

Copyright © 2013 Barry Glendon Raper

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

TEACHING BIBLICAL MEDITATION AS A MEANS  
TO PRAYER TO STUDENTS OF WELCH COLLEGE,  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

---

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

---

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

---

by  
Barry Glendon Raper  
May 2013

**APPROVAL SHEET**

TEACHING BIBLICAL MEDITATION AS A MEANS  
TO PRAYER TO STUDENTS OF WELCH COLLEGE,  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Barry Glendon Raper

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Donald S. Whitney (Faculty Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Adam W. Greenway

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	v
PREFACE .....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose .....	1
Goals .....	1
Ministry Context .....	2
Rationale .....	4
Definitions and Limitations .....	7
Research Methodology .....	8
Conclusion .....	9
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR MEDITATION .....	10
Introduction .....	10
New Testament Basis for Spiritual Disciplines: An Overview of the Book of 1Timothy .....	10
First Timothy 4:6-16 .....	15
Role of Sanctification .....	19
Meditation in the Old and New Testaments .....	26
Conclusion .....	39
3. THE LINK BETWEEN BIBLICAL MEDITATION AND PRAYER .....	41
Introduction .....	41
The Missing Link .....	42

Chapter	Page
George Mueller: Man of Faith and Prayer . . . . .	47
Meditation and Prayer—the Puritans . . . . .	56
Suggestions for Improvement . . . . .	65
Conclusion . . . . .	72
4. DETAILS OF THE PROJECT . . . . .	73
Introduction . . . . .	73
Part 1 . . . . .	74
Part 2: Lectures and Discussions on Disciplines . . . . .	74
Part 3 . . . . .	80
Conclusion . . . . .	83
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT . . . . .	84
Evaluation of the Purpose . . . . .	84
Evaluation of the Goals . . . . .	85
Strengths of the Project . . . . .	87
Weaknesses of the Project . . . . .	88
What I Would Do Differently . . . . .	88
Theological Reflections . . . . .	90
Personal Reflections . . . . .	92
Further Considerations for Research . . . . .	93
Conclusion . . . . .	95
Appendix	
1. COURSE SYLLABUS . . . . .	96
2. PRE-COURSE SURVEY . . . . .	100
2. POST-COURSE SURVEY . . . . .	101
4. COMPARISONS BETWEEN PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEYS . . . . .	102
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	106

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
A1. Question 1: I would describe my understanding of spiritual disciplines to be very thorough . . . . .	102
A2. Question 2: I have a daily time alone with God . . . . .	102
A3. Question 3: I know what is meant by the term Biblical meditation . . . . .	103
A4. Question 4: I practice the discipline of Biblical meditation on a daily basis . . . . .	103
A5. Question 5: I pray on a daily basis . . . . .	103
A6. Question 6: I would characterize my prayer life as growing . . . . .	104
A7. Question 7: I am able to pray with confidence that God is hearing my prayers . . . . .	104
A8. Question 8: I frequently receive answers to prayer . . . . .	104
A9. Question 9: I frequently record significant aspects of my life of faith in a journal . . . . .	105

## PREFACE

I would like to express my deep appreciation for the persons who have been influential and supportive during this project. First, thanks to my wonderful wife, Amanda, for her patience and encouragement throughout. I would also like to thank our four children, Hannah, Tre, Emma, and Caroline—for the enjoyment each brings to my life.

Secondly, I would like to thank the people who allow me to serve the Lord as a pastor and teacher. The congregation at the Bethel Free Will Baptist Church has been a gracious supporter of this endeavor over the last three years. The faculty and administration of Welch College have also been instrumental in the completion of this project.

Third, I am deeply indebted to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Words can never express how much I have benefitted from the teaching of Dr. Michael Haykin and Dr. Donald S. Whitney. Special thanks are due to Dr. Whitney for his assistance as my faculty supervisor. The entire staff involved with the Doctor of Ministry program has made the experience rewarding.

Finally, I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for His mercy and grace. He has enabled the completion of this project. May He use it to cause His people to grow in grace and so become more like Him.

Barry Glendon Raper

Ashland City, Tennessee

May 2013

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to educate and engage students of Welch College in the practice of using biblical meditation as the primary means for transformative prayer.

#### **Goals**

There were four goals for this project. The first goal was to assess the current perceptions on prayer and the actual prayer practices among a select group of college students. This information on prayer practices was assessed through an initial questionnaire/inventory taken by the students at the beginning of a course offered in the spiritual disciplines. The course provided a foundational overview of the spiritual disciplines with special emphasis on meditation and its relation to prayer. This class was offered as a Bible and/or ministry elective for students at Welch College.

The second goal was to expose students to the rich spiritual heritage available in Puritan and early Baptist thought and life. Imitation is both the goal and a means of spiritual formation,<sup>1</sup> therefore it is necessary to provide students with safe models of piety. Special attention was given to George Mueller's example in meditation and prayer.

The third goal was to foster greater confidence in prayer for students. This goal was monitored through the initial assessment and measured again at the end of the

---

<sup>1</sup>Robert P. Meye, "The Imitation of Christ: Means and End of Spiritual Formation," in *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, ed. Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 199.



course through the same instrument. It is believed that praying the scriptures is a simple, yet powerful way to bolster confidence in prayer—and this project overall proved this to be true.

The fourth goal was to become more effective as a minister in teaching and modeling prayer. This goal was measured by an evaluation at the end of the course in which students rate the effectiveness of the class in relation to its stated objectives.

### **Ministry Context**

The National Association of Free Will Baptists founded Welch College (formerly Free Will Baptist Bible College) in 1942 as a two-year institution. Eight students comprised the original student body. The college added a third year of study in 1949 and a fourth year in 1950, and awarded its first bachelor's degrees to five seniors in 1951. Today the college enrolls about 400 students annually from approximately 25 states and several foreign countries. Various majors and minors, in addition to the required Bible major, are available in Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, and Bachelor of Music Education degree programs. Two- and three-year associate degree programs are also offered.

The campus is located in a quiet, residential community in Nashville, Tennessee, the home of at least 17 colleges and universities. This concentration of educational institutions gives the city the well-earned title “Athens of the South.” More than a dozen Free Will Baptist churches are in greater Nashville; many more are in the surrounding communities. Nashville offers excellent access to ground transportation and worldwide air travel via three interstates, rail traffic, and a modern international airport. Nashville is a very cosmopolitan city with at least 20 major language groups represented in the metropolitan area. This accounts for nearly 15 percent of the residents of the city being from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Training is available for learning some 141 languages through a local language institute. This offers a unique perspective from which students can prepare themselves for diverse local church and foreign ministries.

A city of just over 600,000 with a shopping area serving over 1.5 million inhabitants, Nashville offers expansive shopping centers, fine arts and museum exhibits, and a variety of sporting teams and events representing the NFL and NHL. Nashville has an abundance of good clean, family entertainment, including beautiful nature sites. Nashville was chosen to be the home of the College because its founders felt that this location was most central within the denomination.<sup>2</sup>

The mission of Welch College is “to educate leaders to serve Christ, His church, and His world, through biblical thought and life.” Every program of study includes a concentration in biblical and doctrinal studies. The college’s mission also includes preparing students in full-time Christian ministries. Included in this category are such offices as pastor, missionary, youth minister, evangelist, church planter, and minister of Christian education. The Theological Studies Department seeks to wed the Bible and ministry together stating that “(1) mastery of the Bible is the most important preparation for any ministry, professional or lay; and (2) the biblical and ministry areas must directly inform each other.”<sup>3</sup>

The Christian Education and Youth Ministry Programs operate under the Theological Studies Department umbrella. My current role at the college is to direct the Christian Education and Youth Ministry Programs. Given the small size of the college, I have the primary role of teaching those who will most likely be engaged in either an associate pastor or youth pastor role. I have been in this position for six years. Another aspect of my responsibilities at the college is to oversee the internship program for

---

<sup>2</sup>Information about the history of Welch College as well as demographics of the Nashville, Tennessee area is taken from “Free Will Baptist Bible College Expanded Mission Statement,” in *Free Will Baptist Bible College Catalog, 2011-2012*, 7, <http://www.welch.edu/academic-catalog> (accessed January 16, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 48-49.

students within these vocational fields. Over the past three years, I have also served as the pastor of Bethel Free Will Baptist Church in Chapmansboro, Tennessee.

### **Rationale**

College students are at, perhaps, the most crucial period of their lives in terms of establishing patterns and habits that will focus the remainder of their adult lives. I am concerned that the majority of the students enrolled at the college do not have the foundation of the spiritual disciplines to anchor their Christian life. After discussions with students both inside and outside of class I was persuaded that even some preparing for full-time vocational ministry did not actively pursue Christ through consistent practice of the spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines are crucial not only for personal spiritual growth but also for the discipleship of one's family. It was the aim of this project to equip participants with the necessary skills and tools to lead in spiritual development at home and in the church.

The impact of the spiritual disciplines cannot be overemphasized. Charles Spurgeon once remarked, "I must take care above all that I cultivate communion with Christ, for though that can never be the basis for my peace—mark that—it will be the channel."<sup>4</sup> Spiritual disciplines are those habits, practices, and disciplines that enable believers to discover more of God's life changing grace and power in order to become more like Jesus. Donald S. Whitney defines spiritual disciplines: "Spiritual disciplines are the God-given means we are to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness."<sup>5</sup>

In the Biblical Spirituality Program at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, students are exposed to the rich theological and spiritual heritage present in the

---

<sup>4</sup>Charles Spurgeon, "Peace By Believing," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1864; reprint, Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1970), 9: 283.

