Puritans, and group methods used more recently to demonstrate different models of application for meditation.

These five works provided the first of two overarching goals for the CHBC student retreat on meditation. Though meditation is a practice of renewing the mind, its influence cannot stop in the mind; it must continue to the heart and will for it to have an impact on students' lives. The times of meditation included the individual contributions noted above, but, overall, these works helped to shape one major purpose of this retreat—to teach students how to meditate in order to renew their minds to the point that their hearts are affected and their wills align with obedience to God's truths. Each time of meditation focused on the renewing of the mind with God's Word, a time for students to think about how what they have meditated upon affects their hearts, and encouragement for them to write down any commands or doctrines they need to obey.

## **Contemplation**

While meditation can bring about significant change in one's mind, heart, and will, some authors propose that communion with God is the ultimate purpose of Christian meditation. They call this communion "contemplation." Some believe that contemplation is a higher mystical state achieved only by those who have extraordinary spiritual experiences or beatific visions resulting in ecstasy.<sup>38</sup> The works reviewed do not explain

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<sup>37</sup> Toon states, "What the mind receives enters the heart and goes into action via the will." Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Radford, VA: Wilder, 2008), and Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle: The Classic Text with a Spiritual Commentary*, ed. Dennis Joseph Billy, trans. E. Allison Peers, Classics with Commentary (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2007). For a discussion on how to benefit from the extraordinary spiritual experience of some

contemplation as a top rung to be reached through effort of ascension but as a real experience of fellowship with God made possible by Christ's humiliation and not man's ascension.

In *The Art of Meditating on Scripture*, Peter Toon expounds on what he calls the “fruit of biblical meditation—fellowship, communion, and union with God the Father through God the Son by God the Holy Spirit.”<sup>39</sup> Toon uses examples from various Christian traditions—Puritans, Catholic mystics, Eastern Orthodox—to demonstrate that saints from different times have experienced this communion with God in extraordinary ways. For Toon, contemplation—that is, “gazing upon, beholding, experiencing, and seeing by faith God through Jesus Christ”—is a result of meditation—“prayerful considering of and reflecting upon God's truth.”<sup>40</sup> This resource provided a clear, overarching goal for the retreat; the point of focusing on meditation during the retreat was for students to enjoy communion with God—contemplation. Meditation was the means, and contemplation, or fellowship in communion with God, was the goal.

The Christian practice of meditation is an experience of communion with God. In *Meditation and Communion with God*, John Jefferson Davis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary professor of systematic theology and Christian ethics, presents “a biblical and systematic theology for an enhanced practice of biblical meditation, focusing

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mystics, such as John and Teresa, without expecting the same experiences in one's own life, see Vatican, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation,” October 15, 1989, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19891015\\_meditazione-cristiana\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19891015_meditazione-cristiana_en.html); John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 122–23n1. For a discussion on “contemplation” being the result of Christ's humiliation and not of man's ascension, see John H. Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer: A Historical, Theological, and Biblical Resolution,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 144–47.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture: Understanding Your Faith, Renewing Your Mind, Knowing Your God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 12.

<sup>40</sup> Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture*, 79.

on union with Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity and inaugurated eschatology.”<sup>41</sup> Davis argues that God is present in communion with the believer during meditation on Scripture because the Spirit has been given to indwell believers since Pentecost. Meditation on Scripture is a way for Christians to enter into “experiential and Trinitarian fellowship even now, in this life, in anticipation of an even deeper experience in the life to come.”<sup>42</sup> Davis notes that information overload and biblical illiteracy combine to create a significant barrier to biblical meditation, affecting Christians’ ability to commune with God. This resource highlights the fact that Christians do not come to Scripture as strangers; instead, because the Holy Spirit indwells each believer, Christians already have an intimate connection with the Word. Each time of meditation included a reminder to students that the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures is the very same Spirit who now indwells them and creates an immediate, intimate connection between them and the Word of God.<sup>43</sup>

Christian meditation and Eastern religious practices of meditation must be kept distinct. John Coe, Director of the Institute for Spiritual Formation at Talbot School of Theology, argues “that a truly Christian approach to contemplative prayer can be made consistent with Christian theology.”<sup>44</sup> Coe successfully demonstrates that it is the pantheistic core of Eastern meditation that has tainted the concept of contemplation for many Christians. He points out that the Nicene theological doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* corrects the ontological misunderstandings of pantheism and reveals a proper

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<sup>41</sup> Davis, *Meditation and Communion*, 122.

<sup>42</sup> Davis, *Meditation and Communion*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Given the limited time allotted for this project, many excellent practices suggested in the resources reviewed were not incorporated into the one-day retreat. Future sessions on meditation will utilize Davis’s incorporation of learning research along with biblical studies, especially his whole brain approach to meditation. Davis, *Meditation and Communion*, 142–50.

<sup>44</sup> Coe, “Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 140. Coe adds, “If God is to be known, it must be by his initiative to break into the finite, created realm to reveal himself” (146).

understanding of contemplation.<sup>45</sup> Coe insists that contemplation should be interactive for the Christian: the Holy Spirit controls what happens in the experience, while “the believer is merely opening his heart and will and responding to the Indwelling Holy Spirit.”<sup>46</sup> Students need to understand the necessity of having an open heart and willingness to be guided by the Holy Spirit when they meditate. Each time of meditation not only reminded students that they have an intimate connection with the Holy Spirit, as Davis notes, but also included a note of encouragement for students to be open to the Holy Spirit’s leading during their meditation.

Christian contemplation is not merely a form of prayer; it is also “a mode of knowing God.”<sup>47</sup> In his article “In Your Light They Shall See Light,” Kyle Strobel, assistant professor of theology at University of the Free State, provides a biblical and theological understanding of contemplation. Strobel denounces attempts that begin with a secular understanding of contemplation and then try to force Christian contemplation to fit the same mold. He advocates an understanding of contemplation that begins and ends with God; he insists that contemplation is only possible because of God’s self-revelation and the nature of salvation.<sup>48</sup> Strobel notes that spiritual knowledge is relational knowledge—Christians’ relating to the Father, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit—which begins with union with Christ, then pilgrim knowledge (or knowledge by faith), and

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<sup>45</sup> Coe explains that Christians understand that humans do not share a common ontology with God, and unlike pantheistic ontologies, where man can bridge the chasm between himself and god through effort, Christians understand that only God can bridge the chasm. Coe, “Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 146.

<sup>46</sup> Coe, “Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 150.

<sup>47</sup> Kyle Strobel, “In Your Light They Shall See Light: A Theological Prolegomena for Contemplation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 88.

<sup>48</sup> Strobel argues that Christ being incarnate, being sacrificed for sin, the Spirit calling the elect to the Father through the Son (resulting in the adoption of the elect), and Christ being the mediator and high priest all form the foundation for contemplation. Strobel, “They Shall See Light,” 90–97.

finally beatific knowledge (or knowledge of God in glory).<sup>49</sup> Strobel allows this theological discussion to drive his definition of contemplation: “Contemplation is being caught up in God’s economic movement of reconciliation: it is what it means to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:19).”<sup>50</sup> This resource provides an understanding of contemplation that is based on biblical theology and available to any Christian.<sup>51</sup> Session 3 of the one-day retreat informed students that communion with God is not something that only the most holy can do; rather, because it is Christ’s humiliation that opens the way to communion with God and not one’s own ascension, any Christian can experience contemplation in this way.

Some Christians may be uncomfortable with the word “contemplation,” understanding it to mean ascension to a higher spiritual plane or perhaps thinking it to be too mystical to be a Christian practice.<sup>52</sup> Tom Schwanda responds to “widespread suspicion and fear of contemplation” among Evangelicals by examining the presence of contemplation in the writings of four eighteenth-century Evangelicals.<sup>53</sup> He

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<sup>49</sup> Strobel, “They Shall See Light,” 100–101.

<sup>50</sup> Strobel, “They Shall See Light,” 102.

<sup>51</sup> This concept is opposed to the teachings of some monastic mystics (e.g., Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Bernard of Clairvaux, Guigo II) who claim that contemplation is a higher state based on letting go of oneself in order to see a beatific vision of God after one has entirely devoted himself and ascended the ladder. Strobel’s understanding of contemplation was explained to students in order to help them understand how they spend time with God during meditation. Christian meditation and contemplation are possible only because of God’s actions and the believer’s adoption as a child of God.

<sup>52</sup> Schwanda points to John Owen and Karl Barth as two major Christian theologians who did not agree with the term “contemplation” fitting into Christian theology. Schwanda submits that these two theologians had misunderstood contemplation, identifying it with more Eastern religious practices, which is why they disagreed with the term. Owen wrote a critique of “contemplative prayer,” but he focused on it being “mental prayer” (or wordless prayer) and therefore stood against it—probably because, per Schwanda, he associated it with Quakers. However, Owen could accept “mental prayer” as long as it involved the mind being actively engaged. Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 200 (see 200–40 for a full treatment of Barth’s view on contemplation). See also John Owen, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, vol. 4 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 235–354; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, G. T. Thomson, and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936–1975), I/2:730, III/2: 98, III/3:55, III/4:560–63.

<sup>53</sup> Tom Schwanda, “‘To Gaze on the Beauty of the Lord’: The Evangelical Resistance and Retrieval of Contemplation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 62.

acknowledges the “potential for possible theological distortion” but maintains that “there is a biblical and theologically accurate manifestation of contemplation.”<sup>54</sup> Schwanda notes that the four individuals he discusses “each recognized the centrality of Jesus Christ and the role of the Scriptures.”<sup>55</sup> He concludes that Evangelicals have long practiced contemplation without succumbing to the influence of pantheism and modern New Age movements. A believer can cultivate a greater sensitivity to the Spirit, but in the end, “contemplation is a gift and always dependent upon God’s grace.”<sup>56</sup> This resource exposed an area of concern not previously considered. Parents and students may have a misunderstanding of meditation and contemplation that leads to a hesitance to participate in the retreat. This resource encouraged the formulation of a response to an objection of this type.<sup>57</sup>

While most Puritan writers reviewed taught that meditation was for the mind, heart, and will, Tom Schwanda demonstrates how Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) offers some diversity within Puritan practices of meditation with his understanding that meditation was to produce contemplation. Ambrose was a seventeenth-century Puritan minister in Lancashire, England. He was a moderate and was ejected from the Church of England in 1662 for nonconformity.<sup>58</sup> Schwanda notes that Ambrose, like most Puritans, owed much of his method for practicing meditation to English satirist, moralist, and Bishop Joseph Hall (1575–1656).<sup>59</sup> Ambrose’s practice of meditation aligned with other

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<sup>54</sup> Schwanda, ““To Gaze on the Beauty of the Lord,”” 62.

<sup>55</sup> Schwanda, ““To Gaze on the Beauty of the Lord,”” 83.

<sup>56</sup> Schwanda, ““To Gaze on the Beauty of the Lord,”” 69.

<sup>57</sup> This response also explained that meditation and contemplation are about spending time with God as he has revealed himself in Scripture and not about ascending to a higher spiritual plane by one’s own merit. Though it may not have been needed, a well thought-out response to objections of this type proved valuable when discussing the differences between Christian and non-Christian meditation.

<sup>58</sup> Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 241.

<sup>59</sup> Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 129. Hall was one of the first to write out a systemization of

Puritan ministers of his time, based on Hall's teachings, except in two respects. First, "Ambrose made frequent use of imagination and pushed the boundaries perhaps farther than most Puritans."<sup>60</sup> Second, Ambrose described the fruit of meditation in ways similar to Catholic mystical writers, especially Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) and Dominican friar Luis de Granada (1505–1588).<sup>61</sup> This seeming alignment with Catholic mystical writers sets Ambrose apart from other Puritans. Schwanda writes,

Frequently Ambrose spoke of beholding or gazing at God, and his massive and popular *Looking unto Jesus* is a sustained meditation on looking at Jesus in love and gratitude. We discovered that one of the primary benefits of looking at Jesus in a contemplative manner is that the person is transformed to become more like Jesus. The biblical foundation for this transformative looking is 2 Cor 3:18, which has been a favorite text in the history of Christian mysticism.

Schwanda endeavors to answer two questions: "Was Isaac Ambrose a Puritan mystic and can the contemporary church retrieve any wisdom from his writings?"<sup>62</sup> After analyzing definitions of "mysticism," "Puritanism," and "Puritan mysticism," Schwanda concludes that "contemplative-mystical piety is fully present across the mainstream of Puritanism."<sup>63</sup> Schwanda argues that Ambrose's practice of spirituality clearly demonstrates that he can be classified as a Puritan mystic.<sup>64</sup> Ambrose and other Puritans

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meditation, which many Puritans borrowed from, with most making their own revisions to his work.

<sup>60</sup> Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 141.

<sup>61</sup> Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 134–36.

<sup>62</sup> Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 28. Schwanda relies on Bernard McGinn's understanding of mysticism: "The mystical element within Christianity . . . centers on a form of immediate encounter with God whose essential purpose is to convey a loving knowledge (even a negative one) that transforms the mystic's mind and whole way of life." Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism: 1200–1350*, vol. 3 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 26. Schwanda notes that a definition of Puritanism is also difficult to reach, and he opts for a more flexible and encompassing method based on John Coffey and Paul Lim's work. Schwanda notes that they use five themes to help understand Puritanism: "They maintain that Puritans were descendants of the Reformation, with Calvinistic roots, who eventually proved to be divisive, and that their influence quickly overflowed into the European context." John Coffey and Paul Lim, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2–7.

<sup>64</sup> Practices include his emphasis on spiritual marriage, retreats, struggles of the soul, communal spiritual duties, and his writing on meditation and contemplation. It is during these practices that Ambrose experienced God across a full spectrum. "Ambrose always combined a deep study of Scripture



serve as examples of contemplative-mystical piety for those in the Reformed and Evangelical traditions. Thus, Protestants can use Ambrose and others as models to follow instead of seeking spiritual guidance only from within Roman Catholic heritage. This resource highlighted the need to distinguish between union and communion with God, union being the same for all believers (i.e., obtained at the point of salvation) and communion varying for believers as an ongoing “experiential sense of God’s love and enjoyment of God.”<sup>65</sup> Schwanda writes of the idea that the spiritual disciplines, including meditation, should be engaged to enjoy God, as opposed to negotiating with him or viewing the disciplines as a burden. The concept of union was explored in the verses used for meditation in session 3 of the one-day retreat under the topic of the sinner’s reconciliation to God.