<sup>5</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 17.

history of the church. The impact of the Puritans and other evangelical forefathers is almost forgotten in a day of new fads and theological trends. It is an ongoing goal at the college to teach students about important aspects of their history and heritage. This class sought to expose students to the spiritual disciplines in a way that introduces them to select persons from church history that practiced the disciplines of meditation and prayer. This exposure provided the students with models of piety and also teach them to know and appreciate what is present in their heritage.

Among the spiritual disciplines, Scripture intake and prayer are the most important. Since this is a Bible college, students have multiple opportunities to take in Scripture—through Bible classes, chapel, prayer groups, and local church attendance. Wide exposure to Scripture is happening. Every student that graduates from the college has a Bible major. However, one must consider how much the students are being affected internally.

Students are exposed to massive amounts of information on a daily basis. People of all ages have grown accustomed to what Marva Dawn calls “informational consumerism.”<sup>6</sup> Since students live in a consumerist age they take in more and more and absorb less and less. The biblical discipline of meditation is one of the main spiritual exercises that can help students absorb Scripture. Since meditation is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer,<sup>7</sup> meditation was at the center of this course on spiritual disciplines.

In the Applied Ministry Experience from the Spiritual Awakenings and Revivals course (at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) one of the assignments was to lead concerts of prayer in the local church. During these practical assignments in

---

<sup>6</sup>Marva Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 181 ff.

<sup>7</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 71.

our church, Scripture passages were used as the basis for corporate prayer. Scripture dictated not only the subject but also the shape of prayers offered. In preparation for these concerts of prayer, church members were taught concerning the example of George Mueller and his discovery in prayer. For Mueller, meditation on Scripture was the key element in his prayer life. Several people were helped in their attempts at prayer by this simple and straightforward approach to prayer. It was hoped that a more intensive look at his example and discovery would yield even greater results in the participants of this project.

Public prayer is also important. The mission of Welch College is centered on training leaders for local church ministry. It is believed that students who took the course in spiritual disciplines would be better equipped to teach and model prayer in local church ministry. Leaders tend to lead in public prayer in ways that are shaped by their private devotional practices. Since this is true, then shaping devotional and prayer habits of future leaders becomes one of the primary ways to shape their leadership in the realm of public prayer.

The spiritual disciplines are always important in the life of a believer. However, in the current age the barrage of media and its impact on the disciplines makes the cultivation of the spiritual disciplines even more crucial for developing Christlikeness. This project tried to cause the participants to examine the ways current culture works against spiritual discipline. The content of the course coupled with the practical assignments provided the necessary training for students to set their lives in a direction that utilizes the spiritual disciplines as a means of God's grace.

Twenty-first century American culture can be characterized as a very "spiritual" culture. In his book *The Courage to Be Protestant*, David Wells asserts that in America "78 percent of people say they are spiritual."<sup>8</sup> Postmodernity is marked by a

---

<sup>8</sup>David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 178.

fascination with the spiritual and a certain openness to discussions on spirituality. However, with all of the competing worldviews and religions converging together, spirituality becomes a mixture for many people—a blending, a smorgasboard spirituality, a buffet of religions and practices. Nancy Pearcy says, “In our efforts to defend Christianity, we can easily be overwhelmed by the vast number of religions and philosophies being hawked in the marketplace of ideas today.”<sup>9</sup> Spirituality is what you make it, both in terms of your personal beliefs and spiritual practices. To quote Wells’ assessment of the “spiritual” scene, “There are as many spiritualities as there are spiritual seekers.”<sup>10</sup> The presence of this “spiritual” culture makes the need for a distinctly *biblical spirituality* even greater. Students are needed that have their lives anchored in both biblical beliefs and biblical disciplines. Students will see their lives becoming more like Jesus when they not only believe in Him, but also practice the very disciplines that He has designed for the pursuit of godliness.

### **Definitions and Limitations**

The definitions used in this project came from Donald S. Whitney’s book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Whitney defines spiritual disciplines as “the God-given means we are to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness.”<sup>11</sup> Some examples of the spiritual disciplines discussed in the book include Bible intake, prayer, fasting, silence, solitude, and journaling. The second major definition used from the book was for the specific definition of meditation, which Whitney describes as “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of

---

<sup>9</sup>Nancy Pearcy, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 388.

<sup>10</sup>Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, 182.

<sup>11</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 17.

understanding, application, and prayer.”<sup>12</sup> Since journaling was a part of the methodology used in this project, Whitney’s helpful description of a journal served as the definition of this particular discipline. In his chapter on journaling he explains a journal as “a place to record the works and ways of God in your life.”<sup>13</sup>

The participants for this project consisted of those students who enrolled in the course “Spiritual Disciplines in Youth Ministry” in the Fall 2011 at Welch College. Since the project itself took place within this course, it was limited to 15 weeks. Students taking this course were required to meet two times per week, participating in class lectures, discussions, and assignments.

### **Research Methodology**

Two books were used in the course, both authored by Donald S. Whitney. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* was used as the primary text in this project. Participants were required to read through the chapters in preparation for the weekly class discussions on spiritual disciplines. Students also read *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*.

Participants took a spiritual discipline inventory to assess their perception and practice of spiritual disciplines. This survey covered the basic terminology of spiritual disciplines, meditation, and journaling. More questions related to the specific practice of prayer, since the major focus of the project was to teach meditation as a means to transformative prayer. Participants completed the spiritual discipline inventory a second time after finishing the course—this time in order to assess changes in their perception and practice of spiritual disciplines.

Journaling was also a part of the methodology used in this project. Participants were required to journal their meditation and prayer discoveries over a ten-week period

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 205.

within the course. These journals were also discussed collectively in a group setting at the end of the course. The instructor reviewed each student's journal entries and the discipline of journaling, in terms of struggles and blessings experienced, was discussed personally with each participant.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to educate and engage students of Welch College in the practice of using biblical meditation as a means to prayer. In summary, the four goals for the project were to assess perceptions and practices of prayer, to expose students to the spiritual heritage of early English Baptists and Puritans, to foster greater confidence in prayer, and to grow personally in prayer. The project's aim was to equip students with a biblical understanding of spiritual disciplines with a particular emphasis on meditation and prayer. The assessments, which were administered at the beginning and ending of the fifteen-week course, were used in evaluating the effectiveness of the project. However, one-on-one meetings with each student at the end of the term provided another important tool for determining the success of the course for individual students.



CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL  
SUPPORT FOR MEDITATION

**Introduction**

Biblical spirituality is inseparably tied to spiritual disciplines. This chapter explores the New Testament basis for spiritual disciplines by examining the letter of 1 Timothy, giving special attention to 4:6-16. This section of Scripture serves as a foundational text for both the right perception and right practice of spiritual disciplines. Also, this chapter provides a brief treatment of the doctrine of sanctification and how the disciplines fit into God's overall work of salvation. Finally, special consideration is given to the specific discipline of meditation. Four biblical texts serve as the scriptural basis for this crucial spiritual practice: Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:1-3, Philippians 4:8, and 2 Timothy 2:7.

**New Testament Basis for Spiritual Disciplines:  
An Overview of the Book of 1 Timothy**

The word translated “godly” appears frequently throughout the letter of 1 Timothy. This English word is a translation of the Greek word *eusebeia* (εὐσέβεια). The word refers to devoutness or piety toward God.<sup>1</sup> A form of the word for godly or godliness appears repeatedly in the six chapters that comprise the letter, allowing the reader to gain an accurate and biblical picture of godliness. Given the frequency and attention for this theme, it may be suggested that 1 Timothy is, at least in part, an instruction manual for the young Christian leader concerning how to live a godly life. By

---

<sup>1</sup>Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), s.v. “godliness, piety.”

heeding Paul's instruction Timothy can know what Christ-likeness looks like and also how to pursue it.

Living the godly life would certainly be a challenge for Timothy. The city in which he lived and was called to pastor presented many challenges for the formation of godly, Christ-like character. It is helpful to consider the culture of the city of Ephesus in order to understand the influences surrounding Timothy and his congregation. Ephesus would be rightly labeled a city of prominence. Thomas Lea states,

The location of Ephesus on the Aegean Sea made it of commercial importance in the buying, selling, and transporting of goods. In addition several land routes of commerce passed through Ephesus. Lavish buildings including baths, gymnasia (large sports plazas), and theaters have been excavated in the city.<sup>2</sup>

Some estimates of the population number around 300,000.<sup>3</sup>

When a city possesses such commercial force and influence it is likely that various people groups would be drawn to the city. Lea comments again on the magnetic appeal of the Ephesian culture:

Ephesus was a magnet that drew wealthy businessmen, religious enthusiasts, criminals, and tourists to live and to visit. Citizens of the city could follow the routes of materialism, flagrant immorality, pagan religion, or pleasure in their quest for satisfaction. Such a cafeteria of choices in this very open city affected the atmosphere of the Christian church growing in its midst.<sup>4</sup>

This convergence of worldviews and lifestyles in Ephesus is not hard for Americans to imagine. America has become a place where there is a "cafeteria of choices," largely due to the influx of people and rise of postmodernity. One of the marks of postmodernism is a fascination with the spiritual and a certain openness to discussions on spirituality. Even though the term "postmodern" would certainly not be used in Timothy's day, some of the

---

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Lea, *I Timothy*, New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Holman, 1992), 78-79.

<sup>3</sup>Max Anders, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 88.