Though the term “contemplation” has garnered a negative connotation, the authors above have made a strong case for its use when discussing meditation. Contemplation, as referring to a time of communion with God—experiencing the presence of God—is based on a correct ontological understanding of man’s difference from God. Man can experience contemplation because God has descended to his level and not because he has ascended to God’s level. Meditation is the means God has appointed for man to enjoy contemplation; both the experience and the means are themselves gifts of God. The Christian’s heart must be open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance during meditation. As noted above, per Schwanda, many devout Christians in the past have experienced contemplation without getting lost in a mystical distortion. One of the main goals of this retreat was for students to understand what contemplation is, practice the means God has appointed to experience contemplation, and have the opportunity for

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without neglecting an affective praying of Scripture.” Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 242. Schwanda defines Puritan mysticism as “the grateful and loving beholding of God through God’s mighty acts and Scripture, in which one experiences union and deepening communion with Jesus Christ through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.” Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 11–12.

<sup>65</sup> Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 72.

that experience themselves.

### **Benefits of Meditation**

The main benefits of Christian meditation correspond to the two purposes of meditation mentioned above: (1) renewal of the mind to the point that the heart is affected and the will is influenced and (2) communion with God. These two benefits serve as the headings to the two categories under which most of the benefits mentioned by the authors would be classified.

In *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, Joel Beeke, President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, provides a succinct overview and analysis of the Puritan practice of meditation. He insists that spiritual growth among Christians today is hindered due to failure of cultivating spiritual knowledge—that is, spending ample time in prayer and Bible reading as well as meditating. Meditation, Beeke argues, has either been forgotten by Christians or has come to only be associated with Eastern spirituality (i.e., the practice of emptying the mind to become one with the cosmic mind). Beeke declares that meditation is a vital piece to a healthy spirituality and that studying the Puritan practice of meditation can help the church “recover the biblical practice of meditation.”<sup>66</sup> He synthesizes Puritan beliefs, practices, guidelines, benefits, obstacles, and subjects of meditation while noting that the key to Puritan meditation is the way they encouraged the use of sanctified imagination while always keeping such imagination anchored to Scripture.

Beeke lists over 20 benefits of meditation that Puritan writers discussed. These include the benefits of meditation that influence one’s relationship with God, such as meditation helping one focus on God, helping one view worship as a discipline to be

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<sup>66</sup> Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2006), 74.

cultivated, promoting gratitude to God, and bringing glory to God.<sup>67</sup> He also lists several benefits of meditation relating to one's interaction with the Bible, including how it increases one's "knowledge of sacred truth," how it "transfuses Scripture through the texture of the soul," and how it helps Christians to "read and hear the Word with real benefit."<sup>68</sup> Beeke's list of benefits served as the basis for the list used in lesson 4 of the retreat.

### **Methods of Meditation**

Meditation is a common phenomenon in both the Judeo-Christian and Eastern religious traditions, yet in Eastern religions and philosophies, "meditation" has differing underlying assumptions, goals, and practices. Kim Knott, professor of religious and secular studies, describes meditative yoga within Hinduism as "deep concentration leading to liberation of the self." She goes on to say that "concentration on the self, quelling the passions, and becoming calm are the hallmarks of this path, the goal of which is bliss."<sup>69</sup> In Hinduism, individual souls are all part of the divine. Meditation is a way to reconnect the divine within to the ultimate reality/divine (*brahman*).<sup>70</sup>

According to Damien Keown, Professor Emeritus of Buddhist Ethics at Goldsmiths, University of London, "Buddhism regards the religious life as essentially a course of self-transformation."<sup>71</sup> Keown also points out that meditation is essential in Buddhism because it is one of the three divisions of the eightfold path, and the Buddha

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<sup>67</sup> Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 92-94.

<sup>68</sup> Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 92.

<sup>69</sup> Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 35.

<sup>70</sup> Knott, *Hinduism*, 26.

<sup>71</sup> Dameon Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7.

found enlightenment while meditating.<sup>72</sup> Keown defines meditation as “an altered state of consciousness, which is induced in a controlled manner.”<sup>73</sup> Buddhists understand that meditation is not easy and that the mind often produces its own distractions; but, concentrating on one’s breathing and repeating a mantra can aid in one’s ability to master meditation. There are four *jhanas*, or levels, of trance in Buddhist meditation, with the fourth level including some psychic abilities. Meditation that reaches the highest trance states allows a person to reach *nirvana*, or heaven.<sup>74</sup> For both Hinduism and Buddhism, the goal is personal ascension to a higher plane, which can be achieved through repeating mantras and clearing the mind.

Unlike Eastern practices of meditation, which require the emptying of the mind, Christian meditation fills the mind with the things of God. The literature reviewed produced a variety of methods for Christians to practice meditating by filling their minds with Scripture. These methods include reading Scripture while being sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, praying the words of Scripture, and concentrated thinking about Scripture. Though these three are separate practices, they are not necessarily linear in nature regarding meditation and can be used simultaneously or in parallel as one meditates.

Toon suggests an approach to meditation for Christians who are already engaging in practices of spiritual growth and are willing to commit no less than twenty minutes a day to meditation.<sup>75</sup> Toon’s suggested approach—a conglomeration of other approaches he discusses in the book—was modified to include contributions from other literature reviewed in order to create the overarching structure for the students’ time of

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<sup>72</sup> Keown, *Buddhism*, 88.

<sup>73</sup> Keown, *Buddhism*, 90.

<sup>74</sup> Keown, *Buddhism*, 90.

<sup>75</sup> These practices include weekly attendance of church services and following a fixed system of daily Bible reading. Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 118.

meditation during the retreat. Toon's first step in meditation is preparation, which involves praying for the Holy Spirit's assistance, confessing sin, and acknowledging being in God's presence. His second step is to read the Bible—reading small sections, prayerfully, repeatedly, and out loud to commune with God. Toon's third step is to choose a theme to analyze and think deeply about and then apply that theme to oneself after meditating on it. The themes to focus on for the meditation times of the CHBC youth retreat were chosen in advance of the retreat. The fourth step is to retain information; it includes memorizing Scripture or writing Scripture or one's thoughts down in a journal. The fifth is to stir up one's affections (heart) and to determine to be obedient in one's will. The final step is to close in prayer, thanking God and asking for his help in being obedient.<sup>76</sup>

### **Reading Scripture**

As the following works reveal, reading Scripture during a time of meditation is not simply reading to gain knowledge; nor is it reading merely to complete a certain amount of reading within a set time. Instead, reading Scripture during meditation is a slower process that requires multiple readings of the same text and an openness to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Meditative reading is prayerful reading. Reading during meditation also differs from the formal study of Scripture, though meditation does benefit from analytical study.

Analytical study and meditative reading complement each other in the Christian's time with Scripture. In "Approaching Formative Scripture Reading with Both Head and Heart," Klaus Issler, Professor of Christian Education and Theology at Talbot School of Theology, encourages a cyclical and symbiotic approach to Scripture reading

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<sup>76</sup> The individual contributions of literature reviewed for this chapter were added into this outline of Toon's where they fit best for use during the CHBC youth retreat. Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 118–21.

that incorporates both analytical and meditative reading.<sup>77</sup> Issler affirms that the Bible is the necessary foundation for both analytical and meditative study.<sup>78</sup> He advocates a form of “Evangelical Lectio Divina.” In this “methodless method” of reading, musing, conversing, and pausing with the text, the reader follows the leading of his heart. Per Issler, this time is twenty to thirty minutes of “living with the text” and consciously leaving room for God to act. This resource serves as a reminder that intellectual Bible study, though crucial, is not enough; meditation must engage the heart. The symbiotic method presented in this article helped shape the youth meetings leading up to the one-day retreat. For the month before the retreat, students were engaged in analytical study of the topics that they would be meditating upon during the retreat—sin, redemption, and heaven.

A Christian’s intention and mindset when approaching Scripture can have a significant influence on what one experiences during one’s time reading. Susan Muto, dean of Epiphany Academy of Formative Spirituality and executive director of the Epiphany Association, reasons that “the formative reading of Holy Scripture goes beyond exegetical-critical methods and fosters in the heart of every reader a more personal-reflexive approach.”<sup>79</sup> She differentiates between informative reading and formative reading. Formative reading requires meditation and application by a person who is desiring to grow spiritually and willing to let the Spirit shape him or her through the text. Muto proposes that a change of intention while reading is crucial to help one engage in

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<sup>77</sup> This dual-pronged approach allows Christians “to be fully responsive to God’s transforming work” by incorporating both heart and mind. Klaus Dieter Issler, “Approaching Formative Scripture: Reading with Both Head and Heart,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 120.

<sup>78</sup> Issler notes that the results of analytical study—determining the intended meaning of the text—provide the “context to engage in meditative, prayerful reading of Scripture. Any personal touch of God [in meditative reading] will have some connection to the public meaning of the text.” Issler, “Approaching Formative Scripture,” 120.

<sup>79</sup> Susan Muto, “The Art and Discipline of Formative Reading: Revisiting Holy Scripture with Humble Receptivity,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 100.

formative—as opposed to informative—reading. One changes from asking intellectual and critical questions to focusing on one’s own spiritual state.<sup>80</sup>

Muto continues her discussion of reading “that nourishes the life of the spirit” in *A Practical Guide to Spiritual Reading*.<sup>81</sup> She provides three detailed programs of spiritual reading “focusing on themes pertinent to spiritual living.”<sup>82</sup> She says that “the Bible is the basic text for spiritual reading,” but a body of literature in spirituality is a second source and equally valid for use in spiritual reading.<sup>83</sup> Muto concludes her book with common ways of spiritual formation from a Roman Catholic perspective as well as a discussion on five classical methods of contemplative prayer. This resource serves as a reminder for the necessity to clarify the importance of the Bible and the role other valuable, but inferior, books play in shaping one’s spirituality. The project sessions included a guideline for keeping a reflective reading notebook adapted from this resource.

Reading fast to gain as much information as possible in the shortest amount of time has its place, but slowing down and intentionally reading slowly and allowing opportunity for deep thinking might be the most impactful way for Christians to read Scripture. In *Slow Reading*, John Miedema argues that voluntary “slow reading,” or reflective reading, allows for a deeper understanding and interaction with books. Miedema acknowledges that there is a time and a place for skimming, quick reading, and scanning. However, he insists that when reading a book, a physical book is superior to a

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<sup>80</sup> These questions include the following: How does this affect me now? How can I let it guide me in spiritual growth? Muto, “Formative Reading,” 109.

<sup>81</sup> Susan Muto, *A Practical Guide to Spiritual Reading* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s, 1994), 3.

<sup>82</sup> Muto, *Spiritual Reading*, 51. Muto breaks the three main themes (living the desert experience; here I am, send me; stepping aside and starting again) into several minor themes and guides her readers through the readings, which will assist them in their spiritual reading. She includes not only Scripture passages for use in this manner but also what she calls “literature of spirituality.”

<sup>83</sup> Muto, *Spiritual Reading*, 4.

digital one and slowing down—that is, reading fewer books but fully absorbing them—yields the most benefits to the reader. He notes that life has sped up in almost every area, not just reading, and that the change to reading has resulted in the culture, as a whole, being incapable of practicing sustained reading and thought.<sup>84</sup> The resulting inability for sustained reading and thought, Miedema argues, influences not only how people see the world around them but also how they interact with that world.

While skimming and scanning do aid in faster connections between ideas and encourage “remixing of unlike ideas and can lead to innovative solutions,” it is slow reading that “creates a capacity for extended linear thought, the ability to follow complex chains of logic.”<sup>85</sup> Following the suggestion of this resource, students were required to bring a physical Bible with them to practice meditation at the retreat. Also, more time than was previously planned was allowed for each session of meditation at the retreat so that students could spend more time in the text by practicing slow reading.

### **The *Lectio Divina* Method**

*Lectio divina* is an ancient practice of sacred reading common to Christian monastic communities.<sup>86</sup> According to the works reviewed, *lectio divina* is returning to

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<sup>84</sup> Instead of transferring the method people used to employ when reading a book to digital media, people have instead begun using the methods utilized with digital media—scanning headlines, skimming blogs, looking only for keywords—in their reading of physical books. John Miedema, *Slow Reading* (Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2009), 51–52.

<sup>85</sup> Miedema, *Slow Reading*, 51–52.

<sup>86</sup> *Lectio divina* has been given its own category due to the many variations of practices that are associated with the name. The four books consulted mostly agreed on the practice of *lectio* and how it was a part of the process, including *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *contemplatio*. See Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, Cistercian Studies Series 182 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1998); Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1996); M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroad, 1998); James C. Wilhoit and Evan Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

This agreement among these four books, and how they fit in with the other literature reviewed, is the focus of this section. Some disagreements among the books are minor, and some are not. For example, Casey and Pennington (and Muto) agree that traditional and patristic texts can be used for *lectio divina* along with the Bible, while Wilhoit, Howard, and Bianchi agree with the other works reviewed that the Bible is the sole text to be used for sacred reading. Casey and Pennington also support the fourfold view



the public eye, and Christians of all walks—not merely monks or ministers—are encouraged to take up the practice. Four works regarding the practice of *lectio divina* were reviewed, three written by monks (two of the Cistercian order and one of the Bose community) and one written by two Evangelical Christians.

Enzo Bianchi, founder of the ecumenical Monastic Community of Bose, contends that the Second Vatican Council brought the Word of God back to its central place in the Church after centuries of exile; but, people have been confused on how to use the Word. Bianchi proposes *lectio divina*—that is, “prayerful reading, or praying the Word or contemplative prayer”—as the answer.<sup>87</sup> He defines *lectio divina* as follows:

Simply the practice of praying over Scripture in preference to any other spiritual or patristic text. It is explicitly conscious that the Word is central in the Christian life, that the Word is sovereign over every form of religious life, and that the Word has a role in effectively renewing religious life because it provides the norm of every kind of Christian prayer.<sup>88</sup>

Bianchi notes that faith is indispensable if one seeks an encounter with Christ in the text of Scripture. He objects to the notion of equating contemplation with ecstasy and, instead, claims that contemplation is normal vision that has been reshaped by God’s loving gaze—it is looking at life but focusing on God. Bianchi ends his book with a letter he wrote and one written by Carthusian monk Guigo II (1114–1193). Both letters are an encouragement to individuals and a guide to practicing *lectio divina*. The two letters inspired me to pen something similar in order to send students that participated in the meditation retreat.<sup>89</sup>

*Lectio divina* is not only praying; it also involves reading with a listening ear.

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of Scripture, while Bianchi, Wilhoit and Howard do not.

<sup>87</sup> Bianchi, *Praying the Word*, 40.

<sup>88</sup> Bianchi, *Praying the Word*, 17–18.