<sup>4</sup>Lea, *I Timothy*, 78-79.

characteristics that are displayed in postmodern culture were present. In this climate, with all of the competing worldviews and religions converging together, spirituality becomes a mixture for many people—a blending, a smorgasboard spirituality, a buffet of religions and practices. Spirituality, for many in such a culture, is what a person makes it, both in terms of personal beliefs and spiritual practices. David Wells’ assessment of the current “spiritual” scene is summed up in the sentence, “There are as many spiritualities as there are spiritual seekers.”<sup>5</sup> If this was the type of culture present in Ephesus, then it was crucial for Paul to establish the biblical spirituality that Timothy must teach publicly and pursue in his own life.

The word translated godliness, as noted previously, is central to Paul’s instruction to Timothy. Paul uses the word in 2:1-2 as he instructs Timothy that various forms of prayer should be made “for all people, for kings and for all who are in high positions.” The purpose for this kind of consistent prayer life is “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”<sup>6</sup> As already mentioned, the term for godly/godliness is a person’s piety toward God. It should be emphasized, however, that a piety toward God is manifested in relationships with other people.

The type of prayer life that pleases God includes prayer for all people. Paul indicates that prayer for all people, including those in leadership positions, is rooted in the atonement—that Christ gave his life as a ransom for all. Since it is God’s very nature to save (2:3) and He desires all to be saved (2:4), then it follows that His people will practice godliness by praying for all people. The section of Scripture in which this is found (2:1-8) concludes with the charge for men to pray by “lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.” The word translated ‘holy’ is the Greek word *hosios*. While this

---

<sup>5</sup>David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 182.

<sup>6</sup>All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version unless indicated otherwise.

word is different from the word for godly, it does carry the same general idea. These holy hands are those that should be pure and clean and reflect a life of piety toward God.<sup>7</sup>

Another occurrence of *eusebeia* is found at the end of chapter 3: “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of *godliness*: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Tim 3:16, emphasis added). Paul introduces a summary of the gospel. These phrases are most likely an early hymn.<sup>8</sup> This passage introduces the idea that the “mystery” of godliness has now been revealed. In other words, the mystery of the godliness Paul describes is not something that is hidden. Instead it is a mystery that has now been revealed in Christ.

It is crucial to understand that biblical piety is first and foremost rooted in Christ. Any type of spirituality that is not rooted in Christ, in His Person and Work, through union with Him, is not a biblical spirituality. Any other form of “godliness” is really no godliness at all; it is merely “a form.” The Ephesian culture provided many pseudo-spiritualities, many forms of so-called godliness. The mystery religions of the day provided a great challenge to the church at Ephesus. In this very “spiritual” climate, Paul teaches a defined spirituality grounded in this confessional statement concerning the person and work of Christ. George Knight states, “Paul now writes in the confessed grandeur of the gospel in terms of him who is its reality. It is the revelation (*μυστήριον*) of true godliness (*εὐσέβειας*) a godliness seen and known in Jesus Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

Chapter 6 provides the lengthiest treatment of godliness in 1 Timothy. In 6:3 Paul warns Timothy to be on the lookout: “If anyone teaches a different doctrine and

---

<sup>7</sup>Brown, *The New International Dictionary*, s.v. “holy.”

<sup>8</sup>George Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1992), 182-83.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

does not agree with sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with *godliness* (emphasis added).” It is clear that godliness is once again shown to be based on revelation—sound words and teaching that promote the type of life Paul is challenging Timothy to live. Evidently one of the main sources of ungodliness within the congregation stemmed from the false teachers who were viewing godliness and ministry as a means of material gain.

Against this error Paul distinguishes biblical piety or godliness as that which is content with the basic necessities of life (6:6-8). It is not that godly people are unconcerned with money, nor that it is wrong for them to have riches. The godly person does not and must not desire to be rich. This love for money is the root of all sorts of evil with the resulting pains that accompany leaving the God-ordained path to godliness (6:10). Instead of following the course of these false teachers, Timothy is charged with the pursuit of “righteousness, *godliness*, faith, love, patience, meekness” (emphasis added).

While the letter of 1 Timothy was a personal letter, no doubt most portions of it were not for him exclusively. In other words, this letter would form the instruction for the entire Ephesian congregation on matters related to public worship, the selection of leaders, the treatment of widows, and a number of other issues. Despite the corporate nature of the instruction, the letter also demonstrates a great deal of personal address to Timothy. John B. Polhill asserts,

By the time of I Timothy (around A.D. 65), he [Timothy] was probably in his mid-thirties. Paul referred to his “youth” in 1 Timothy 4:12, using a Greek word (*neotes*) that was used of individuals up to the age of forty. Timothy was not the bishop of Ephesus; he was not even the pastor. He was the apostle’s personal representative among the Ephesian house-churches, and he carried Paul’s full apostolic authority. The epistle was primarily addressed to Timothy, but Paul surely intended him to share it with the entire church.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 407.

No other passage in the letter is more personal than the section of 1 Timothy 4:6-16. When focusing on these verses the word “godliness” appears again. These verses also provide a solid New Testament basis for the practice of spiritual disciplines.

### **First Timothy 4:6-16**

False teachers and false teaching are the subjects of the opening verses of chapter 4. These men give heed to seducing spirits and the teaching of demons. Specifically, some of the false teachers embraced a form of asceticism. Paul provides insight into their doctrines by describing them as those “who forbid marriage” and “require abstinence from foods that God created.” Evidently, the way to be “godly” for these men was tied to a rigorous and strict approach toward at least two primary blessings of life—marriage and food. In stark contrast to these men, Timothy is called upon to nourish himself in the Word of God. George Knight suggests, “The participial phrase ἐντρέφόμενος . . . in v. 6c delineates the nourishment necessary for a good minister if he is to instruct others.”<sup>11</sup> Timothy must allow himself to be nourished on the words passed down from Jesus and the apostles. Knight indicates again, “The evidence thus indicates that Paul is referring to the teaching of Jesus and the apostles when he uses the plural λόγοι.”<sup>12</sup> There is an ever-present distinctive of Pauline spirituality—spirituality is grounded in the sure Word of God.

### **Pursuing Christ through the Disciplines**

First Timothy 4:7 states, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness.” Donald S. Whitney rightly observes that this verse is the foundational verse for spiritual disciplines.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to those who pursue the path

---

<sup>11</sup>Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 194.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 16.

of silly myths, Timothy is charged to pursue godliness. The verb Paul uses in 4:7 is a vividly demanding word. Whitney comments on the significance of this particular word in Paul's charge to Timothy: "The word translated 'discipline' in the New American Standard Bible is the Greek word *gymnasia* from which our English words gymnasium and gymnastics derive."<sup>14</sup> It is an active pursuit, one that is brought to his attention vividly by this word variously translated as "exercise" (KJV), "train" (NIV, ESV), and "discipline" (NASB). Paul frequently uses grueling and demanding athletic imagery to describe the Christian experience.

Close attention to the overall context of 1 Timothy reinforces the truth that godliness is rooted in a union with Christ. Godliness belongs to the believer—God declares His children to be righteous, He calls His people saints as they participate in the imputed righteousness of Jesus. The Christian can say in one sense that godliness is a possession (declared of the believer because of Christ) and yet godliness is a reality in which a person must make progression (in his actual practice). Knight grounds this pursuit in the gospel: "But the *εὐσέβεια* is no longer, as in Greek thought, a general religious piety. It is now a *εὐσέβεια* rooted in the mystery of *εὐσέβεια*, Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup>

This pursuit of godliness is to take place in the practice of the spiritual disciplines. God uses several means in life in order to shape his people into the image of Jesus. People, circumstances, trials, opportunities, and blessings are all instruments used by God to help the child of God become more like Jesus in thought, heart, and life. The spiritual disciplines are another one of the means that God provides for the believer to assist in the pursuit of holiness. Whitney, once again, provides a clear and succinct definition of spiritual disciplines: "Spiritual disciplines are the God-given means we are

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>15</sup>Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 197.

to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness.”<sup>16</sup> The Christian may consider the spiritual disciplines as those habits, practices, and disciplines found in Scripture that enable believers to discover more of God’s life changing grace and power, in order to become more like Jesus. The following illustration by Richard Averbeck is instructive regarding the nature of the disciplines:

The wind will not take us very far if our sail is down; that is, if our human spirit is not engaged. Just as the writers of Scripture needed the Holy Spirit to drive them along in writing the Bible, so every Christian needs the same divine wind to drive them along in living the Christian life. The spiritual formation practices that we engage in are like putting up the sail. They are ways of getting our human spirit engaged with the Spirit of God.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Purpose of the Disciplines**

The purpose of this disciplined pursuit is to grow in godliness. The purpose is demonstrated by the definite purpose clause in verse 7, rightly translated in the KJV as “unto” and the NASB “for the purpose.” As Timothy actively engages in the practice of spiritual disciplines, he must keep in the forefront of his mind and heart that this is ultimately about growing in his walk with the Lord. The disciplines are about having communion with the living Christ, the kind of communion that transforms the heart and life of those who consistently seek Him through such activities as meditation, prayer, fasting, etc. Knight notes,

One may speak paraphrastically of exercising one’s godliness with the purpose of being more godly. Therefore, the εὐσέβεια that one has in Christ is to be developed by γυμνάζειν in εὐσέβεια (cf. Phil 2:12, 13: “work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”).<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 17.

<sup>17</sup>Richard Averbeck, “Worship and Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, ed. Paul Pettitt (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 63.

<sup>18</sup>Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 97.



## The Promise of the Disciplines

The growth Timothy is called to pursue through discipline will be challenging. In light of this Paul reminds Timothy of the promise that is attached to godliness. In these verses the apostle counsels his son in the faith regarding the value of both physical exercise and spiritual exercise. Exercise of the body is profitable. Christians are to live in such a way as to glorify God with their bodies, offering the body as a living sacrifice unto God in light of the mercy offered in Christ. The Christian, therefore, ought to care about his/her body and seek to do things that are beneficial to the body, which would include things like proper exercise. However, no matter how much profit there is for exercise of the body, it does not compare to the promise held out for godliness. Commenting on this verse, Knight explains, “That the εὐσέβεια ‘has’ (ἔχουσα) the ‘promise’ (ἐπαγγελίαν) means that this promise is inherent to the nature of εὐσέβεια.”<sup>19</sup> Godliness has promise both for the present life and for the life to come—the abundant life that is found in Christ.

## The Necessary Progression

In verses 11-16 Paul provides a balanced challenge for Timothy—to watch his personal life and his public ministry of the Word of God. For example, his personal life or growth in godliness is to be on display as a model of faith to both the old and young alike (v. 12). John B. Polhill reminds readers,

Paul’s third line of advice to Timothy was to set himself up as a model for the whole congregation (vv. 11-16). Paul’s counsel—that younger people provide a model to follow—would have not been altogether natural in the social context of first-century Ephesus. People generally looked up to the elders of the community, not young adults like Timothy. But Timothy represented Paul and embodied true Christian godliness.<sup>20</sup>

Timothy must remember that his teaching starts with his personal life, one that is to be

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 199.

<sup>20</sup>Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 413.

imitated by others who desire to be godly. Commenting on verse 12, Polhill continues, “*The qualities which Paul urged Timothy to model are the essence of godliness: exemplary speech and lifestyle, love, faith, and personal purity (v. 12).*”<sup>21</sup>

Timothy’s spiritual giftedness was for the good of the church. It was his personal responsibility to fan the gift into flame. It is Timothy’s task to immerse himself first in his pursuit of holiness through the disciplines (4:15). He must insure that he watches his life (16), for there is a real sense in which no one can do this for him. Thus, Paul would charge him in verse 16 to “pay close attention to yourself” (NASB).

The young Christian leader’s personal pursuit of holiness is balanced with his public ministry and connection to the body of Christ. He must give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching. He must fan into flame the gifting of God in his life, but he must do this mindful of the church body—recalling those who laid their hands on him for this ministry. The Christian must pursue Christ, but he is doing so in a community of believers. So, while there is a personal dimension to Timothy’s progression in godliness, there is also an indispensable corporate dimension as well. In verse 16 he is reminded that the stakes are high. Timothy must constantly be giving attention to his personal holiness and the public ministry of the Word because perseverance in these things “will save both yourself and your hearers.”

### **Role of Sanctification**

Given this all-out pursuit of godliness through the disciplines, it is important to step back and ask where the disciplines fit into the overall picture of salvation. The doctrine of sanctification must be understood properly in order that one might understand the disciplines properly. In the book *Christian Spirituality*, Sinclair Ferguson offers a summary of the reformed perspective on sanctification, noting two main features. He

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added.

states, “Two features are central to sanctification: Jesus Christ himself is our sanctification or holiness (1 Cor. 1:30); and it is through union with Christ that sanctification is accomplished in us.”<sup>22</sup>

The Bible presents believers with the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and glorification. These are three distinct aspects of salvation, yet they are also presented as inseparable in Scripture. Since the entire world is held captive by the enslaving power of sin and is therefore guilty before God, humanity is in need of deliverance from sin’s penalty. Christians are saved or delivered from sin’s *penalty* through the death of Jesus; the deliverance is realized personally the moment the believer turns to Christ in faith. The Bible refers to this transaction as the doctrine of justification. Another glorious aspect of justification is the pronouncement or declaration of righteousness given to the believer based on the person and work of Christ. Secondly, Christians are being saved or delivered from sin’s power or dominion. This aspect of salvation involves a *process* of deliverance. The process of continual deliverance from sin is what the Bible calls sanctification. It is helpful to speak of definitive sanctification, which is a one-time event, happening inseparably with and at conversion. In progressive or continual sanctification Christians are in the process of being delivered from the remaining presence and effects of indwelling sin. This process will not be finished until the believer dies or until Jesus returns. Dependent effort or grace-empowered effort characterizes this aspect of salvation for believers. Disciples, through the grace and power of God, are expected to “work out” God’s salvation because God is working in them through the power of His Spirit (Phil 2:12-13). Glorification is the final aspect of salvation or deliverance from sin. Believers either at their death or at the return of Jesus will be delivered from the very presence of sin. Paul links all of these dimensions of salvation

---

<sup>22</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” in *Christian Spirituality: Four Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 48.

together in the book of Romans, painting a holistic picture of God's entire work of salvation in Romans 8:29-30.

### **Positional Sanctification**

The holistic picture of salvation is crucial for a discussion of the doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification is brought about by and rooted in the gracious work of the Trinity (1 Pet 1:2). As noted earlier by Ferguson, Scripture indicates that Christ is the believer's sanctification (1 Cor 1:30). Therefore, it is vital to begin with positional sanctification. According to this section of Scripture (1 Cor 1:26-31), believers should know that they have not been chosen according to worldly standards. Instead, God has chosen the "foolish in the world to shame the wise" and "the weak in the world to shame the strong." The very ground of boasting for believers is not in who they are nor is it in what they have accomplished. Jesus Christ is for believers their righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. In verse 30 Paul declares, "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." This passage of the Bible became the bedrock of John Bunyan's faith after years of spiritual struggle. He recounts the event in his book *Grace Abounding*:

But one day as I was passing into the field, with some dashes on my conscience, fearing yet that all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, "Your righteousness is in heaven." I thought I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand. There was my righteousness. Wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me that I lacked His righteousness, for that was ever before Him. Moreover, I saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, "the same yesterday, and today, and forever."<sup>23</sup>

It is through union with Christ, by faith, that sanctification is worked out in experience (Rom 6). Paul teaches that there is an aspect of sanctification that happened definitively at conversion. At this moment in time the believer is set apart from the world and set

---

<sup>23</sup>John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1993), 112.

apart to God—but this sanctification is always tied to the personal union with the living Christ. Union with Christ is a radical and even startling teaching according to Ferguson:

We miss the radical nature of Paul’s teaching here to our great loss. So startling is it that we need to find a startling manner of expressing it. For what Paul is saying is that sanctification means this: in relationship both to sin and to God, the determining factor of my existence is no longer my past. It is Christ’s past. The basic framework of my new existence in Christ is that I have become a “dead man brought to life” and must think of myself in those terms: dead to sin and alive to God in union with Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>24</sup>

The apostle Peter communicates the definitive work of sanctification when he declares that believers are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood” (1 Pet 1:2).

### **Progression in Sanctification**

The Bible also maintains that the Christian is to become in practice what he or she is positionally in Christ. In other words, sanctification is a life-long process with the goal of Christ-likeness (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). God uses all of life’s events over the course of one’s lifespan to bring about conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ. The ultimate good promised in Romans 8:28 is held out to those that love God. All things are working together for this stated purpose. As the believer has been freed from the enslaving power of sin, he or she still has the presence of indwelling sin (Rom 7). The Spirit of God who gave victory and newness at conversion now over time grants deliverance from the power of sin in the life of the believer. This process is one that will never be completed fully in this life. This aspect of sanctification is one that involves the mind, heart, and will of the believer. The Christian is freed, little by little, from the power of sin in order to become more like Christ in their actual experience. This happens by obedience to the work of grace wrought by the Spirit.

---

<sup>24</sup>Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” 57.

This teaching is seen clearly in Paul’s writings, particularly in his discussions about putting off the old man and putting on the new (Eph 4; Col 3). In Romans 8:12-13 the two persons involved in personal sanctification are made clear—God and man. Paul can declare that it is the Christian’s responsibility to “put to death the deeds of the body.” However, the way the Christian is empowered to do this is “by the Spirit.” In light of this passage the great theologian John Owen once said, “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.”<sup>25</sup> But union always accomplishes this mortification with the living Christ, empowered by His Holy Spirit that resides within.

The ongoing process of sanctification comes to the believer as the glory of Christ is revealed in the gospel to the heart, mind, and will (2 Cor 3:18). The ministry of the gospel excels the ministry of the law under Moses. As believers behold the glory of God revealed in the face or Person of Christ, they are changed from glory to glory. The passage teaches at least two crucial aspects of sanctification. First, sanctification and change happen as people behold the glory of Jesus. Second, sanctification happens in degrees—from glory to glory. Since believers behold the glory of the Lord “in a mirror” and not face to face, the believer can expect that the sanctification process will be incomplete until the day when he no longer walks by faith but by sight. Until that day of sight, Christians are reminded that sanctification involves grace-empowered effort (Phil 2:12-13). Grace is opposed to attempts to earn salvation, but grace is not opposed to grace-empowered work that results from salvation. Paul indicates this dual tension in 1 Corinthians 15:10: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

---

<sup>25</sup>John Owen, “Of Mortification of Sin in Believers,” in *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, ed. Justin Taylor and Kelly Kapic (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006). This work by Owen can be found in many places, but this book edited by Taylor and Kapic provides helpful background to Owen’s life, explanations of archaic words, and gives the reader more exposure to his writings in one volume.