<sup>89</sup> This letter included a summary of the retreat, the steps practiced in meditation, an example meditation, and an encouragement to continue practicing meditation. See appendix 5.

In his book *Lectio Divina*, Roman Catholic Trappist Monk Basil Pennington encourages modern Christians to participate in the ancient practice of *lectio*, “an experiential hearing of the Word of God.”<sup>90</sup> Pennington says that *lectio* is listening to, and speaking with, one’s divine friend. He claims that man was created to listen, and listening to the Word, in whatever form it comes, is the ultimate purpose of existence. Within this schema, Pennington holds to the fourfold view of Scripture—literal, allegorical, tropological, anagogical.<sup>91</sup> Pennington does not insist that *lectio* requires reading per se but that it requires listening to the Word, even if it is being heard from another person in a Bible study group or from a preacher. It is, quite simply, hearing God communicate his Word.<sup>92</sup> Pennington suggests that on the occasion when it does not feel like God is present in one’s time of *lectio*, God is making it so in order that one would seek him all the more. During the meditation retreat, I let students know that not every effort they make to spend time in meditation will result in a supernatural spiritual experience; but, being faithful and “sitting with the Word of God, listening . . . is a time of communion, even when the Lord seems absent and the words seem to be just words.”<sup>93</sup>

Cistercian abbey prior Michael Casey contributes what he calls “a book-length, ‘postgraduate’ treatment of *lectio divina* from within the monastic tradition.”<sup>94</sup> In *Sacred Reading*, Casey’s focuses on “aspects of *lectio divina* that become important only after sustained practice.”<sup>95</sup> He looks to the Catholic monks from the past to guide his present understanding of *lectio divina*, including their understanding of the fourfold sense of

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<sup>90</sup> Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 4.

<sup>91</sup> The practice of *lectio* aligns with the literal interpretation of Scripture followed by *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio* corresponding to the remainder of the list. Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 92.

<sup>92</sup> Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 92.

<sup>94</sup> Casey, *Sacred Reading*, vii.

<sup>95</sup> Casey, *Sacred Reading*, vii.

Scripture—reading through one book of Scripture at a time and doing so in a slow, meandering, and repeating way. He also present the monks’ practice of *lectio divina* as being not only an individual pursuit but also an ecclesial one. Casey notes that the purpose of *lectio* is to lead a Christian to prayer and, ultimately, to experience contemplation.<sup>96</sup> Casey offers several suggestions for putting his theory into practice. He encourages Christians to be ritualistic with their time of *lectio divina*, being mindful of the ambiance by focusing on the place used—especially the surroundings to keep distractions at a minimum. Another suggestion Casey makes for the practice of *lectio* is to write out the texts that seem to speak to the Christian most eloquently. He suggests that this ancient practice is useful for both keeping one’s attention focused during *lectio* and for memory after *lectio*.<sup>97</sup> Students were prompted during each meditation session to keep a journal of written Scripture that most speaks to them, as suggested in this resource.<sup>98</sup>

James Wilhoit, Professor of Christian Education at Wheaton College, along with former pastor and professor Evan B. Howard, bring an Evangelical perspective to the discussion on *lectio divina*. In *Discovering Lectio Divina*, they provide a way to “enter, through the Scriptures, into an ever-transforming intimacy with God.”<sup>99</sup> With a high view of Scripture, Wilhoit and Howard argue that *lectio divina* can take one before God, where the thirst of the soul can be satiated.<sup>100</sup> Based on this idea, the authors present *lectio divina* as “an encounter of three elements: the inspired text of Scripture, the Christian reader, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>101</sup> Wilhoit and Howard discuss the interaction of

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<sup>96</sup> Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 35.

<sup>97</sup> Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 84.

<sup>98</sup> Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 84.

<sup>99</sup> Wilhoit and Howard, *Lectio Divina*, 12.

<sup>100</sup> Wilhoit and Howard, *Lectio Divina*, 15.

<sup>101</sup> Wilhoit and Howard, *Lectio Divina*, 44.

these three elements in reading, meditating, praying, contemplating, and acting in response to one's time in *lectio*. They note that everyone brings their own previous experiences, desires, questions, and circumstances, and the Spirit stimulates thoughts and feelings within them in order to help them align themselves with the Word of God. This resource provides a practical way to better understand when the Holy Spirit is speaking to a person. The authors' suggestion on asking questions about where inclinations, feelings, and thoughts come from during one's time of *lectio* served as the topic of session 2 of the meditation retreat.<sup>102</sup> Together, the students learned how to discern the Holy Spirit's leading, and then they were able to put this concept into practice during the remaining times of meditation. Students were instructed to check what they believed the Holy Spirit was telling them through answering these questions against what Scripture says. They were cautioned that if what they believed the Holy Spirit was communicating did not line up with what Scripture teaches, then they were in error in their discernment as God never contradicts himself.

The above resources reiterate how important consumption of the Word of God is to the Christian. Reading Scripture repeatedly, slowly, prayerfully, and with a heart that is open to the Holy Spirit is an integral part of meditation. While students were guided in their thinking during their meditation, a good portion of their time during each session was spent reading—and rereading—Scripture and listening for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

### **Praying Scripture**

Prayer also plays an important role in Christian meditation. Christians pray for

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<sup>102</sup> These questions include the following: What have I been thinking about while I read this passage? Why? Are there any particular thoughts, questions, or ideas that have come up? Do I notice any inclination to action as I read this passage? What might be underneath these inclinations? What feelings have accompanied my reading? Why? Wilhoit and Howard, *Lectio Divina*, 58.

assistance from the Holy Spirit in understanding what they read while they meditate.<sup>103</sup>

Christians also finish their time of meditation by praising God and praying that he would help them to be obedient and live out the truths that they have meditated upon.<sup>104</sup> The following three books discuss how to use the Bible to guide one's prayers during one's time with God.<sup>105</sup>

In *Praying the Scriptures*, Evan Howard provides a how-to guide for praying Scripture. He explains, "To pray the Scriptures is to order one's time of prayer around a particular text in the Bible . . . . [A] particular Scripture influences the words, mood and structure of my time with God."<sup>106</sup> From this understanding of praying Scripture, Howard supplies various prayer methods to use when praying: reading slowly, reading aloud, repeating phrases, identifying with emotions, rewriting what has been read, and the like. Howard uses the Lord's Prayer as his model, dissecting it to reveal several categories of prayer in which one can utilize the methods of prayer previously discussed. Howard also furnishes nine lists of Scripture that correspond to categories of prayer discussed in part 1 of his book.<sup>107</sup> This resource provides practice in using the Scripture to frame one's time of prayer.<sup>108</sup>

The Bible does not leave Christians without guidance when it comes to prayer.

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<sup>103</sup> Wilhoit and Howard, *Lectio Divina*, 93.

<sup>104</sup> Wilhoit and Howard, *Lectio Divina*, 98.

<sup>105</sup> These three books are focused more on the time of prayer than on meditation. In fact, some do not even mention the word "meditation." However, given the intimate nature between the type of prayer they discuss and meditation, each of these works adds to the discussion on meditation.

<sup>106</sup> Evan B. Howard, *Praying the Scriptures: A Field Guide for Your Spiritual Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>107</sup> The lists include the following: The Lord's Prayer; Psalms Listed by Mood, Passages for Worship and Thanksgiving, Theological Meditation, Gospel Meditation, Praying for Personal and Corporate Needs, Prayers for Mercy and Revival, Promises, Commandments, and Scriptural Exhortations. Howard, *Praying the Scriptures*, 111–37.

<sup>108</sup> Howard's advice for looking up keywords in a concordance and then picking verses that were appropriate to meditate on was used to help decide which verses were included in the meditation booklet. Howard, *Praying the Scriptures*, 48.

Jesus teaches the disciples to pray (Luke 11:1–28). *Learning to Pray Through the Psalms* is a meditation on what the Psalms reveal about prayer. In it, former InterVarsity Press senior editor James Sire teaches a practical approach to praying the Psalms. Sire insists that prayer can only be learned by praying. He supports this claim in the execution of his book; each chapter, outside of the introduction and conclusion, walks the reader through the suggested method of prayer while focusing on a specific psalm.<sup>109</sup> Sire encourages analysis of the text only after the reader absorbs it through extensive and repeated reading. This delaying of analysis allows the Holy Spirit to speak through the psalmist and keeps the reader from reading into the psalm or writing his or her own.<sup>110</sup> Once the reader absorbs the Psalm through multiple readings, Sire guides him or her in its analysis.<sup>111</sup> After the analysis, Sire includes a guide for praying through the Psalm of the chapter, incorporating what the reader should have absorbed through multiple readings and analysis. This resource provides a hands-on approach to praying the Psalms, which, due to its in-depth nature, is considered a guide to meditation on the Psalms as well. The format of the guided reading, rereading, analyzing, and praying of the Psalms provides a thorough approach for meditation for any section of Scripture. Session 5 of the meditation retreat utilized this method of reading, rereading, and reading again to meditate on Revelation 21.

Donald Whitney, Professor of Biblical Spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, continues the discussion about what the Bible has to offer when it comes to prayer. He proposes that “every Christian can have a meaningful and satisfying

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<sup>109</sup> James W. Sire, *Learning to Pray through the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>110</sup> The key to Sire’s method is “reading, rereading, then reading again—and again.” Sire, *Learning to Pray*, 13.

<sup>111</sup> The analysis includes “clarifying the meaning of the text”; “analyzing its structures”; “rational, emotional and rhetorical”; and “gaining a sense of the psalmist’s own often complex and changing relationship to God.” Sire, *Praying the Psalms*, 13.

prayer life” if he or she begins praying the Bible.<sup>112</sup> Whitney focuses on using the Psalms to help prompt oneself during times of prayer. He cautions that this method is not about interpretation but about prayer: “Bible intake is secondary in this process. Our focus is on God through prayer; our glance is at the Bible.”<sup>113</sup> Whitney points out that the Psalms are especially easy to use in this process as they are written prayers, but other parts of the Bible can be turned into prayers as well—simply read from the Word and then turn what was read into a prayer.<sup>114</sup> At the time of this project’s execution, students at CHBC had been using this method of prayer for over two years during our weekly meetings. Thus, I incorporated it into the meditation times at the one-day retreat.

Each of these works focused on the Bible being the key to prayer. While short prayers and personal individual prayers have their place and time, these resources demonstrate that there is power in praying the words of Scripture. Praying in the manner these books suggest is an act of meditation; they combine reading and thinking about Scripture with praying Scripture. Session four of the retreat focused on praying the Bible.

### **Meditating or Concentrated Thinking**

Reading and praying Scripture as described above can both be a part of meditation and even the act of meditation itself. However, the literature reviewed also reveals several methods of meditation as it concerns concentrated thinking about Scripture. The Puritan writers were especially gifted at instructing Christians on the process of meditating by thinking about Scripture in various ways.

George Swinnock defines meditation as “a serious applying the mind to some sacred subject till the affections be warmed and quickened, and the resolution heightened

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<sup>112</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. and upd. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 24.

<sup>113</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 35.

<sup>114</sup> Whitney, *Praying the Bible*, 55–62.

and strengthened thereby, against what is evil, and for that which is good.”<sup>115</sup> He encourages taking only one sacred subject at a time so that one can think upon the subject and view it from every angle possible, each new angle shedding light on the matter. Swinnock instructs Christians to warm their affections as well as to think upon the “causes, properties, effects, titles, comparison, testimonies, contraries” of the subject so that they have a full understanding of the subject.<sup>116</sup> He provides an excellent meditation on sin that was adapted and given to students at the retreat as an example of how meditation works and an aid in their meditation upon sin.<sup>117</sup>

To be fully functional, meditation requires one to turn one’s thoughts in application to oneself. In his section on meditation in *The Christian’s Daily Walk*, Henry Scudder (1585–1652), English Puritan and member of the Westminster assembly, gives a concise overview of meditation, discussing its two acts—“the one directed upon the thing meditated; the other reflects upon himself, the person meditating”—and several rules to follow when practicing meditation.<sup>118</sup> With this two-pronged approach to meditation in mind, Scudder insists that Christians use only subjects presented in Scripture, and he warns against prying beyond what Scripture reveals.<sup>119</sup> Being that the person practicing meditation should also turn that meditation upon oneself, Scudder concludes that the book of one’s conscience, as well as the Word of God, should be known to the one meditating, and this knowledge of self in light of God’s Word will direct one’s path. Meditation is only successful through experiential knowledge—that is, putting what one

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<sup>115</sup> George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1868), 2:425.

<sup>116</sup> Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock*, 2:426.

<sup>117</sup> Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock*, 2:427.

<sup>118</sup> Henry Scudder, *The Christian’s Daily Walk in Holy Security and Peace* (Edinburgh: William Whyte and William Oliphant, 1826), 147.

<sup>119</sup> Scudder says, “You will presently lose yourself, and be swallowed up in a maze and whirlpool of errors and heresies.” Scudder, *The Christian’s Daily Walk*, 150.



has meditated upon into practice. With this resource, Scudder imparts a practical way for ensuring that meditation has the opportunity to warm the affections; his method of focusing not only on the object of meditation but also on oneself due the act of meditation allows the person meditating to take ownership of his or her meditation and begin to put it into practice. Each session in the retreat curriculum included this method of turning meditation upon oneself. Students were given a blank notebook and guided in applying their meditations to themselves in that notebook.

Furthering the discussion on Christian meditation being a mindful practice, in *Prima, Media, et Ultima*, English Puritan and nonconformist Isaac Ambrose defines meditation as “a deep and earnest musing upon some point of Christian instruction, to the strengthening us against the flesh, world and devil, and to the leading us forward toward the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>120</sup> Ambrose proposes no specific time of day for meditation, but he insists on the necessity of solitude. To practice meditation, one enters one’s time through prayer and chooses a theme revealed in Scripture. Like Owen, Ambrose stipulates that meditation begins in the understanding and ends in the affections. This resource provides a thorough guide for analyzing a subject in meditation from various angles as well as a comprehensive plan assuring that meditation does not stop in the mind but continues, kindling the affections. Its methods of observing the various aspects of the object of meditation were the focus of sessions 1 and 2 of the meditation retreat. Students meditated on sin and the reconciliation of the sinner by analyzing these topics from different angles and discussing causes, effects, properties, and opposites.<sup>121</sup>

Meditation looks at the parts to better understand the whole. In *The Art of Divine Meditation*, English Puritan Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) contends that God

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<sup>120</sup> Isaac Ambrose, *Prima, Media, et Ultima; or, The First, Middle and Last Things*, 7th ed. (Glasgow: James Knox, 1757), 215.

<sup>121</sup> Ambrose, *Prima, Media, et Ultima*, 217.

requires meditation of holy things from all people, just as he requires prayer. Calamy concludes that meditation must enter through three doors to be complete: one's understanding, heart, and conversation (or practices). He argues that meditation must include the speculative as well as the practical and that the intellect, emotions, and will must all be affected. This resource provides concise examples of topics for meditation.<sup>122</sup> Calamy's "heads" of subjects upon which to meditate were written into the time of meditation for the student retreat. For example, when meditating on God's love, the students were guided through headings such as "God's everlasting love for those who belong to him," "God is the source of love," "God demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son," and "Christians' love for one another lets people know that Christians belong to Jesus."<sup>123</sup>

These four works provided practical methods for students to use in an effort to think deeply about Scripture. Students were provided with a written meditation on sin. They were also guided in analyzing subjects by looking at various parts, and they were given different "heads" of thinking to explore for topics. Finally, after they had considered each topic thoroughly, students were encouraged to turn their meditation upon themselves.

### **Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, and Proposed Adjustments from Doctoral Projects**

Meditation has been a popular topic among seminary doctoral students over the past decade. This literature review consults professional doctoral projects in order to

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<sup>122</sup> Calamy goes beyond merely saying "meditate upon death" by giving several branches of thought that one can pursue to meditate upon death: its certainty in occurring; its uncertainty in timing; one's fitness for death; living in constant expectation of, and continual preparation for, death; and how to be free from the fear of death. Edmund Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1680), "Materials of Meditation", Kindle.

<sup>123</sup> Calamy's examples of short paragraphs to consider while meditating were combined with Owen's inspiration to continue encouraging the practice of meditation for students beyond the one-day retreat. Calamy, *Divine Meditation*, Kindle.

identify and preemptively address common issues faced in executing doctoral projects.<sup>124</sup>

Three main areas of concern are discussed: (1) the time allotted and the amount of material covered, (2) the material covered, and (3) the need for time for participant discussion.

### **Time and Material Allotment**

Five of the twelve projects consulted addressed the issue of time. Theodore Richard noted that he would add three more sessions, thus increasing his project time by almost 30 percent.<sup>125</sup> Toby Havens and Marcus Davidson both admitted that they would narrow their focus and increase the time spent on what they found to be most beneficial to participants.<sup>126</sup> Pusey Losch reasoned that a time limit of a single Saturday would be placed on the project.<sup>127</sup> Timothy Cline realized that he tried to cover too much material in his sermons and admits that he would adjust to preaching both Sunday morning and Sunday evening from 1 Peter.<sup>128</sup>

Trying to cover too much material in too short a time is a common theme among these projects. This project was already limited to a one-day retreat; therefore,

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<sup>124</sup> Professional doctoral project consultations were limited to DMin and DEdMin projects, which included a section on meditation, submitted to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary between the years of 2011 and 2018.

<sup>125</sup> Theodore John Richard, "Equipping Members of Pendleton Street Baptist Church, Greenville, South Carolina to Use the Bible in a Daily Time of Study and Prayer" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 92.

<sup>126</sup> Toby Havens says he would change the intentional spiritual growth plan for the family and extend it from one session to several weeks, thus giving participants ample time to thoroughly think through and complete this task. Toby Michael Havens, "Equipping Fathers at First Baptist Church, Sherwood, Arkansas, to Be the Primary Disciple Makers in Their Families" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 127. Marcus Davidson says that he would have dedicated more time to teaching the disciplines of prayer and fasting because the two weeks allocated were insufficient. Marcus Desmond Davidson, "Developing Church Members into Ministry Leaders at the New Mount Olive Baptist Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 76.

<sup>127</sup> Pusey Anthony Losch, "Developing Leadership for Discipleship Groups at Mountain View Community Church, Richfield, Pennsylvania" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 97.

<sup>128</sup> Timothy Lynn Cline, "Developing and Implementing a Discipleship Plan for Chillicothe Baptist Church, Chillicothe, Ohio" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 106.

instead of adjusting how much time was allotted, I adjusted the focus of the material covered. Rather than expose students to several topics for meditation, I limited the project to the topics of sin, the love of Christ in redemption, and the joys of heaven. It was my hope that this decision would allow students to experience the depth of each subject in their times of meditation and inspire them to use the skills they learn to pursue other topics later.

### **Scripture Used**

These doctoral projects provided three insights concerning which Scripture to use for meditation: (1) use a familiar text,<sup>129</sup> (2) be sure to provide material suitable for immature Christians and not only meat for the mature ones;<sup>130</sup> and (3) if possible, use Scripture from one book of the Bible for all the times of meditation so that students can develop an association between that book and meditation.<sup>131</sup> These three insights led to a curriculum based around texts from the book of Romans; thus, passages from Romans served as doorways for students to enter through during each time of meditation.<sup>132</sup>

### **Time for Discussion**

Half of the projects analyzed recommend adding sufficient time for

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<sup>129</sup> Jin Choi discovered that the text used for Bible Study in his project was unfamiliar to his participants, thus resulting in confusion and frustration. Jin Su Choi, “Training Older Adults for Personal Bible Study” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 88.

<sup>130</sup> Lydia Chou found her material to be “solid food,” not the “milk” that her participants needed. Lydia Chou, “Equipping Leadership through Servanthood at Abounding Grace Church” (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 90. Given that the topics I considered for meditation at the one-day retreat are the basics of Christianity (i.e., sin and redemption), I hope to have avoided this problem.

<sup>131</sup> Cline taught out of 1 Peter to help his participants associate the epistle with discipleship. Cline, “Discipleship Plan for Chillicothe Baptist Church,” 105.

<sup>132</sup> For example, the first verse considered for meditation was Rom 3:23. Students were guided in considering what it means that sin causes humankind to fall short of God’s glory. To gain a better understanding of how God views sin, other Scripture (e.g., Gen 3:8–24; Isa 13:11; 59:2) were also considered in order to help develop students’ meditation on sin and how it separates them from God. Each time of meditation began with a verse from Romans, which was reinforced with other Scripture concerning the same topic.

participants to discuss their experiences during the project. The schedule for the retreat included time for discussion; however, after reading how important this aspect was for many of these projects, I allotted more time for discussion. Given that the retreat participants were middle and high school students, this time was highly structured to keep the students engaged and on task.

### **Conclusion**

The resources reviewed provide much insight into the types of meditation practiced by the Puritans and by Catholic monks. These works shaped not only the individual times of meditation during the student retreat but also added depth to the understanding of meditation, its purposes (i.e., renewing the mind, affecting the heart, guiding the will, communing with God), its practices (i.e., praying the Bible, reading the Bible while being open to the Holy Spirit's leading), and the subjects upon which Christians should meditate (i.e., heavenly things revealed in the Bible, doctrines, worship, praising God). Each piece of the retreat curriculum can be traced back to the contributions of the literature this chapter reviews.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the project implementation and provides a detailed account of the three project goals and their results. The purpose of this project was to equip the middle and high school students of Chaparral Hills Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas, to meditate on Scripture. The project had three key aspects: (1) to design and administer a pre-retreat survey to ascertain current meditation practices of CHBC students, (2) to develop and review a five-session retreat for instruction in biblical meditation based on the pre-retreat survey results, and (3) to administer a post-retreat survey to determine the effectiveness of the retreat. Implementation of the project commenced on July 28, 2019, and it continued through November 13, 2019.

#### **Project Promotion**

Promotion and recruitment for the project began on July 28, 2019. Parents and students were invited to participate in the meditation retreat via an announcement on the Remind app utilized by CHBC youth to communicate with parents and students. Parents and students were also informed of the retreat in person each Sunday and Wednesday at church for two weeks, beginning July 28, 2019. They were asked to reserve October 5, 2019, for the retreat. After receiving parent permission to administer the pre-retreat survey, the Google forms pre-retreat survey was sent to students via the Remind app on July 28, 2019.<sup>1</sup> For those who did not respond within two days, follow up text messages were sent, requesting their participation. For those students who did not have a phone of

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<sup>1</sup> I began seeking parental permission for student surveys two weeks prior, on July 14, 2019.

their own, paper surveys were printed and distributed on Sundays and Wednesdays for two weeks, beginning July 28, 2019. The goal of fifteen survey responses was met on August 12, 2019, during week 3.

### **Summary of Project Goals**

This project had three goals. The first goal was to assess the current biblical meditation practices among youth who attend CHBC. This goal was considered successfully met when fifteen students completed the pre-retreat survey. The second goal was to develop a five-session retreat series for students to increase their confidence in the practice of biblical meditation. This goal was considered successfully met when the combined rating of the four-member expert panel earned a 90 percent “sufficient” rating. The third goal was to increase the confidence of CHBC students in the practice of biblical meditation by training them to meditate on the Bible. This goal was considered successfully met when the retreat work had been completed, four weeks of follow-up reminders to meditate had been sent, each participant had completed the pre- and post-retreat surveys, and a paired t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive correlation between the retreat work and changes in participant behavior regarding biblical meditation.

### **Goal 1 Results**

The first goal of this project was to assess the current biblical meditation practices among youth who attend CHBC. This goal was accomplished during weeks 1 and 2 by administering a pre-retreat survey to youth group members regarding their understanding and practices of biblical meditation.<sup>2</sup> The results of this survey were used to create the five-session retreat on biblical meditation and shape the retreat to the specific needs of CHBC students. Eighteen surveys were completed and returned by the

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1 for a copy of the survey.

requested date of August 11, 2019.

A major emphasis of the retreat for this project was the need to use the Bible in meditation. The pre-retreat survey suggested that CHBC youth are familiar with the practice of reading their Bibles, yet they do not have a plan for this practice of reading (see table 1). Seventy-two percent of respondents (13/18) indicated that they read their Bibles several times a month or more, while 42 percent (8/18) indicated that they read their Bibles at least once a week. However, when it comes to setting aside time for Bible reading, meditation, and prayer, only 33 percent (6/18) indicated that they do so on a weekly or daily basis. Another 33 percent (6/18) indicated that they never set aside time for these practices. These figures indicate that on average, for the eighteen CHBC youth who completed the pre-retreat survey, they read their Bible more often than they make a conscious effort to set aside time daily for Bible reading, meditation, and prayer. As life becomes busier for students, continued neglect of planning for a quiet time is going to result in them missing more and more time with God.

Table 1. CHBC youth Bible reading practices<sup>3</sup>

Survey Question	Not at all	Once a month or less	Several times a month	Once per week	Several times per week	At least once a day
Q5. I read my Bible.	0	5	5	3	3	2
Q7. I set aside a quiet time each day for Bible reading, meditation, and prayer.	6	4	2	0	2	4

Table 2 demonstrates that 66 percent (12/18) of respondents indicated that they

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<sup>3</sup> Tables 1–5 represent the number of youth who completed the pre-retreat survey (18) and not the number of youth who participated in the retreat (11).



meditate on Scripture once a month or not at all; this data supported the need for this project on meditation at CHBC. Table 3 shows that 72 percent of respondents indicated that they used their Bible to some degree when meditating. Thus, while a majority of the youth surveyed (66 percent) responded that they rarely or never meditate on the Bible, when they do meditate, they use their Bibles (72 percent).

Table 2. CHBC youth meditation practices

Survey Question	Not at all	Once a month or less	Several times a month	Once per week	Several times per week	At least once a day
Q6. I meditate on Scripture.	5	7	2	2	2	0

Table 3. CHBC youth use of Bible in meditation<sup>4</sup>

Survey Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q12. I use my Bible during my time of meditation.	4	0	1	5	3	5

A majority of youth (94 percent; 17/18) indicated that meditation is important to them (see table 4). The same number indicated that the type of meditation described in the Bible applies to Christians today. However, only 66 percent (12/18) indicated that they understood what the Bible teaches about meditation. This discrepancy between the perceived importance of biblical meditation and the students' understanding of what the Bible teaches about meditation also reinforced the need for this project. Students indicated an understanding that meditating on the Bible was important, but nearly one-

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<sup>4</sup> For table 3 (and others below), "SD" stands for "Strongly Disagree," "D" stands for "Disagree," "DS" stands for "Disagree Slightly," "AS" stands for "Agree Slightly," "A" stands for "Agree," and "SA" stands for "Strongly Agree."

third of them did not understand what the Bible teaches about meditation.

Table 4. CHBC youth understanding of and attitudes toward meditation

Survey Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q8. I understand what the Bible teaches about meditation.	2	3	1	5	6	1
Q9. The kind of meditation described in the Bible also applies to Christians today.	0	0	1	4	9	4
Q10. Meditating on the Bible is important to me.	0	1	0	4	11	2

Many respondents indicated a positive association with meditation (see table 5). Eighty-three percent (15/18) agreed that they felt closer to God when they meditate on the Bible. Seventy-two percent (13/18) agreed that verses that they have meditated on are helpful to them when making decisions. Finally, 83 percent (15/18) indicated that they better understand what God wants them to do when they meditate. The discrepancy between the positive associations students have with meditation—demonstrated in table 5—and their lack of consistently practicing meditation—demonstrated in table 2—again reinforced the need for this meditation project for the CHBC youth.

Table 5. CHBC youth understanding of the results of biblical meditation

Survey Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Q 13. I feel closer to God when I meditate on the Bible.	2	1	0	2	10	3
Q 14. When I have a hard decision to make, I feel that verses I have meditated on are helpful to me.	3	1	1	8	3	2
Q 15. I better understand what God wants me to do when I meditate.	1	2	0	3	9	3

## Goal 2 Results

The second goal was to develop a five-session retreat series for students to increase their confidence in the practice of biblical meditation. A preliminary curriculum outline was conceived after the completion of chapter 3 of this project during July 2019. The specific sessions discussing aspects of meditation and teaching students different methods of meditation were written after the pre-retreat surveys had been analyzed during weeks 3–7. Waiting until after the analysis of the pre-retreat survey ensured that the curriculum would match CHBC student needs. The retreat curriculum was combined into a meditation booklet for students.

This booklet was provided to a four-person expert panel during weeks 8 and 9 for review. The panel consisted of (1) an active pastor with over thirty years of ministry experience and a Doctor of Philosophy in theology, (2) a recent Doctor of Ministry graduate serving as dean of students and admissions with eight years of ministry experience, (3) a current Doctor of Ministry student serving as a family minister with ten years of ministry experience, and (4) a current Doctor of Ministry student serving as pastor of youth and children with ten years of ministry experience.