While much more could be said about sanctification, a few final things must be stressed in summary. First, sanctification is fundamentally about God’s deliverance from sin provided for believers through their union with Christ. Second, while justification, sanctification, and glorification are never separated, there are some differences. Justification happens instantaneously, while sanctification must be described as an ongoing process. It is a progressive work, one that is never finished in this life. Glorification is that future experience promised to all believers of final and complete deliverance from sin. The progressive work of sanctification is only finished in glory—either at death or at the return of Jesus. Third, sanctification has as its goal the likeness or image of Jesus for all believers (Rom 8:28-29). Finally, God has ordained specific means to assist or help followers of Christ in the process of sanctification (1 Tim 4:7). Because believers live between justification and glorification, continual deliverance by the Spirit (from the power of sin—to living godly lives) comes through God-ordained means. Therefore, the disciplines are to be viewed as God-ordained means to assist disciples in the process of sanctification.

### **Use of Means**

Since the disciplines are the God-ordained means for the Spirit-filled pursuit of Christ-likeness, then which practices fall under the category of spiritual disciplines? A look into books on the subject reveals a number of disciplines or practices. For example, in the opening chapter of her resource book on spiritual disciplines, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun traces the development of practices from the book of Acts throughout church history. According to Calhoun, each age had its own unique addition to the “list” of spiritual practices. One might conclude that each period had its own “edition” of disciplines: disciplines that were rediscovered or emphasized. For example, the monastic period emphasized such disciplines as silence and solitude, the practice of coming apart from the world. The practice of Bible study was one primary spiritual discipline that emerged from the Reformation as people were given access to the Bible for themselves.

The more modern times/age added or produced spiritual habits like accountability partners.<sup>26</sup> She then concludes her summary of church history with these words: “Throughout the centuries the disciplines of prayer, confession, worship, stewardship, fellowship, service, attending to Scripture and the Lord’s Supper have remained constant channels and disciplines of grace.”<sup>27</sup> In the book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Whitney explores the major disciplines of Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning.

Which spiritual discipline is the most important? Surely the intake of Scripture is the discipline that takes priority for the believer. It is the Scriptures that reveal God: “Man lives not by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” is the pronouncement of Jesus recorded in Matthew 4:4. Evangelical Christians believe that the words of the Bible are the words of God, given for spiritual nourishment. 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 a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture.”<sup>28</sup>

Scripture intake involves many interrelated “sub-disciplines.” The discipline of listening to God’s Word is involved as Scripture is being read or preached. The Christian is also to give personal attention to daily Bible reading. Memorization is another sub-category of Scripture intake that is especially useful in the spiritual battle (see Matt 4:1-11; Ps 119:11). While all of these disciplines of Scripture intake are vital

---

<sup>26</sup>Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 17-18. It should be noted that Calhoun has seven major sections in her handbook. There are more than *sixty* spiritual practices are discussed in detail with suggestions for personal application. While the book is a good resource on the subject, she presents many “disciplines” that do not normally appear in evangelical treatments on the subject. The book also relies heavily on Catholic mystics from church history.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 28.



for the Christian, it could be argued that meditation is the most important aspect of Scripture intake. Meditation enables the Christian to take what is heard, or read, or studied, or memorized, and internalize it. While it is certain that memorization has suffered in the technological age, it is equally certain that meditation has as well. It is the *reception* of the truth that sanctifies (John 17:7), not the mere acquaintance with truth.

### **Meditation in the Old and New Testaments**

Donald S. Whitney defines meditation as “deep thinking of the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”<sup>29</sup> The Old Testament use of the word for “meditate” certainly suggests something foreign to the modern notion of meditation. The Old Testament use of the word *haga* means to moan, growl, utter, speak, muse<sup>30</sup>: “The basic meaning of *haga* and its cognates is a low sound, characteristic of the moaning of a dove (Isa 38:14; 59:11) or the growling of a lion over its prey (Isa 31:4).”<sup>31</sup> It is also found in such contexts as mourning, the whispering of the enemy over the collapse of Jerusalem, and in the distress of God’s people.<sup>32</sup> Evidently in Scripture meditation is tied frequently to both speech and prayer as indicated in the psalmist’s prayer in Psalm 19. Herbert Wolf states, “In Psalm 19:14 [H 15] ‘the meditation of my heart’ is parallel to ‘the words of my mouth,’ as the psalmist compares his own speech with what God communicates in nature and in Scripture.”<sup>33</sup> Evan B. Howard, in his book on prayer, provides an illustrative insight into the Hebrew world of meditation: “The Hebrew words for *meditate* suggest a background

---

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>30</sup>F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, eds., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 211c.

<sup>31</sup>R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1: 205.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

of ‘muttering,’ perhaps taken from the practice of reading one’s Scripture lessons over and over.”<sup>34</sup>

With this definition and backdrop for meditation in mind, it becomes clear that a sharp contrast exists between biblical meditation and most modern ideas of meditation. Biblical meditation is objective. Eastern religions focus much on the subjective. Biblical meditation is actively involving the mind and heart whereas most modern forms of meditation are passive. The following passages underscore the engagement of the mind, heart, and will of the believer with the objective, unchanging truth of God’s word.

### **Joshua 1:8**

The opening chapter of the book of Joshua provides a moving picture of an emerging leader. Leadership has passed from Moses to Joshua. Now faced with the daunting challenges of the supervision of Israel, as well as the dangers in the conquest of Canaan, God graciously comes to Joshua to provide him with stability and courage. God’s enabling grace is provided to him in the form of a promise tied to Joshua’s personal attention to meditation.

**Content of meditation.** The book of the law must always be on the lips of Joshua. His personal success and the success of the people of Israel now under his leadership depend upon obedience to God’s instruction. However, in order for it to be on his lips, it first must be on his heart. Thus, the command “you shall meditate on it day and night.” Joshua had seen this demonstrated in the life of Moses. He had also heard this same basic idea in the practical instructions that followed the Ten Commandments. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the *Shema*, the Israelites were told of the importance of passing on the law to their children. The parental teaching was to take place in the normal course

---

<sup>34</sup>Evan B. Howard, *Praying the Scriptures: A Field Guide for Your Spiritual Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 19.

of life: “You shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” However, this consistent and constant teaching will not happen if the teaching parent does not first have the commands of God written on his or her heart. Deuteronomy 6:5 reads, “These commands which I am giving you today shall be on your heart.” The idea that words spoken spring from the heart is all over the Bible. Jesus echoed this when he said, “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles the person (Matt 15:18).”

Therefore, Joshua’s mediation was to be centered on the objective word from God, given in the law. His thoughts were to be centered on the unchanging reality of the revelation God had given to His people. He must give himself to this at all times: “You shall meditate on it day and night.” Calvin notes,

Assiduous meditation on the Law is commanded; because, whenever it is intermitted, even for a short time, many errors readily creep in, and the memory becomes rusted, so that many, after ceasing from the continuous study of it, engage in practical business, as if they were mere ignorant tyros. God therefore enjoins his servant to make daily progress, and never cease, during the whole course of his life, to profit in the Law.<sup>35</sup>

**Obedience to the law.** There is an obvious purpose clause that follows the command for meditation. Joshua’s settled practice of thinking on the truth of the Word of God is aimed at personal obedience to God’s will. He is to be careful to meditate so that he can be careful to do what God has commanded him to do. Commentator Matthew Henry says of this passage, “To this end he must meditate therein, not for contemplation sake only, or to fill his head with notions, or that he might find something to puzzle the priests with, but that he might, both as a man and as a magistrate, observe to do *according to what was written therein;*”<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>John Calvin, *The Book of Joshua, Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 32.

<sup>36</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 290.

**Success that attends obedience.** If Joshua follows the Lord in obedience, he can expect the Lord's blessing upon his life. The final link in the chain is the spiritual success of Joshua and by extension, the nation of Israel. What type of success is offered to those who obey God? Can the believer expect to be "prosperous" in the sense of financial and material prosperity? David M. Howard, Jr., makes important comments regarding the promise of "success" in this text: "The words we find here in our passage in Joshua (1:7-8) speaking of prosperity and success are almost never used in the Old Testament to speak of financial success." This is a helpful corrective to the health and wealth movement that is influencing many in today's world. He continues, "Rather, they speak of succeeding in life's proper endeavors. This happens when people's lives are focused entirely on God and obedience to him. The focus of people's endeavors is not to be prosperity and success but rather holiness and obedience."<sup>37</sup> Therefore, while success and prosperity are promised, one must be careful to not read into the text one's own definitions of success nor let the prosperity gospel point him in a direction the text does not.

The chain of faith discussed in Joshua 1:8 (Meditation + Obedience = Success) can also be considered in reverse order. If the new leader (Joshua) wants the spiritual success that only God can give, then he must be obedient to the instructions of God. However, in order to be obedient he must have these words (the written Word of God) upon his mind and heart. This heart knowledge of the Word of God is cultivated through the practice of biblical meditation.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>David M. Howard, *Joshua: The New American Commentary*, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 88.

<sup>38</sup>This pattern was first brought to my attention in the Doctor of Ministry class on personal spiritual disciplines, Donald S. Whitney, "Introduction to Biblical Spirituality" (Doctor of Ministry Seminar, 80911, January 11-14, 2010).

### **Psalm 1:1-3: Meditation and Success**

Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner states, “It seems likely that this psalm was especially composed as an introduction to the whole Psalter.”<sup>39</sup> The Psalms served primarily as the worship book for Israel, but they also present two different paths in life—those that worship and obey God and those who do not. The great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon comments on the contents of the first psalm as a form of a preview of the entire collection of Psalms:

It is the psalmist’s desire to teach us the way to blessedness, and to warn us of the sure destruction of sinners. This then, is the matter of the first psalm, which may be looked upon in some respects, as the text upon which the whole of the psalms make up a divine sermon.<sup>40</sup>

This “sermon” poses the two ways of life in order to force the reader to evaluate and decide which way to walk. Tremper Longman III words it this way:

The first psalm also seems relevant to the whole structure. As we open the book of Psalms, a wisdom psalm (Ps 1) immediately confronts us. Wisdom psalms are relatively uncommon. Psalm 1 deliberately places an important question before us by drawing two portraits in our minds: the portrait of the wicked man and the portrait of the wise man. The question is then posed: Which are we? As we enter the sanctuary of the Psalms to worship and petition to the Lord, which side are we on?<sup>41</sup>

Both the wise man and the wicked man are characterized not only by their thinking but also by their living.

**Blessing.** The entire psalm (and Psalter) begins with blessing. The blessedness promised in verse 1 is not for the ungodly.<sup>42</sup> The ungodly man is marked by

---

<sup>39</sup>Derek Kidner, *Psalm 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009), 47.

<sup>40</sup>Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 1: 1.

<sup>41</sup>Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 45.

<sup>42</sup>James Montgomery Boice states, “In Hebrew the word [blessed] is actually a plural, which denotes either a multiplicity of blessings or an intensification of them.” He also argues that this interpretation is built into the overall progression of the psalm. James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1-41* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 15-16.

his pursuit of the counsel of the wicked. The text may imply a progression in the formation of ungodly character and life. Spurgeon draws a vivid progression with his words on this portion of Psalm 1:

When men are living in sin they go from bad to worse. At first they merely *walk* in the counsel of the careless and *ungodly*, who forget God—the evil is rather practical than habitual—but after that, they become habituated to evil, and they *stand* in the way of open *sinner*s who willfully violate God’s commandments; and if let alone, they go one step further; and become themselves pestilent teachers and tempters of others, and thus they *sit in the seat of the scornful*. They have taken their degrees in vice, and as true Doctors of Damnation they are installed.<sup>43</sup>

Further support for this interpretation can be found in the overall intent of the psalm, which surely points to the godly man that is marked by a steady progress in the formation of godly character.

**Meditation.** The focus of the godly is not on the counsel of the wicked. Instead of walking in the way of the world, the blessed man is the one who delights in the law of the Lord. This law or instruction concerning the ways and will of God is the foundation of his life. These words mirror closely the words of Joshua 1:8. Joshua was commanded to meditate “day and night.” The psalmist describes the heart of the godly man as one that meditates “day and night.” Once again the content of meditation is the objective Word of God.

**Fruitfulness.** Thoughts are not separated from life and conduct. Derek Kidner reminds readers, “The psalm is content to develop this one theme, implying that whatever really shapes a man’s thinking shapes his life.”<sup>44</sup> Just as the ungodly listened to the counsel of the wicked and also embraced that way of life, so now the godly man listens to the law of the Lord and embraces this way of life. The blessedness attached in verse 1 continues in verse 3. The psalmist uses the illustration of the fruitful and stable

---

<sup>43</sup>Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1: 1-2. Emphasis original.

<sup>44</sup>Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 48.

tree to describe the spiritual life of the man of God. He is “planted,” but the ungodly are like “chaff that the wind drives away.” The godly man’s life brings forth fruit “in its season.” Commenting on the promise/hope held out in this picture, Kidner states,

The phrase *its fruit in its season* emphasizes both the distinctiveness and the quiet growth of the product; for the tree is no mere channel, piping water unchanged from one place to another, but a living organism which absorbs it, to produce in due course something new and delightful, proper to its kind and to its time.<sup>45</sup>

The psalm not only provides a portrait of godliness but also a practical guide as to how to grow in godliness. Psalm 1 lays out the promise of blessing to anyone that will delight in the law of the Lord. If the Christian wants to grow in godliness and if he or she desires the blessed life, then it seems once again to focus the attention first on meditation.

### **Philippians 4:8: The Content of Meditation**

Some commentators speculate that Paul begins this verse with a catalog of virtues as was commonly used by the secular writers of his day.<sup>46</sup> While this is possible, it seems unlikely due to the overall context of the letter where he has drawn the readers’ attention to their heavenly citizenship instead of their earthly one (3:20-21). Silva takes this view, arguing, “The idea that at this point in the letter Paul descends from such heights and asks his brothers merely to act like well-behaved Greek citizens can hardly be taken seriously.”<sup>47</sup> Silva cites both the broad context of the letter and the immediate context of 3:2-4:9 as pointers to this list of virtues “as representing distinctly Christian

---

<sup>45</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup>For example, Max Anders summarizes this interpretation/approach: “Such virtues are not limited to the Christian community but are recognized even by pagan cultures.” Max Anders, *Philippians*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 262.

<sup>47</sup>Moses Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 197.

virtues” while acknowledging “we need not deny that many non-Christian citizens exemplify such virtues in their lives.”<sup>48</sup>

**Content of godly thinking.** Philippians 4:8 reads, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Stress is first laid upon the types of things that are to characterize the thinking of the Philippian believers. The list provided by Paul deals with the content of the thought life.

Most of the major translations use the term “true” for the first word on the list, as the ESV does (KJV, NASB, NIV). The word for truth is the Greek word *alethes*, which means that which is correct or genuine.<sup>49</sup> *Semnos* is the next word in the list, variously reflected in the translations as “honest” (KJV), “noble” (NIV), and “honorable” (NASB). The Philippians must also focus their minds on whatever is right (*δικαιος*) in the eyes of God. *Hagnos* comes from the same root as *hagios*, which means holy or sacred.<sup>50</sup> “Lovely” is the next word on Paul’s list, referring “to things that attract, please, and win other people’s admiration and affection.”<sup>51</sup> The ESV rendering of “commendable” is a translation of a word that has an active sense and means “fair- sounding” or “well-speaking” (the KJV “good report,” the NASB “good repute”).<sup>52</sup> Melick suggests that “excellence” means *morally excellent*, used in Peter’s writings to describe Christian virtue.<sup>53</sup> Silva notes that the last term *epainos*, “though relatively common in Paul,

---

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Brown, *The New International Dictionary*, s.v. “truth.”

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., s.v. “holy.”

<sup>51</sup>Anders, *Philippians*, 262.

<sup>52</sup>Peter T. O’ Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 505.



occurs here in an unusual passive sense.”<sup>54</sup> Most versions translate the word as either “worthy of praise” or “praiseworthy.”

**The command to think.** Some Christians often refer to this verse as the Philippians 4:8 filter. Just as a coffee filter keeps the grounds from getting into the coffee pot, so also these virtues should be used as a filter to keep out the contaminants of a sinful culture. Peter T. O’Brien argues that the emphasis is placed on the reflection on the positive, rather than on critical evaluation, “λογίζεσθε [the command to think] refers not so much to a critical evaluation of heathen culture and its standards of morality as to a careful taking into account and reflection on these positive characteristics so that their conduct will be shaped by them.”<sup>55</sup> Reflection on these characteristics will no doubt lead believers to reject and filter out much of what they see and hear in culture. Melick suggests that the command to think “means far more than simple thought. The church was to count on these things and to chart its course according to them.”<sup>56</sup>

The tie between thinking and conduct is reflected in the next verse, Philippians 4:9, where Paul states, “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—*practice* these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” It is clear that Paul is holding himself up as someone who has modeled these traits before the Philippian believers. These Christians had not only received things that were true, honorable, right, etc., but they had also viewed Paul’s embodiment of these virtues. Now the challenge was for them to think on these same traits so that their living would reflect the same. Commenting on the tie between thought and practice, Melick states, “After presenting the

---

<sup>53</sup>Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 151.

<sup>54</sup>Silva, *Philippians*, 197.

<sup>55</sup>O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 507.

<sup>56</sup>Melick, *Philippians*, 150.

standard for the thought life, Paul turned to Christian practice. The church was to cultivate the things it saw in Paul. Again the theme of imitation predominates.”<sup>57</sup>

**Blessings of peace.** In the broader context of Philippians 4:4-9, Paul has indicated that the peace of God is granted in exchange for the anxiety of the believer. When they bring their worries to God in the form of prayer and supplications with thanksgiving, He grants His peace to guard their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (4:6-7). There is, therefore, a promise attached to the command, “Don’t worry about anything; instead pray about everything” (NLT). It is the promise of the peace of God.

The promise of peace is also offered for the command for meditation and practice. If the believer will meditate on those characteristics that are excellent and worthy of praise—so that their conduct is shaped by it—then Paul assures them that the “God of peace will be with you.” While the peace of God is promised in verse 7, the very presence of God is the anchor of assurance for believers who will continually think and live in the ways expressed by the apostle.

### **Understanding: 2 Timothy 2:7**

The final Scripture to explore is found in Paul’s last letter to Timothy. Second Timothy was most likely written around A.D. 66-67.<sup>58</sup> As Paul passes off of the scene, he charges young Timothy to discharge all of the duties related to the ministry (4:5). The ministry must be one that is centered on the Word of God. As the culture surrounding Timothy goes from bad to worse (3:13), the young Christian leader must cling to the unchanging Word of God.

---

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>58</sup>Suggested by Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 426-27. George Knight points to the writings of the early church fathers who wrote about Paul’s death in Rome under the reign of Nero. He concludes, “Assuming that this testimony about Paul’s death under Nero is correct, the conclusion of Nero’s reign in AD 68 makes that date, or, more likely, the year before (AD 67) in order to accommodate the events referred to in 2 Timothy 4, the latest that 2 Timothy may be dated.” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 53-54.