The reviewers used an evaluation rubric to assess the biblical faithfulness, curriculum accessibility, length, and adequacy in preparing CHBC students to meditate.<sup>5</sup> The goal was to have a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria of the curriculum meet or exceed the sufficient level. Two main suggestions impacted the curriculum after the first review by the expert panel. First, color-coding and a system of pictures were added to help students identify different sections of the booklet. Second, the wording of the booklet was reduced, and a more in-depth discussion was added to the introductory session covering the sections that repeated each time of mediation (i.e., time of preparation for each meditation session and recording thoughts in the meditation

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix 3 for the curriculum rubric.

notebook. Once these changes were made, the panel approved the curriculum with 100 percent “Sufficient” or “Exemplary” ratings on each of the criteria measured (see table 6).

Table 6. Evaluation rubric results

Criteria	Insufficient	Requires Attention	Sufficient	Exemplary
The curriculum is biblically faithful.	0	0	0	4
The curriculum is accessible to students in grades 6–12.	0	0	1	3
The curriculum adequately challenges students in grades 6–12.	0	0	0	4
The curriculum teaches the importance of biblical meditation.	0	0	1	3
The curriculum sets students up to succeed in meditating on the Bible.	0	0	0	4
The curriculum length is sufficient to determine effectiveness.	0	0	0	4

### Goal 3 Results

The third goal was to increase the confidence of CHBC youth in the practice of biblical meditation by training them to meditate on the Bible. The curriculum was delivered on week 10 via a one-day retreat on October 5, 2019, which ran from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The retreat consisted of five sessions, which lasted between thirty minutes and an hour. This retreat was followed up by weekday reminders to meditate along with suggested verses and methods of meditation. Students who attended the retreat received these reminders via the Remind app in weeks 11–14. Pre-retreat surveys were administered in July and August of 2019 (weeks 1 and 2) to measure the participants’ level of understanding, attitude toward, and practices regarding biblical meditation. Students returned post-retreat surveys during weeks 15 and 16, beginning Sunday, November 3, 2019, with the final survey being returned on November 13, 2019. In week

17, the results of the pre- and post-retreat surveys were analyzed using a t-test for dependent samples to provide a statistical analysis of course effectiveness. Table 7 displays the results of the t-test for dependent samples.

Table 7. Results of t-test for dependent samples<sup>6</sup>

	Sample 1	Sample 2
Mean	43.4545454	51.4545454
Variance	107.2727273	32.6727272
Observations	11	11
Personal Correlation	0.0452225	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	10	
t Stat	-2.8544961	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0085588	
t Critical one-tail	1.8124611	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0171176	
t Critical two-tail	2.2281388	

The first session of the retreat provided an overview of the booklet used for meditation, teaching students what each section meant and how to use the booklet as they practiced meditating by themselves.<sup>7</sup> Next, students received an introduction to the practice of preparing themselves for meditation by asking for the Holy Spirit’s guidance, confessing their sins to God, and acknowledging that they are in God’s presence when

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<sup>6</sup> The responses from the 7 students who did not attend the retreat were removed from the pre-retreat survey data before calculating the t-test for dependent samples.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 2 for the booklet used during the meditation retreat at CHBC. Meditation workbooks for this retreat were based on several of the texts discussed in chap. 3 of this project, especially from Susan Muto, *A Practical Guide to Spiritual Reading* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s, 1994), 18.

meditating on his Word.<sup>8</sup> Students completed an activity sorting descriptions of meditation into either Christian or non-Christian practices. Once the groups had sorted the cards, we discussed each description together, focusing on the difference between Christian meditation and non-Christian meditation.<sup>9</sup> Next, students discussed the following definition of biblical meditation that we would use during the retreat: “Meditation is spending time in communion with God by renewing your mind through his Word in an effort to affect your will, resulting in obedience.”<sup>10</sup>

Students then received instruction on how to apply their meditation to themselves by answering questions in their meditation notebooks, such as How has this time renewed my mind? What have I learned about sin? Based on what I have learned during this time of meditation on sin, what do I now desire to do?<sup>11</sup> Finally, the method of considering different angles of a given theme was taught to students. The theme for the first time of meditation was sin. Students read over verses that discussed sin and answered a list of questions that would help them analyze these verses from different angles.<sup>12</sup> After this initial time of teaching, students went off to a place where they could

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 118–19.

<sup>9</sup> These differences were adapted from Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2002), v. Students received these differences on cards to sort into the appropriate categories, and then we discussed each decision they made.

<sup>10</sup> This definition of meditation does not include every aspect of the term as scholars and theologians have described meditation through the centuries; however, it covered the basic understanding useful to CHBC students during the meditation retreat.

<sup>11</sup> These questions were adapted from James Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 85, 130. The need for self-application is explained in Richard Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest: Or, A Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints in Their Enjoyment of God in Glory* (London: T. Tegg, 1839), 592–95, and Henry Scudder, *The Christian’s Daily Walk in Holy Security and Peace* (Glasgow: William Whyte and William Oliphant, 1826), 147–49, 151–55.

<sup>12</sup> The list of questions given to help students consider different angles of the theme was modified from Isaac Ambrose’s list; see Isaac Ambrose, *Prima, Media, et Ultima; or, The First, Middle and Last Things*, 7th ed. (Glasgow: James Knox, 1757), 217–21; George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1868), 2:426.

be alone and spent the next thirty minutes meditating by following the instructions in their meditation workbook.<sup>13</sup> When students returned together as a group after this first session of individual meditation, we held a group discussion, talking about what went well, what was difficult, and whether they thought their time was beneficial.

In session 2, students learned questions that they can ask about the Holy Spirit's guidance when meditating or doing their quiet time.<sup>14</sup> After discussing the role of the Holy Spirit in meditation and reading the guiding questions about discerning the Holy Spirit's lead, students were taught the meaning of reconciliation, as it was the theme for this time of meditation. Students separated for individual meditation session 2; this time, they had thirty-five minutes to practice meditation on their own. During this second time of meditation, they again used the method of looking at a theme from different angles. Students read verses to consider reconciliation, along with some guiding questions in their meditation booklet. When students finished with this time of meditation, they discussed their meditation experiences in a large group.

Session 3 began with students deciding which items from a list described different aspects of communion with God.<sup>15</sup> Several false statements were included so that students had to discern the true statements from the false ones. Next, students discussed each statement listed to determine why it was true or false. The method of using different heads of meditation was then taught. This method, suggested by Edward

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<sup>13</sup> I unobtrusively monitored students to make sure they were on task and to answer any questions they had as they began practicing meditation.

<sup>14</sup> These questions were adapted from Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 58.

<sup>15</sup> This list was adapted from a combination of the following sources: John H. Coe, "The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer: A Historical, Theological, and Biblical Resolution," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 140; John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 10–64; Kyle Strobel, "In Your Light They Shall See Light: A Theological Prolegomena for Contemplation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 88; Peter Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture: Understanding Your Faith, Renewing Your Mind, Knowing Your God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 12.

Calamy, is much like that of Isaac Ambrose’s method of considering a theme from different angles. The “heads” themselves serve as guideposts for the analysis.<sup>16</sup> Students were again given thirty-five minutes to practice meditation by themselves. This session also ended with a group discussion centering on their most recent meditations.

Session 4 began with a discussion of the benefits of Christian meditation.<sup>17</sup> Students chose the two benefits, from a list provided, that they thought were most important for themselves. Next, we discussed each of the benefits listed, and students were taught how to meditate by praying the Bible.<sup>18</sup> Students learned how to turn what they had read in the Bible into a prayer back to God, the Bible’s author. Students meditated for forty minutes and then held a group discussion over the practice of praying the Bible as a form of meditation.

The final session focused on hindrances to meditation as well as the method of meditation—reading, rereading, and reading again.<sup>19</sup> Students completed a word search and a close reading activity to familiarize themselves with some common hindrances given for the lack of meditation in Christians’ lives.<sup>20</sup> Students had forty-five minutes to practice the deep reading form of meditation on Revelation 21. After this fifth time of

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<sup>16</sup> This method was chosen for its close connection to Isaac Ambrose’s use of angles of meditation. I wanted students to see different—but familiar—ways to practice meditation so that their understanding of these practices might be full and, therefore, hopefully, become a lifelong habit for them. The heads of meditation used were adapted from Edmund Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1680), 172–73, Kindle.

<sup>17</sup> These benefits were adapted from Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2006), 92–93, and David W. Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 105–14.

<sup>18</sup> The method of praying the Bible taught to students was influenced by James W. Sire, *Learning to Pray through the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 11–35, and Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 29–32.

<sup>19</sup> This method was adapted from Sire, *Learning to Pray through the Psalms*, 13. For this retreat, I called it “deep reading” for simplicity and to make the students aware that reading something several times helps gain a deeper understanding of what is being read, especially when it comes to the Bible.

<sup>20</sup> These hindrances to meditation were adapted from Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 115–27.



meditation, students returned to the group and discussed their overall experience of the meditation retreat.

Reminders to meditate, along with suggested methods and verses to use during meditation, were sent to students every weekday for four weeks after the October 5th retreat. On Sunday, November 3, 2019, students received the post-retreat surveys during Sunday School. Three students were absent, so they received the link to the post-retreat survey via text message. All eleven students completed the post-retreat survey by November 13, 2019.

The third goal was met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-retreat survey scores:  $t_{(10)} = -2.854, p = 0.0085$ . The results for the pre- and post-retreat surveys and the t-test for dependent variables are in table 7 above.

### **Conclusion**

Each of the project goals met or exceeded expectations. First, the pre-retreat survey demonstrated the need for instruction focusing on biblical meditation by revealing a discrepancy between students' positive associations with meditation and their lack of consistent practice in meditation. Second, the expert panel found the curriculum written to be sufficient or exemplary. Finally, a t-test for dependent variables revealed a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-retreat surveys, indicating that the curriculum made a difference in the meditation practices of CHBC students.

## CHAPTER 5

### MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

In this chapter, I evaluate this ministry project, analyzing the purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the project. Next, I outline the changes I would make to the project. Finally, I detail my theological and personal reflections on the project and then offer a conclusion for the project as a whole.

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

The purpose of this project was to equip the middle and high school students of Chaparral Hills Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas, to meditate on Scripture. This purpose grew from a ministry context revealing a lack of structured implementation of biblical practices—specifically, in teaching members how to use the spiritual disciplines on their own. This lack of structure, combined with the belief that Bible intake is of the utmost importance for Christians, resulted in my choosing biblical meditation as the topic for this project.

The purpose of this project was consistent with what the Bible teaches about the importance of meditating on the Word of God. First, God guides the righteous when they meditate on his Word (Ps 1:1–6; Pss 119:15–16, 23–24, 97–98). Second, meditating on God's Torah fuels obedience to his Torah (Josh 1:6–9). Third, meditation is a means of seeking, and being satisfied in, God (Ps 63:1–8). Finally, meditating on Christ—that is, beholding the glory of the Lord—transforms the believer “into the same image [i.e., Christ] from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18).

#### **Evaluation of the Project Goals**

The project goals aligned with the project purpose and were effective for

equipping students of CHBC to meditate on the Bible. The project included three goals: (1) to assess the current biblical meditation practices among students who attend CHBC, (2) to develop a five-session retreat series for students to increase their confidence in the practice of biblical meditation, and (3) to increase the confidence of CHBC students in the practice of biblical meditation by training them to meditate on the Bible.

### **Goal 1: Student Meditation Practices Assessment**

The first goal of the project was to assess the current biblical meditation practices among students who attend CHBC. The pre-retreat survey was designed to measure the understanding and practices of biblical meditation within the CHBC youth group. All students who consistently attend CHBC youth meetings took the survey. Although 18 students completed the pre-retreat survey, only 11 students participated in the retreat and completed the post-retreat survey. While the pre-retreat survey response exceeded the original goal of 15 completed surveys, the number of youth who participate in the retreat fell below the goal of 15. Having been the youth pastor at CHBC for the past five years, I was not surprised by students' responding that meditation is important to them (17/18) and that the type of meditation described in the Bible applies to Christians today (17/18), as most students have been attending CHBC for most their lives and, therefore, have continuously had exposure to the importance of the Bible. However, because this topic is one we have never covered in the youth group over the past five years, I was surprised by the number of students who indicated that they understood what the Bible teaches about meditation (12/18).

### **Goal 2: Curriculum Development and Evaluation**

The second goal of the project was to develop a five-session retreat series for students to increase their confidence in the practice of biblical meditation. A combination of chapters 2 and 3 of this project, along with the results from the pre-retreat survey,

drove the curriculum development for this project. Four ministers completed a curriculum rubric that measured biblical faithfulness, appropriateness of the curriculum for the intended audience of seventh through twelfth graders, and the curriculum's ability to aid students in becoming successful practitioners of biblical meditation.

With a few adjustments suggested by the expert panel, this goal met and exceeded the original goal set of 90 percent sufficiency. The suggestions made by the panel were valuable in creating a solid curriculum that remained faithful to the Bible while being accessible to students. The final meditation booklet used for the retreat had a good amount of reading, which can be a deterrent for many youth; but, the first attempted meditation booklet had a great deal more reading and was less organized. I am indebted to the expert panel for pointing out these two areas and making suggestions for how the booklet could be improved.

### **Goal 3: Confidence in Meditation Increased**

The third goal of the project was to increase the confidence of CHBC students in the practice of biblical meditation by training them to meditate on the Bible. The results of the pre- and post-retreat surveys were analyzed using a t-test for dependent samples, which demonstrated that this goal was successfully met. The t-test for dependent samples revealed a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-retreat surveys. Of course, a significant weakness of surveys is the likelihood of inflated responses either in the pre-retreat survey (wherein one may want to represent oneself in what is perceived as a better light) or in the post-retreat survey (wherein one may hope to help the minister be successful in his endeavors). To mitigate these issues, students completed surveys anonymously. However, this anonymous administration does not eliminate the possibility of error. A few students approached me at the end of the retreat to say they believed the retreat was "very helpful." These informal and unsolicited acknowledgments of the course, combined with the results of the t-test for dependent

samples, make the project a success.