Several specific commands related to the Word of God are found throughout the letter. These commands alternate between Paul's own inspired words and the scriptures Timothy has known from childhood (3:15). For example, Timothy is to keep and also guard what has been entrusted to him through the apostle Paul (1:13-14). Chapter 2 presents another challenge and responsibility of ministry: Timothy must take what Paul has said and teach it to other reliable men who, in turn, can teach others also (2:1-2). The broader command is found later in chapter 2 where Timothy is told, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2:15, NIV). Timothy has known the Scriptures from childhood (3:15) and is now admonished to continue in what he has learned. Paul insists that every word of Scripture is God-breathed (3:16) and therefore is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness—for Timothy and for his hearers. It is this Word, that has been given by God in the Scriptures, that is to be the proclamation of the Christian minister even when people do not wish to hear it (4:1-5).

**Inspiration of the Scriptures.** The Greek word that is translated in 3:16 as "God-breathed" (NIV) is the word *theonuestos*. Paul maintains that all of the sacred writings are inspired. The term that is used for Scripture is the term *graphe*. Paul's assertion here is that all of the Old Testament writings are from the mouth of God. The Bible in many places affirms the *inspiration* of its authors. Inspiration may be defined as "the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit on the writers of the Scriptures so that, fully using their own personalities and writing styles, they wrote precisely what God intended them to write and therefore are God's words as well as man's words."<sup>59</sup> However, what is one to make of Paul's words? Are his words on the same level as Scripture?

---

<sup>59</sup>Robert L. Saucy, "Is the Bible a Human Book?" in *Understanding Christian Theology*, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 73.

In 2 Peter 3:15-16, the apostle places the words of Paul on the same authoritative level as the rest of the Scriptures. Peter indicates that some people distort the difficult sayings of Paul “as they do the rest of the Scriptures.” Commenting on this phrase, Wayne Grudem states,

Since *graphe* in the New Testament always refers to the Old Testament Scriptures, which both Jews and Christians held to be authoritative words from God, it is noteworthy that Peter here classifies all of Paul’s epistles as *graphai*. This is an indication that very early in the history of the church Paul’s epistles were considered to be God’s written words in the same sense as the Old Testament texts.<sup>60</sup>

**Illumination and understanding.** All of the previous discussion on the words of Scripture is crucial for the overall setting of 2:7: “Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.” This command comes to Timothy on the heels of Paul’s instruction to take his share of suffering through the illustrations of a soldier (2:3-4), an athlete (2:5), and a hard-working farmer (2:6). Once again the command to meditate is central to the formation of Timothy’s spiritual life. The focus of Timothy’s meditation in this particular context is the inspired, written words of Paul. The result of Timothy’s disciplined thinking is clear—the Lord will give him understanding. In fact, the Greek sentence structure suggests that the gift of understanding is held out as a cause or reason (Greek: *γάρ*) for Timothy’s obedience to Paul’s command to think.

When the work of the Spirit upon the authors of the Bible is discussed, evangelical Christians maintain use of the term “inspiration.” These were holy men of God who were “moved by the Holy Spirit.” Only the authors of Scripture are inspired in this sense. However, the Holy Spirit continues to provide *illumination* for those who read, hear, or ponder the truth of Scripture. Robert Stein defines illumination as the work of the Holy Spirit, which assists the reader in gaining the sense and significance of God’s special, written revelation.<sup>61</sup> The Spirit is still actively at work, engaging the hearts and

---

<sup>60</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 46.

<sup>61</sup>Robert Stein, *Playing by the Rules: A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*

minds of men and women who come into contact with the Bible. Hayne P. Griffin comments on this process of arriving at understanding: “The term ‘insight’ refers to the faculty of right judgment or comprehension. Timothy was to put his mind to use in reflecting on Paul’s metaphors, but genuine understanding would come from the Lord (1 Cor 2:10).”<sup>62</sup> As Timothy prayerfully ponders the illustrations, he will see instances in his life where he does not need to get entangled in “civilian” affairs. If he will think hard about the athlete’s crown, then the Lord will give understanding for his personal race of faith. The psalmist claimed that he had more insight than all of his teachers (Ps 119:99). How did this come about? It came as a gift from God as the psalmist gave himself to the hard and delightful work of biblical meditation.

In this text, Paul indicates that illumination comes as a gift from God, yet it comes in connection with Timothy’s disciplined meditation on the objective words from Paul. Therefore, biblical meditation encourages people to be actively engaging the text instead of emptying the mind. Biblical meditation is disciplined thought and demands an intentionality that Timothy must provide. In the overall picture of sanctification, God is at work sanctifying His people and His people are seeking to work out what He is working in (Phil 2:12-13). Specifically in this text, the image is the man of God actively pursuing understanding through reflection, coupled with the gift of understanding provided by the Lord. Robertson McQuilkin discusses both the similarities and differences between inspiration and illumination, both of which are directly related to the ministry of the Spirit:

The role of the Spirit is indispensable to proper biblical interpretation. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible and He illumines Christians who read the words centuries later. Inspiration means that God superintended the writing of Scripture down to the last “jot and tittle.” Illumination means that the Holy Spirit is

---

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), chap. 3.

<sup>62</sup>Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *II Timothy*, New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Holman, 1992), 205.

now at work in the Christian to help him understand what is already there and to assist in applying the Word authentically.<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

These four texts provide a solid foundation for a proper understanding of biblical mediation. It is interesting that the four texts, written by three different authors, follow a similar pattern—if one meditates on God’s Word, then blessings follow. In other words, reward is held out for those that will make it their consistent and continual practice to meditate on God’s revelation of Himself. Donald S. Whitney comments on the benefits attached to obedience:

Teaching on meditation is more winsome when we emphasize its benefits. True success is promised to those who meditate on the Bible (Josh 1:8). In Psalm 1:1-3 God pledges stability, fruitfulness, perseverance, and prosperity to those who think deeply about what He has written. Meditation also insures unusual wisdom and insight.<sup>64</sup>

Also, as noted previously, Philippians 4:8-9 promises the peace of God and His presence to those who meditate and obey His Word. Understanding is the fruit of disciplined thinking for the student of the Bible.

Whitney’s definition of meditation is “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”<sup>65</sup> The Scriptures that have been examined in this chapter have dealt primarily with the first two purposes revealed in Whitney’s definition. Each of the texts has the implicit purpose of understanding (it is explicitly mentioned in 2 Tim 2:7). Joshua 1:8 especially highlights the need for personal obedience (application) to the law; meditation is not enough. The third and final purpose for meditation, according to the above definition, is the purpose of prayer.

---

<sup>63</sup>Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 43.

<sup>64</sup>Donald Whitney, “Teaching Scripture Intake,” in *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 170.

<sup>65</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 48.

Howard Neil Wallace, in his book *Words to God, Word from God: The Psalms in the Prayer and Preaching of the Church*, mentions that Dietrich Bonhoeffer “stressed that it a dangerous error to assume the heart can pray by itself” and “prayer does not mean simply to pour out one’s heart. It means rather to find the way to God and to speak with him, whether the heart is full or empty.”<sup>66</sup> Perhaps one of the most undervalued purposes of biblical meditation is prayer. In biblical meditation the believer is filled with the words from God, expressly revealing His character and will, so that the believer may be filled with the words to pray back to God in confidence and intimacy. The next chapter seeks to explore the crucial link between meditation and prayer.

---

<sup>66</sup>Howard Neil Wallace, *Words to God, Word from God: The Psalms in the Prayer and Preaching of the Church* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 20.

CHAPTER 3  
THE LINK BETWEEN BIBLICAL  
MEDITATION AND PRAYER

**Introduction**

The focus of this chapter is to explore the link between biblical meditation and prayer. The chapter will begin an overview of some biblical examples of scriptural based prayer—characters found within the biblical record who are presented praying the Word of God. While these characters provide the example of praying the Scriptures, they do not provide as much detail or instruction as to how this kind of prayer may be developed or cultivated. Therefore, special consideration in this chapter is given to the life of George Mueller, with an in-depth look at his key discovery regarding meditation on Scripture and its link to prayer. Mueller’s personal account of this discovery not only gives a testimony to this particular way of praying, but also provides counsel for other believers so that they too might learn the same path of transformative prayer.

In addition, three other influential Christian leaders and their works are examined briefly in order to show how important meditation and prayer have been in the Protestant tradition. The prayer lives of Joseph Hall, Nathaniel Ranew, and Matthew Henry provide insights into the world of meditation in prayer by and in their works *The Art of Divine Meditation* (Hall), *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation* (Ranew), and *A Method for Prayer* (Henry). Excerpts and ideas from these three writings will be provided. Mueller is at the end of a long chain of people, including these men, who held meditation on Scripture and prayer together.

Following the example of these leaders, with primary emphasis on Mueller’s counsel, suggestions are made in order to implement improvements in both private and



corporate prayer. Believers can rediscover the wonderful benefits that praying the Scriptures affords. Since people will generally pray in public in the same manner as they pray in private, special attention is given to one spiritual tool that aids in personal meditation and prayer. The personal spiritual discipline of journaling will be discussed as both a prompter for prayer and an evaluation tool for the spiritual journey.

### **The Missing Link**

Donald S. Whitney states, “Meditation is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer.”<sup>1</sup> However, relatively few Christians may even be aware that there is a missing link. Many Christians would be willing to admit quickly that their prayer life is not what it ought to be. Sadly, the prayer life of many is lacking in fervency and power. The problems with prayer are acknowledged—inattention, mindless routines or “ruts” in prayer, a lack of interest, a sense of prayers going unanswered, a loss for knowing what to say in prayer, and so forth. While some Christians may be quick to admit the problems with prayer, few, perhaps, would be able to put their finger on biblical solutions to these problems. Many of the difficulties encountered in prayer could be overcome with proper attention given to the spiritual discipline of meditation on Scripture.