A few growth areas are worthy of mention. First, every question in the survey increased on the Likert scale, except one (Q15: I better understand what God wants me to do when I meditate).<sup>1</sup> The mean response to this question remained the same (4.81). The questions regarding the understanding and practices of biblical meditation all showed an increase, with some even increasing by one full point on the Likert scale. Table 8 provides a snapshot of the results for those questions showing the highest increase.<sup>2</sup>

Table 8. Areas of significant increase

Survey Question	Pre-retreat (N=11)	Post-retreat (N=11)	Change
Q6. I meditate on Scripture	2.36	3.81	+1.45
Q8. I understand what the Bible teaches about meditation.	3.81	4.90	+1.09
Q11. I spend some of my daily quiet time in meditation.	3.00	3.81	+0.81
Q12. I use my Bible during my time of meditation.	4.00	5.50	+1.50
Q13. I feel closer to God when I meditate on the Bible.	4.63	5.72	+1.09
Q14. When I have a hard decision to make, I feel that verse I have meditated on are helpful to me.	3.72	4.90	+1.08

### Strengths of the Project

As many of the passages analyzed in chapter 2 of this project demonstrate, the Word of God is central in Christian meditation (Josh 1:8; Pss 1:1–6; 63:1–8; 119:15–16, 23–24, 97–90). The main strength of this project was its alignment with, and use of,

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<sup>1</sup> The responses of students who did not attend the retreat were removed for the pre-retreat survey so that the data from dependent random samples could be compared.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 4 for the table displaying means for all students pre- and post-retreat responses.

Scripture. Scripture served as the source for each theme or topic chosen for meditation. Students were given verses to look up and use during their times of practicing various methods of meditation. I purposefully designed the exercises in the meditation booklet around the Word of God.

Another strength of this project was the various ways used to make the meditation retreat learner-centered instead of teacher-centered. While some lecture was included to explain complicated topics or processes students needed to be aware of to use the meditation booklet, a conscious effort was made to incorporate learner-centered activities. Methods used to make the curriculum learner-centered included the following: card sorts; snowball toss; sticky truth; word finds; group discussions led only with questions from the teacher; the meditation booklet, which required each student to read, and put into practice, the ideas presented therein; and the meditation notebooks, which were provided to students for them to apply their meditations to themselves.<sup>3</sup>

The final strength of the project was that it revealed the value of direct instruction for meditation. By extension, this value of direct instruction may also be applied to other spiritual disciplines to continue students' growth as disciples and aid in their maturity as Christians. Not only will I continue to schedule times of meditation during CHBC youth group meetings in the future, as well as teach students more ways to meditate on the Bible, but I will also create lessons for other spiritual disciplines, both personal and corporate.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

One weakness of the project was that the meditation retreat tried to cover too much. Each of the five sessions included information about meditation, a discussion of a method of meditation, a different biblical theme, and repeated instructions for students

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<sup>3</sup> These methods are described in detail in the meditation curriculum booklet in appendix 2.

regarding how to prepare for meditation and what to do during their time of meditation. This structure required the students to take in a great deal of information, followed by a lengthy time of meditation, which included a considerable amount of reading as well.

Another weakness of the project was the somewhat vague rubric used by the expert panel to examine the curriculum. Two of the panel members marked everything as exemplary the first time they read over the curriculum. While I appreciate their efforts in assisting me, their initial positive feedback left me with little outside help in creating a curriculum that went beyond my own perceptions. The other two members each made two helpful suggestions, which influenced the curriculum a good deal. A more specific rubric, or my giving suggestions to the panel for specific issues that they were to look for, might have been helpful in developing a better curriculum.

The greatest weakness of the project was not in its preparation or execution but in my own failure to practice what I would be teaching the students. I was so busy reading about meditation, picking out the methods that I thought would work best, trying to find a date when the most students would be available, and the like that I failed to use the methods of meditation myself before teaching the students about them. I tried each method once or twice to make sure they were feasible, but I did not consistently practice any of them. Although legalism tempts me to label the project as a failure for my lack of participation at this level, grace allows me to see how God still uses those who are willing, even when their fidelity wanes.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

I will implement several changes next time I undertake this project or any project about the spiritual disciplines. The project's strengths and weaknesses both influenced these changes. An attempt to correct the weaknesses is an obvious place to begin to improve the project, but I believe that utilizing the project's strengths to an even greater degree would also prove beneficial. First, I would combine the weakness of trying

to cover too much material with the scriptural fidelity of the project. Instead of covering five different biblical themes, I would limit the project to two themes and allow time for students to examine each theme via different methods of meditation. I would also change the number of methods for meditation used. Session 3 utilized the “heads of meditation” employed by Edmund Calamy. This method is similar to Isaac Ambrose’s method of “analyzing angles” and could have been excluded in order to give students more practice with either the “praying the Bible” or the “deep reading” method.

While this project used learner-centered instruction, I believe such instruction was underutilized. For future uses of this project, I would design a learner-centered activity at the beginning of the retreat so that students would have time to explore the meditation booklet themselves and discover its value rather than sit and listen to the lecture format used to tell students what to do with the booklet.

The most significant change I would make is in regard to the project’s greatest weakness. Before using this project again, or any project designed to assist with the spiritual disciplines, I will first ensure that I am practicing the spiritual disciplines consistently. This advice will be beneficial if heeded by anyone who pursues such projects or teachings in the future. Though God, through his mercy, blessed this project, I believe he and his people deserve the best from their ministers, and “the best” was not what CHBC students received in this instance.

### **Theological Reflections**

I began this endeavor knowing that what I knew of meditation was influenced almost solely from the world’s perspective. I was aware that I did not know what biblical meditation was, but I was unaware of just how ignorant I was of its value. Bible reading and prayer are often touted—rightly so—as the two most crucial practices of spiritual discipline. However, the verses studied in chapter 2 of this project, along with the sources analyzed in chapter 3, made me realize that meditation on Scripture brings a new depth



and understanding to my Bible reading and prayer. Joshua's success as a leader, the blessedness of the man in Psalm 1, the devoted man of Psalm 119, the searching man in Psalm 63, and those who behold the Lord with unveiled face in 2 Corinthians all depended on meditation for growth, success, and obedience. The power of Christian meditation, as revealed in Scripture, is tremendous, and if it were not for this project, I might never have known its place in a believer's life.

The practice of interpreting the verses for chapter 2 at the doctoral level was challenging yet exponentially rewarding. This practice helped me develop the skill of reading multiple technical or semi-technical commentaries and synthesizing them to help make sense of a text. It also forced me to study the text repeatedly before turning to the commentaries, as I was apt to lean too much on the commentaries early in my study. This practice of studying the text repeatedly on my own helped me see insights from the commentaries or better understand where commentators were coming from.

The many benefits of meditation are excellent, but my students' growth of one point on the Likert scale in regard to feeling closer to God because of meditation taught me, in a practical way, just how powerful biblical meditation can be. I experienced this growth myself not long after the retreat. I generally only preach once a year; this year, I had two opportunities, with the second coming a month after the retreat. During my time of preparation, I not only drew upon the exegetical skills I developed while completing this project, but I also spent a great deal more time meditating on my text than ever before—thanks to my experience with this project. I will utilize this practice from now on in my own study and devotional life.

Finally, I have grown in my understanding of God's grace and his use of imperfect vessels. Legalism is a battle I fight with myself regarding the spiritual disciplines, prayer, Bible reading, lesson preparation, and mostly anything spiritual. Through this project, God yet again demonstrated to me how he uses my imperfections for his glory and that my main job is to trust and seek him. By his grace alone, this

project had a positive influence on the students of CHBC.

### **Personal Reflections**

I tend to walk a razor's edge between pride and self-abasement. On the one hand, I hesitated to pursue a doctoral degree because I was not sure I was intelligent enough. On the other hand, I hesitated because I knew I already struggled with pride, and I did not want an advanced degree to exacerbate the struggle. Neither of these issues lasted past the first semester; I became way too busy to entertain them. In the end, intelligence alone was not enough; time and a great deal of effort were needed—more time and effort than I had ever given to anything before. Though the struggle has been rewarding, there have been numerous times I wanted to quit.

At one point, I misread the due date and thought I was behind, so I took some days off work and read over twenty books in just over two months. Though I struggled to continue reading daily, and the fear of not finishing in time created anxiety in me, looking back, those two months were some of the most beneficial times I experienced during this project. Reading so many books on the same topic in such a short amount of time helped me develop the skill of measuring anything an author said against what I know of Scripture. I have read nearly thirty books in the year since that time, and I find that skill to be of great value.

This project, as well as the seminars for the degree, have added depth to my spiritual life as a Christian, a theologian, and a minister. I have sacrificed many a weekend, I have spent many evenings and lunches with my nose in a book, and stress has made a permanent home in my middle back; yet, it has all been worth it—not merely for the degree but for the depth this process has added to my life as a child of God.

### **Conclusion**

This project succeeded in its stated objective: equipping students of CHBC to meditate on the Bible. This success was evident not only in the results of the t-test for

dependent samples but also in the comments I received from students about how the meditation retreat helped them think about the Bible more and feel closer to God. This project was not merely successful in its intended purpose; in my preparation, study, and synthesis of all the reading materials, this project has made an impact on me. I pray that anyone who uses this project in the future would see it blessed by God, just as I have.

APPENDIX 1  
MEDITATION KNOWLEDGE  
AND PRACTICE SURVEY

The following survey was used to ascertain CHBC students' knowledge and practices of meditation before and after the meditation retreat.

MEDITATION KNOWLEDGE  
AND PRACTICE SURVEY

**Agreement to Participate**

You are being requested to give permission for a minor or member of a vulnerable population under your legal supervision to participate in a study designed to reveal student understanding and practices of biblical meditation. This research is being conducted by Jimmy Chavedo for purposes of doctoral project research. In this research, a person will complete the electronic survey attached. Any information provided will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will a person's name be reported, or a person's name identified with his or her responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and the person you are giving approval to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By entering your email address below, you are giving informed consent for the designated minor or member of a vulnerable population to participate in this research if he or she desires.

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

PIN \_\_\_\_\_

DOB mm/dd/yy

**Part 1**

1. Do you consider yourself a Christian?

\_\_\_ A. Yes                      \_\_\_ B. No

2. Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation?

\_\_\_ A. Yes                      \_\_\_ B. No

3. Have you been baptized as a member of a local church?

\_\_\_ A. Yes                      \_\_\_ B. No

4. What is your grade level in school?

\_\_\_ A. 7<sup>th</sup>                      \_\_\_ D. 10<sup>th</sup>

- B. 8<sup>th</sup>                       E. 11<sup>th</sup>  
 C. 9<sup>th</sup>                         F. 12<sup>th</sup>

5. I read my Bible (check only one)

- A. at least once a day  
 B. several times per week  
 C. once per week  
 D. several times per month  
 E. once a month or less  
 F. not at all

6. I meditate on Scripture (check only one)

- A. at least once a day  
 B. several times per week  
 C. once per week  
 D. several times per month  
 E. once a month or less  
 F. not at all

7. I set aside a quiet time each day for Bible reading, meditation and prayer. (check only one)

- A. at least once a day  
 B. several times per week  
 C. once per week  
 D. several times per month  
 E. once a month or less  
 F. not at all

## Part 2

Directions: Answer the following questions: using the following scale:

DS = Disagree Strongly, D = Disagree, SD = Slightly Disagree, SA = Slightly Agree, A = Agree, AS = Agree Strongly; please circle the appropriate answer.

8. I understand what the Bible teaches about meditation.

- |          |          |          |          |       |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| Disagree | Disagree | Slightly | Slightly | Agree | Agree    |
| Strongly |          | Disagree | Agree    |       | Strongly |

9. The kind of meditation described in the Bible also applies to Christians today.

Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Agree Strongly
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10. Meditating on the Bible is important to me.

Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Agree Strongly
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### Part 3

Directions: Answer the following questions: using the following scale:

N = Never, VR = very rarely, R = rarely, S = sometimes, U = usually, AA = Almost Always; please circle the appropriate answer.

11. I spend some of my daily quiet time in meditation.

Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Almost Always
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12. I use my Bible during my time of meditation.

Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Almost Always
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13. I feel closer to God when I meditate on the Bible.

Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Almost Always
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14. When I have a hard decision to make, I feel that verses I have meditated on are helpful to me.

Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Almost Always
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15. I better understand what God wants me to do when I meditate.

Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Almost Always
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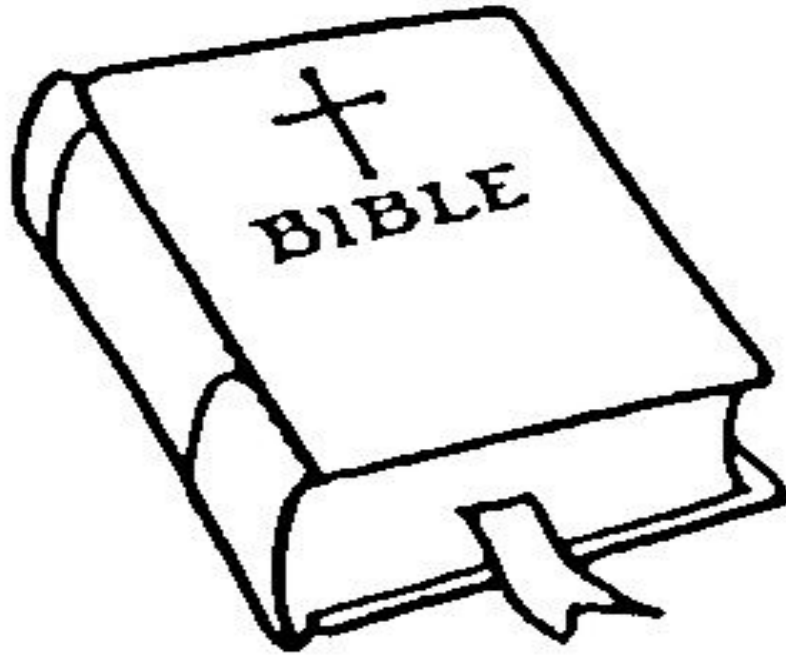
## APPENDIX 2

### PRATICING BIBLICAL MEDITATION HANDOUT

The following meditation booklet was used as the curriculum during the meditation retreat.



# Practicing Biblical Meditation<sup>1</sup>



CHAPARRAL HILLS YOUTH  
October 5, 2019

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<sup>1</sup> The original format of the booklet was not fitting for the final project report; therefore, I have adjusted the format to better fit the style and size adequate for this project report. This accounts for the number of large white spaces in the booklet in its current format.

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## Retreat Outline

We will have 5 sessions during the retreat. Each session will consist of the following parts.

### Limited Teaching Time<sup>2</sup>



Jimmy will teach for 15 minutes during each session. Half of the time will be spent discussing an aspect of meditation and half of the time will be spent in instructing students how to practice a method of meditation.

### Time for Practicing Meditation



After each time of teaching, students will retreat to their designated spots and use the booklet to spend time practice the method of meditation discussed during the teaching session. (The time set aside to practice meditation will increase with each session.)

### Discussion

After the time for meditation, students will regroup and debrief in small groups by discussing their individual experiences during meditation. To complete this time, students will come together as one group and share about their experiences.

### Meditation Notebook



As you practice meditation, you will write down your answers to questions, thoughts, and verses that stick out to you. You can also write down a written meditation for your topic in this notebook.

---

<sup>2</sup> Each section, including these explanation, was highlighted in corresponding colors so students could more easily remember what they were to do in that session. Teaching was yellow, practicing meditation was green, and meditation notebook times were blue.

# Session 1 Notes



Christian <sup>3</sup>	Non-Christian
Filling the mind	Emptying the mind
Available to any Christian	Only available to committed and enlightened people
Uses Bible to focus on God	Focuses on nothingness
Helpful	Harmful
God focused	Self-focused
Responding to the truths of God	Repeating mantras
Concentration to commune with God	Concentration to liberate self
Self-transformation accomplished by outside influence: God	Self-transformation accomplished from within
Not about reaching a higher state of being	Altered state of consciousness

## Meditation Definition

Meditation is spending time in communion with God by renewing your mind through his Word in an effort to affect your will, resulting in obedience.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> These differences were adapted from Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2002), 7–19 and John H. Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer: A Historical, Theological, and Biblical Resolution,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 140–153. Students were given these differences on cards to sort into the appropriate categories and then we discussed each decision they made.

<sup>4</sup> This definition does not encompass every aspect of Christian meditation; however, for our purposes with this retreat, it served as a solid working definition.

# Meditation Practice



## **Meditation Method: Analyze the Angles<sup>5</sup>**

One way to practice meditation is to choose a topic such as sin, investigate what the Bible says about different aspects of the topic, such as its source, its consequences, its properties, etc., and then think deeply about what you have learned. You can write down what you learn from different verses and in the end put together a meditation on the topic that covers quite a lot of what the Bible says about the subject. You can spend some time in deep thought as you read each verse and again at the end as you put together your meditation.

## **Angles to Consider<sup>6</sup>**

Ask the following questions about the topic you are reading about. Don't just answer to answer, think about what the question is asking and what the Bible says.

- What is it?
- What is its source?
- What are its causes?
- What are its effects?
- What are its properties?
- What are its opposites?

## **Let's Practice**

Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

What are two words in this verse that might be considered synonyms for sin?

What are the effects of sin in this verse?

What else do we learn about sin?

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Isaac Ambrose, *Prima, Media, et Ultima; or, The First, Middle and Last Things*, 7th ed. (Glasgow: James Knox, 1757), 217, and George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1868), 2:426.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrose, *Prima, Media, et Ultima*, 217; Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock*, 2:426.

# Meditation Practice 1 cont.



## Preparing for Meditation<sup>7</sup>

Remember the goal of meditation is twofold. First, have a time of communion with God. Second, achieve this by spending time in God's Word to renew your mind, so that your desires are affected, resulting in your obedience to God's Word. Remember that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible lives inside of you and that he longs to make his will known to those who belong to him.<sup>8</sup>

- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your time of meditation.<sup>9</sup>
- Confess your sins to God, emptying yourself of evil.
- Acknowledge that you are in God's presence, and that you desire to spend time with him.

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*Preparing your heart and mind is an important first step of meditation.*

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## Topic

The theme of this time's meditation is sin. Our purpose is to read and think about what the Bible says about sin so that we come to understand the weight of sin, the evil of sin, God's wrath against sin, God's judgement of sin, the consequences of sin, etc.

## Meditation Notebook<sup>10</sup>

Look Up the following Scripture references one at a time and see what all you can learn about sin. Remember to ask the Angles to Consider questions. Write your answers and thoughts down in your notebook.

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 118–19, and J. Stephen Yuille, "Conversing with God's Word: Scripture Meditation in the Piety of George Swinnock," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 38.

<sup>8</sup> John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 122.

<sup>9</sup> John H. Coe, "The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer: A Historical, Theological, and Biblical Resolution," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 150.

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Susan Muto, *A Practical Guide to Spiritual Reading* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's, 1994), 18.

# Meditation Notebook #1

## Romans 3:23

What is one result of sin? Who does sin affect?

## Colossians 3:5–6

How should Christians treat sin? How does God react to sin?

## 1 John 3:6–10

How do those who abide in God treat sin? How do children of the devil treat sin? What do children of God practice?

## Matt 15:17–20

Where does sin come from? What does this teach us about our hearts?

## Romans 6:23

What does one earn from sinning? What is the opposite of this?

## 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

What sins in this list do you struggle with? According to verse 11, what is a Christian's new standing after receiving Christ?

## Hebrews 9:22

What is required for the forgiveness of sin? Who supplied this permanently for Christians?

## Romans 5:12

What did sin cause? How did sin come into the world?

In your notebook, after you answer questions analyzing what these verses say about sin, copy down one or two verses in your notebook that stood out to you. Write a meditation on sin in your notebook based on what you learned.

# Meditation Notebook #1 Cont.

## Self-Application<sup>11</sup>

In your meditation notebook, answer the following questions once you have spent time meditating on sin.

- How has this time renewed your mind? What have you learned about sin?
- How has this renewing of your mind affected your will? What do you now desire to do after this time of meditation?
- Are there any actions you need to quit doing?
- Are there any actions you need to begin doing?

## Sin

We have not meditated on everything the Bible says about sin. However, we have started reading and thinking deeply about the topic of sin. Below is an example of meditation on sin. The written meditation does not list verses, but when we meditate on a theme, we must make sure we know that our information about the topic comes from what God has communicated to us through his Word. Over the years, as you meditate more and more on specific topics, you will be able to put together a more complete picture of what the Bible says on each topic—much like the written meditation below.

## Written Meditation Example<sup>12</sup>

Sin is against God's nature, his holiness, his character. Sin is harmful to our souls, their purity and their peace. Sin does not come around only once, it infects us and can take over our wills. Satan is the father of lies, a man's heart is the seat of sin. Sin defiles a man, it is filthy. Sin is infectious and overcomes the whole man. Sin resulted in the curse of God and causes God's wrath to kindle against the sinner. Sin is deceiving, promising fulfillment and leaving one empty.

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<sup>11</sup> Adapted from Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest: Or, A Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints in Their Enjoyment of God in Glory* (London: T. Tegg, 1839), 592–95, Henry Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walk in Holy Security and Peace* (Glasgow: William Whyte and William Oliphant, 1826), 147–49, 151–52, and James C. Wilhoit and Evan Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 85, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from George Swinnoock, *The Works of George Swinnoock*, 2:427.



# Session 2 Notes



## Listening to the Holy Spirit

Meditation is not merely an intellectual practice. Although meditation involves renewing of the mind, one aspect of this renewal is its reliance on the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

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*The Spirit of God works with our Spirit to understand and believe what the Bible says.*

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## Questions to Ask for Guidance<sup>14</sup>

These questions can be asked no matter what kind of meditation method you are using. In fact, you can use these for guidance while reading during a quiet time or even during prayer.

1. What have I been thinking about while reading this passage? Why?
2. Are there any particular thoughts, questions, or ideas that have come up?
3. Have I noticed any blessings or sins in my life as I have been reading? What kinds of responses do I notice?
4. What have I seen of the Lord in my reading, of God's character or works? How am I led to respond to what I see of God?
5. Do I notice any inclinations to action as I read this passage? What might be underneath these inclinations?
6. What feelings have accompanied my reading? Why?

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<sup>13</sup> Davis, *Meditation and Communion*, 122.

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from James C. Wilhoit and Evan Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 58.

# Meditation Practice 2



## Topic

Our topic for this session of meditation is the sinner's reconciliation with God. We will be analyzing the topic from different angles as before. Because of Adam's sin, everyone after Adam has inherited a sin nature. At the point of Adam's sin and because we were born with a sin nature, each person has a broken relationship with God. Those of us who have received God's salvation through Christ have now had our relationship with God reconciled—that is, our relationship with God has been restored, despite our sin.

## Preparing for Meditation<sup>15</sup>

Remember the goal of meditation is twofold. First, have a time of communion with God. Second, achieve this by spending time in God's Word to renew your mind, so that your desires are affected, resulting in your obedience to God's Word. Remember that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible lives inside of you and that he longs to make his will known to those who belong to him.<sup>16</sup>

- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your time of meditation.<sup>17</sup>
- Confess your sins to God, emptying yourself of evil.
- Acknowledge that you are in God's presence, and that you desire to spend time with him.
- As you read and think about reconciliation, ask the questions to determine the Holy Spirit's leading.

## Meditation Notebook<sup>18</sup>

Look Up the following Scripture references one at a time and see what all you can learn about sinners' reconciliation to God. Remember to ask the Angles to Consider questions. Write your answers and thoughts down in your notebook.

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<sup>15</sup> Adapted from Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 118–19, and Yuille, “Conversing with God's Word,” 38.

<sup>16</sup> Davis, *Meditation and Communion*, 122.

<sup>17</sup> Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 150.

<sup>18</sup> Adapted from Muto, *Spiritual Reading*, 18.

# Meditation Notebook #2

As you read and think about the following verses, remember to look for the Holy Spirit's guidance by asking the questions we discussed.

## Romans 5:10–11

What was our condition when God reconciled us to himself? What was the means of this reconciliation? What is a result of this reconciliation? How should we react to this reconciliation?

## Colossians 1:20–22

What all is reconciled to God? What was Jesus's condition when he reconciled us? (flesh or spirit) What is our standing once we have been reconciled to God?

## 2 Corinthians 5:17–21

What happens to those who have been reconciled to God through Christ? (v17) What are some aspects of reconciliation? (v 19) What is our duty once we have been reconciled? (20) What happened to Christ in order for us to be reconciled to God? (21) What is another result of our reconciliation? (v21)

## Ephesians 2:13

What does this verse teach you about reconciliation?

## Ephesians 2:18

What is one aspect of reconciliation?

In your notebook, after you answer questions analyzing what these verses say about reconciliation, copy down one or two verses in your notebook that stood out to you.

# Meditation Notebook #2 cont.

## **Self-Application**<sup>19</sup>

In your meditation notebook, answer the following questions once you have spent time meditating on reconciliation with God.

- How has this time renewed your mind? What have you learned about reconciliation with God?
- How has this renewing of your mind affected your will? What do you now desire to do after this time of meditation?
- Are there any commands you need to obey?
- Are there any actions you need to quit doing?
- Are there any actions you need to begin doing?

## **Written Meditation**

Now that you have spent some time meditating on reconciliation, copying down verses that struck you and have applied your meditation to yourself, write a meditation on reconciliation in your notebook based on what you learned.

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<sup>19</sup> Adapted from Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 592–95, Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walk*, 147–49, 151–52, and Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 85, 130.

# Session 3 Notes



## Communion with God<sup>20</sup>

Sticky truth. Some of the following are true and some are not, write each truth on a sticky note and put on the board. We will discuss after.

Only super spiritual can do it.

Possible because God lowered himself to reveal himself to us.

Is a heightened sense of reality.

Communion is fellowship with God.

Possible because of self-ascension.

Available to any Christian.

Communion is one purpose of meditation.

Communion requires nothing from us.

Requires the Holy Spirit.

Contemplation is knowing God.

Contemplation is becoming one with God.

## Method of Meditation<sup>21</sup>

Similar to angles, but I've provided you with different headings to meditate upon. Each heading is inspired by one of the Scriptures listed. As with the angles, read each verse and spend some time thinking about what the verse means.

## Practice

Romans 5:5

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<sup>20</sup> Adapted from a combination of the following sources: Coe, "The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer," 140–53; Davis, *Meditation and Communion*, 10–64; Kyle Strobel, "In Your Light They Shall See Light: A Theological Prolegomena for Contemplation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 85–106; Peter Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture: Understanding Your Faith, Renewing Your Mind, Knowing Your God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Adapted from Edmund Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1680), Kindle.

# Meditation Practice 3



Meditate on how God’s love has been poured out on Christians.

## Topic

Our topic for this session of meditation is God’s love. Much is said about love today. “Love Conquers all.” “All you need is love.” But let’s look at what the Bible says about God’s love.

## Preparing for Meditation<sup>22</sup>

Remember the goal of meditation is twofold. First, have a time of communion with God. Second, achieve this by spending time in God’s Word to renew your mind, so that your desires are affected, resulting in your obedience to God’s Word. Remember that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible lives inside of you and that he longs to make his will known to those who belong to him.<sup>23</sup>

- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your time of meditation.<sup>24</sup>
- Confess your sins to God, emptying yourself of evil.
- Acknowledge that you are in God’s presence, and that you desire to spend time with him.
- As you read and think about reconciliation, ask the questions to determine the Holy Spirit’s leading.

## Meditation Notebook<sup>25</sup>

Look Up the following Scripture references one at a time and see what can learn about God’s love. Follow the heads of meditation suggested and spend some time really thinking about each aspect of God’s love as revealed in the Bible Write your thoughts down in your notebook.

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<sup>22</sup> Adapted from Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 118–19, and Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 38.

<sup>23</sup> Davis, *Meditation and Communion*, 122.

<sup>24</sup> Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 150.

<sup>25</sup> Adapted from Muto, *Spiritual Reading*, 18.

# Meditation Notebook #3

Romans 8:31–29

Meditate on God's everlasting love for those who belong to him.

1 John 4:7–8

Meditate on how God is the source of love, that our love for others demonstrates that we know God. Meditate on how a lack of love for others reveals that one does not know God.

1 John 4:9–10

Meditate on how God's love was demonstrated for us. Focus on the fact that Christ's sacrifice is the way which life and salvation have been bought for Christians.

1 John 4:11–12

Meditate on how God's love for Christians inspires our love for one another. Think about the fact that God's love for us is completed when we love one another.

1 John 3:1

Meditate on how God's love allows us to become children of God.

John 13:34–35

Meditate on how Christians' love for one another let's people know that Christians belong to Jesus.

John 3:16–18

Romans 5:8

Psalms 136:26

# Meditation Notebook #3 cont.

## Self-Application<sup>26</sup>

In your meditation notebook, answer the following questions once you have spent time meditating on God's love.

- How has this time renewed your mind? What have you learned about God's love?
- How has this renewing of your mind affected your will? What do you now desire to do after this time of meditation?
- Are there any commands you need to obey?
- Are there any actions you need to quit doing?
- Are there any actions you need to begin doing?

## Written Meditation

Now that you have spent some time meditating on God's love, copying down verses that struck you and have applied your meditation to yourself, write a meditation on God's love in your notebook based on what you learned.

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<sup>26</sup> Adapted from Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 592–95, Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walk*, 147–49, 151–52, and Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 85, 130.



# Session 4 Notes



## **Benefits of Meditation**<sup>27</sup>

Pick two benefits from the list below that you feel are important reasons for you to practice meditation and write them on your colored piece of paper.

- Communion with God.
- Understanding of the Bible.
- Increased desire to be obedient to God.
- Meditation fosters repentance.
- Meditation fosters a change of life.
- Meditation stresses the heinousness of sin.
- Renewing of the mind.
- Infuses the Christians soul with Scripture.

## **Praying the Bible**<sup>28</sup>

Praying the Bible consists of simply turning what you have read into a prayer back to God.

## **Practice**

Romans 3:23–24

Father, I realize that I have sinned. I confess my sin to you. Lord, thank you for the free gift of justification and redemption you have provided through Jesus.

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<sup>27</sup> These benefits were adapted from Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2006), 92–93, and David W. Saxton, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 105–14.

<sup>28</sup> The method of praying the Bible taught to students was influenced by James W. Sire, *Learning to Pray through the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 11–35, and Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 29–32.

# Meditation Practice 4



## Topic

Our topic for this session of meditation is salvation. Salvation is the most precious gift one can receive. It is a free gift from God, and it is why Jesus came to earth to die. As Christians, we should learn as much as we can about our salvation and we should think upon it often.

## Preparing for Meditation<sup>29</sup>

Remember the goal of meditation is twofold. First, have a time of communion with God. Second, achieve this by spending time in God's Word to renew your mind, so that your desires are affected, resulting in your obedience to God's Word. Remember that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible lives inside of you and that he longs to make his will known to those who belong to him.<sup>30</sup>

- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your time of meditation.<sup>31</sup>
- Confess your sins to God, emptying yourself of evil.
- Acknowledge that you are in God's presence, and that you desire to spend time with him.
- As you read and think about reconciliation, ask the questions to determine the Holy Spirit's leading.

## Meditation Notebook<sup>32</sup>

Look up the following Scripture references one at a time and see what all you can learn about sinners' reconciliation to God. Remember to ask the Angles to Consider questions. Write your answers and thoughts down in your notebook.

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<sup>29</sup> Adapted from Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 118–19, and Yuille, "Conversing with God's Word," 38.

<sup>30</sup> Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 122.

<sup>31</sup> Coe, "The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer," 150.

<sup>32</sup> Adapted from Muto, *Spiritual Reading*, 18.

# Meditation Notebook #4

Read the following verses, think about them and turn them into prayers back to God. This may require reading them several times and spending some time in thought about what the verses say before you pray them. Write down a verse or two that stood out to you.

## Romans 10:9–10

God, I confess that I believe in my heart that you raised Jesus from the Dead. I praise you for sending your son to be the Lord of my life and to save my soul through his sacrifice.

## 1 John 1:9

(Before turning this one into a prayer, think about some specific sins you have committed which you can openly confess to God.)

God, I confess my sins to you. Thank you for cleansing me from all unrighteousness that I have brought upon myself with my sin.

## 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

Father, I know that the unrighteous will not inherit your kingdom, and I confess that I have done some of the unrighteous things. I praise you for washing me, sanctifying me and justifying me in the name of Jesus. Thank you for your Spirit cleansing me from my sin.

## Titus 3:4–7

## Luke 19:10

## Romans 5:7–8

## 1 Corinthians 1:18

## John 3:17

# Meditation Notebook #4 cont.



## **Self-Application**<sup>33</sup>

In your meditation notebook, answer the following questions once you have spent time meditating on salvation.

- How has this time renewed your mind? What have you learned about reconciliation with God?
- How has this renewing of your mind affected your will? What do you now desire to do after this time of meditation?
- Are there any commands you need to obey?
- Are there any actions you need to quit doing?
- Are there any actions you need to begin doing?

## **Written Meditation**

Now that you have spent some time meditating on salvation, copying down verses that struck you and have applied your meditation to yourself, write a meditation on reconciliation in your notebook based on what you learned.

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<sup>33</sup> Adapted from Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 592–95, Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walk*, 147–49, 151–52, and Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 85, 130.

# Session 5 Notes



## Hindrances to Meditation<sup>34</sup>

It is too \_\_\_\_\_.

I am \_\_\_\_\_ at it.

I am too \_\_\_\_\_.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ for not doing it.

I am living for passing \_\_\_\_\_.

I am being \_\_\_\_\_.

Failure to separate from the \_\_\_\_\_.

I would rather be \_\_\_\_\_.

M T N B Z O I J F W S J S Z R  
 W O X B Q O A I A C M D P W D  
 K Z B N R I U H N M S R G W X  
 M E D E N I A T R E T N E J Y  
 X O P L F J F Q W Z T D Z C P  
 T H P D B L U R Y X O S I B F  
 U L N O P I B S T B L L Q D P  
 C P U V Y K D I L L D J L R S  
 S W B C O A E K I J L R N U H  
 V H D U I K E L U N O F J I O  
 F C D P S F B V G W I X P J S  
 C I K E C Y F E L J Z N X A H  
 B C O V Q W E I L A Z Y R J I  
 A I T N S R I H D E E K K C Y  
 D X X Y X Z D C B P C F A H W

- |             |
|-------------|
| World       |
| Entertained |
| Lazy        |
| Busy        |
| Pleasures   |
| Difficult   |
| Guilty      |
| Bad         |

## Deep Reading Description

Deep reading requires reading, rereading, and rereading again. It is an attempt to let the words of Scripture permeate your soul.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Adapted from Beeke, *Spirituality*, 94–95, and Saxton, *God's Battle Plan*, 115–27.

<sup>35</sup> Sire, *Learning to Pray through the Psalms*, 13.

# Meditation Practice 5



## Steps to Deep Reading<sup>36</sup>

Your Scripture for this time is **Revelation 21**. Don't be too quick to try and judge the exact meaning of the verses, simply read and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your mind and heart through the Scripture.

- *1st reading*: read the passage to become familiar with the text. Open your mind and heart to the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- *2nd reading*: read the passage again, this time slowly, out loud. Allow the Holy Spirit to work on your mind and heart through the words of the passage.
- *3rd reading*: Read the passage again, this time pausing after each sentence, thinking about what the sentence said.
- *4th reading*: read the passage one more time (more if necessary) letting it fill your mind and seep into your soul.

## Topic

Our topic for this session of meditation is heaven. Those who trust Jesus will see heaven; reading Revelation 21 will help you gain a better understanding of what heaven will be like.

## Preparing for Meditation<sup>37</sup>

Remember the goal of meditation is twofold. First, have a time of communion with God. Second, achieve this by spending time in God's Word to renew your mind, so that your desires are affected, resulting in your obedience to God's Word. Remember that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible lives inside of you and that he longs to make his will known to those who belong to him.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Adapted from Sire, *Learning to Pray through the Psalms*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Adapted from Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 118–19, and Yuille, "Conversing with God's Word," 38.

<sup>38</sup> Davis, *Meditation and Communion*, 122.

# Meditation Notebook #5

- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your time of meditation.<sup>39</sup>
- Confess your sins to God, emptying yourself of evil.
- Acknowledge that you are in God’s presence, and that you desire to spend time with him.
- As you read and think about reconciliation, ask the questions to determine the Holy Spirit’s leading.

## **Meditation Notebook**<sup>40</sup>

As you spend time reading, rereading and reading Revelation 21, write down some of your thoughts in your notebook. Also, write down any verses that stood out to you.

## **Self-Application**<sup>41</sup>

In your meditation notebook, answer the following questions once you have spent time meditating on heaven.

- How has this time renewed your mind? What have you learned about reconciliation with God?
- How has this renewing of your mind affected your will? What do you now desire to do after this time of meditation?
- Are there any commands you need to obey?
- Are there any actions you need to quit doing?
- Are there any actions you need to begin doing?

## **Written Meditation**

Now that you have spent some time meditating on heaven, copying down verses that struck you and have applied your meditation to yourself, write a meditation on heaven in your notebook based on what you learned.

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<sup>39</sup> Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 150.

<sup>40</sup> Adapted from Muto, *Spiritual Reading*, 18.

<sup>41</sup> Adapted from Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 592–95, Scudder, *The Christian’s Daily Walk*, 147–49, 151–52, and Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 85, 130.

APPENDIX 3

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate the meditation curriculum developed by the author. The expert panel completed the rubric and gave recommendations for making the project better.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Biblical Meditation Curriculum Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The curriculum is biblically faithful.					
The curriculum is accessible to students in grades 6–12.					
The curriculum adequately challenges the students.					
The curriculum teaches the importance of biblical meditation.					
The curriculum sets students up to succeed in meditating on the Bible.					
The curriculum length is sufficient to determine effectiveness.					



#### APPENDIX 4

#### PRE- AND POST-RETREAT MEANS PER STUDENT

The following table displays the pre-and post-retreat mean data for each student who participated in the meditation retreat.

Table A1. Pre- and post-retreat means

Student	Pre-Retreat Mean	Post-Retreat Mean	Change
1	47	57	+10
2	61	57	-4
3	46	58	+12
4	46	50	+4
5	24	49	+25
6	41	41	0
7	44	45	+1
8	28	52	+24
9	45	52	+7
10	54	58	+4
11	42	47	+5

## APPENDIX 5

### MEDITATION RETREAT FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Happy New Year. It has been a few months since our meditation retreat and I hope that you have continued in your practice. As we discussed at the retreat, there are many hindrances to meditation. But I trust that you experienced the benefits of biblical meditation during the retreat and I hope that experience has spurred you on to continue in your meditation practices.

To encourage you to continue, I am writing this letter to remind you of what we discussed at the retreat, to encourage you to continue practicing meditation and to provide you a couple of written meditations that I hope serve to reignite the meditation fire within you.

#### ***What is meditation?***

*“Meditation is spending time in communion with God by renewing your mind through his Word in an effort to affect your will, resulting in obedience.”*

Basically, we spend time thinking deeply about God’s Word using different methods until his Word changes our desires to match his and then through our actions we display our obedience to his word. The Word enters our minds until it makes a difference in our wants, then we perform our wants with our actions.

#### ***How to meditate?***

We discussed several methods of meditating on God’s Word.

1. Look at the subject from different angles
2. Listen to the Holy Spirit’s prompting as you read and think by asking
3. Praying the Bible
4. Deep Reading

#### ***Communion with God***

We don’t meditate just to influence our minds and our actions; we also want to experience fellowship with God during this time. To enjoy that fellowship, remember to

prepare yourself by confessing your sins and acknowledging that you are entering God's presence.<sup>1</sup>

In the upcoming weeks, we will add a few more methods of meditation to our toolbox. For now, I have included the details of what we learned about meditation below in a summary along with two written meditations for you to use.

### ***How to meditate?***

1. Look at the subject from different angles<sup>2</sup>
  - a. What is it?
  - b. What is its source?
  - c. What are its causes?
  - d. What are its effects?
  - e. What are its properties?
  - f. What are its opposites?
  
2. Listen to the Holy Spirit's prompting as you read and think by asking:<sup>3</sup>
  - a. What have I been thinking about while reading this passage? Why?
  - b. Are there any particular thoughts, questions, or ideas that have come up?
  - c. Have I noticed any blessings or sins in my life as I have been reading? What kinds of responses do I notice?
  - d. Do I notice any inclinations to action as I read this passage? What might be underneath these inclinations?
  - e. What feelings have accompanied my reading? Why?
  
3. Praying the Bible.<sup>4</sup>
  - a. Turn what you read into a prayer back to God

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 118–19.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Isaac Ambrose, *Prima, Media, et Ultima; or, The First, Middle and Last Things*, 7th ed. (Glasgow: James Knox, 1757), 217, and George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1868), 2:426.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from James C. Wilhoit and Evan Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 58.

<sup>4</sup> The method of praying the Bible taught to students was influenced by James W. Sire, *Learning to Pray through the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 11–35, and Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 29–32.

4. Deep Reading<sup>5</sup>
  - a. Read, reread, and read again a single passage of Scripture allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the Bible as you read and think.

**Two written meditations for you to read and use for your own meditation.**

You, as a Christian are blessed. Here are a few of the blessings you experience while on earth.

You are blessed because you are born of the Spirit (John 3:5) All of your sins have been forgiven you, having been bought through Jesus' suffering, (Romans 4:8, 25; 8:1-2; 1 Peter 2:24) and all of Jesus' righteousness has been counted to you. (Romans 5:19) Thus, you are reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:19) You are free from Satan's bondage (Acts 26:18; Ephesians 2:2), and you are made a brother of Christ. (John 20:17, Romans 8:20) You are a co-heir of the heavenly kingdom with Jesus. (Romans 8:17) You have been blessed with the Holy Spirit who sanctifies and encourages you. (1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 4:16, Ephesians 3:12)<sup>6</sup>

You as a Christian are blessed. Here are a few blessings you will experience in death.

Angels will usher you into the presence of Jesus. (Luke 16:22) You will receive a crown of righteousness, not from good works, but because God has promised it of his own goodness. (2 Timothy 4:8, Revelation 2:10, 1 Peter 5:4) You will receive an incorruptible body. (1 Corinthians 15:35-49)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Sire, *Learning to Pray through the Psalms*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian How to Walk, That He May Please God* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 45-46.

<sup>7</sup> Bayly, *The Practice of Piety*, 50, 52.

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING STUDENTS OF CHAPARRAL HILLS BAPTIST CHURCH IN AMARILLO, TEXAS, TO MEDITATE ON THE BIBLE

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Joseph C. Harrod

This ministry project was designed to equip students of Chaparral Hills Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas to meditate on the Bible. The purpose of equipping was to increase knowledge and student confidence in the practice of biblical meditation. Chapter 1 explains the context, rationale, purpose, goals, and methodology of the project. Chapter 2 describes the biblical practice of meditation based on the exegesis of the following passages: Psalm 1:1-6, Psalm 63:1-8; Psalm 119:15-16, 23-34, 97-98; Joshua 1:8, and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. Chapter 3 reviews and synthesizes literature discussing meditation from Catholic and Protestant traditions to gain a better understanding of how Christians have practiced meditation as well as analyzing strengths, weaknesses and proposed changes from other doctoral projects. Chapter 4 details the implementation of the project from creation through analysis of statistical results of the project. Chapter 5 presents an assessment of the purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the project, and concludes with suggested changes, theological and personal reflections.

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BGS, West Texas A&M University, 2002

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Associate Preteen Pastor, Paramount Baptist Church, Amarillo, Texas,  
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