### **Jesus and Prayer**

The first disciples evidently knew something of a prayer life that was lacking. On one occasion their failure to cast out a demon was tied to their inadequacies in prayer (Mark 9:29). Certainly another way the followers of Christ sensed their own deficiency in prayer was through their hearing of Jesus’ prayers. It is remarkable that the disciples of Jesus did not ask to be taught how to preach or teach. If they did ask, then it is not recorded in Scripture. However, the Bible records these men asking Jesus to teach them

---

<sup>1</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 71.

to pray (Luke 11). This question and the corresponding teachable moment came on the heels of hearing Jesus pray.

But do believers really have to be taught to pray? The Scriptures declare that disciples of Jesus receive the Spirit of God at conversion, the Spirit who moves them to intercession. One might argue that the Bible places the emphasis on the heart of prayer, not necessarily on believers having the right words in prayer. Surely the disciples who asked Jesus to teach them to pray had prayed before. There is a sense in which they knew how to pray. Yet, when comparing their prayers with the prayers of Jesus, they sensed that they did not know how to pray. His prayers were full of authenticity, power, and confidence. As the disciples listened to Jesus pray, there was an obvious gap between their prayer life and His. One might point to His divinity, as if His divinity enabled Him to pray above and beyond normal human capabilities. However, the Scriptures teach both His full deity *and* His full humanity. So, from a human standpoint, what was it that made His prayers so refreshingly different?

John's gospel account asserts from the beginning that Jesus Christ was the Word of God in the flesh. While the disciples followed Jesus, they saw and heard the Word in full humanity. Yet the Gospel accounts consistently show Christ's earthly dependence on the Word of God. Jesus' reliance on the Word is especially highlighted in his temptation in the wilderness. In each temptation Jesus demonstrated perfectly that "man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).

An ongoing dependence on the Word is also present when His prayers are considered. Obviously the Scriptures do not record every prayer He prayed, nor do they give views into the typical prayers that happened day-in-and-day-out for His entire life. However, as a Jew, Jesus would have been exposed to and reared in the prayer practices of His day. One example of this would be in the prayers offered in worship at the Temple—"the house of prayer" (Isa 56:7). The *Eighteen Benedictions* (as one example)

was a prayer that was most likely used during the time of Jesus. J. D. G. Dunn suggests that it was probably used by Jesus. Describing the elements he states,

Characteristic of each is the final response or blessing (hence the title): “Blessed are you, Lord . . .”—“shield of Abraham,” “who makes the dead alive,” “who delights in repentance,” “rich in forgiveness,” “who humbles the insolent,” “who builds Jerusalem,” “who hears prayer.”<sup>2</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine the background and content of the phrases that makeup this Jewish prayer. At the very least, however, it seems the phrases mentioned came from a long-standing and growing understanding of God as He had revealed Himself to His people. References to God being the “shield of Abraham” (Gen 15:1) and the one “who builds Jerusalem” (Ps 147) come from special revelation. Evidently the Jews at the time of Jesus had, as their normal course of praying, prayers that consisted of scriptural references or allusions.

Perhaps the greatest example of Jesus personally praying the Scriptures comes in his hour of greatest agony—on the cross. He takes, for instance, the words of Psalm 22:1 and applies them to himself. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” are the prophetic words that pointed to Christ but also are now on the cross the heartfelt words of prayer from Christ. Hundreds of years before the death of the Son of God, David had uttered, “Into your hand I commit my spirit” (Ps 31:5). Jesus takes these words and prays them as he yields up his spirit into the Father’s hands. The Gospel writers go out of their way to show that Christ, as He said, has come to fulfill all of the Law and the Prophets. Both these writers and Jesus himself are seeing His life and death as the final fulfillment of all of Old Testament history, including these prayers of David the King of Israel.

---

<sup>2</sup>J. D. G. Dunn, “Prayer: 1. Jewish Prayer at the Time of Jesus,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1992), 617.

## **Old Testament Prayer**

The practice of using the Scriptures in prayer is obviously not limited to Jesus. Praying the Scriptures, which reveal God’s character and His promises, is seen frequently in the biblical record. One of the early instances of this way of prayer is found in Genesis 32:9,12. In this text readers are presented with the character of Jacob who “reminds” God of His promises—ones that God had previously and personally spoken to Jacob. The context of this account is one where Jacob finds himself gripped by the fear of what Esau might do to him in exacting revenge. However, this fear propels Jacob to grip the greater promises of God and then to turn the promises back to the Lord in prayer. In verse 9 he says, “O LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good.’” In light of the unknown calamities that Esau might bring, Jacob clings to the known promise from God: “But you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude’” (Gen 39:12).

Another Old Testament example is found in the prayer offered by Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20. The setting is a time when both the personal and national faith are threatened by intense and overwhelming fear. News has reached the king’s ears that a great multitude is coming against him and his people. In response to this threat he begins to seek the Lord and proclaims a fast. All of the people of Judah gather in order to corporately seek the Lord for His deliverance and protection. As the people are waiting together before him, Jehoshaphat offers a corporate prayer. In this prayer he makes an allusion to God’s response to Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple. God had promised to hear genuine, heartfelt prayer when the people turned their hearts toward the place where His glory dwelt. Now, years later, the man of God finds the words from this promise that become his ground of confidence when faced with calamity.

## **Prayer in the Early Church**

The New Testament shows the picture of the early church as it continued the

practice of praying the Scriptures. An example of the saints praying the Word of God is found in the account of Acts 4:23-31. As the infant church expands, they face growing opposition and even threats from authorities. These believers react to the rising tension by gathering together to pray for boldness and power. The actual prayer is recorded in Acts 4:24-30. In this brief prayer, two verses that the believers used come directly from Psalm 2. Commenting on this Psalm, Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner states, “It is much quoted in the New Testament, both for its high claims for the Person of God’s Anointed and for its vision of His universal Kingdom.”<sup>3</sup> While it is often quoted in the New Testament, here the quotation is found *in the corporate prayer* offered while God’s kingdom is expanding. While the psalm had historical roots in David and the kings that followed him, ultimately the psalm pointed Old Testament readers to Christ. Kidner draws out the implications of the original Psalm for these believers in the early church: “A greater, however, than David or Solomon was needed to justify the full fury of these threats and the glory of these promises.”<sup>4</sup> Once again, it becomes clear that God’s people are learning to lay hold of Him in prayer by the promises that find their “amen” in Jesus.

In all the previous examples, which span much of the history of God’s people recorded in the Bible, the link between meditation and prayer is not described in great detail. It is, however, modeled. These men and women had learned to take God’s Word into their hearts, and in turn, speak them from their hearts to God. Great men and women of faith are seen taking the *words from God* and turning them back into *words of prayer to God*. Despite this, neither Jesus nor the apostles go into detailed instructions about the link between meditation and prayer. For counsel concerning this link, George Mueller serves, perhaps, as the best example.

---

<sup>3</sup>Derek Kidner, *Psalm 1-71: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1973), 50.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

## George Mueller: Man of Faith and Prayer

George Mueller was born in Prussia in 1805. He spent the early years of his life in a habitual cycle of sin. In his own account, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Mueller*, he reflects on his early childhood practice of stealing. Looking back on his late childhood experience he wrote,

Though I was punished on this and other occasions, yet I do not remember that at any time, when my sins were found out, it made any other impression upon me than to make me think how I might do the thing the next time more cleverly, so as not to be detected. Hence it came, that this was not the last time to be guilty of stealing.<sup>5</sup>

Mueller's mother died when he was 14 years old. This loss did not have any positive influence in terms of steering his life in a different direction. He spent the next several years living in the same sinful pattern. The sins of drunkenness, theft, lying, and deceit continued to be a lifestyle for Mueller. His father wanted him to be a clergyman, not for the sake of God, but "so that I might have a comfortable living."<sup>6</sup> Even during his studies he displayed a darkened heart, a life without hope and without God in the world.

Mueller points to a Saturday evening in 1825 as the turning point in his life. Mueller attended a prayer meeting in a Christian home. He was impacted greatly by the piety and humility of the Christians who were present. Concerning that evening and his experience of grace, he wrote, "For I have not the least doubt, that on that evening, He began a work of grace in me, though I obtained joy without any deep sorrow of heart, and with scarcely any knowledge. That evening was the turning point of my life."<sup>7</sup> Mueller indeed had a turning point. Throughout the rest of his life, the man who formerly displayed unbelief turned into a man that demonstrated a vibrant faith in the living God.

---

<sup>5</sup>George Mueller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Mueller: Written by Himself Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Mueller Complete and Unabridged* (reprint, Muskegon, MI: Dust and Ashes, 2003), part 1.3.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 1.4

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

In 1832, Mueller and his wife moved to Bristol where he made his most memorable contribution to the church. During the early 1830s he began the Scriptural Knowledge Institute (S.K.I.). Mueller envisioned four purposes for this establishment. Through this institution he wanted to organize schools on a scriptural foundation, provide education for poor children, circulate the Scriptures, and support missionaries. Later he would add another purpose for the institute—to feed, clothe, and educate orphan children.<sup>8</sup> The orphanage became the ministry that marked George Mueller’s service in the kingdom of God. Cyril Davey states,

Believing that this was God’s will, Mueller was certain the Lord would provide what was necessary—1000 pounds to begin a home and the right people to run it. In April 1836, Mueller opened a home for thirty orphaned girls. The expenses were 240 pounds for the year, the income that came in amounted to 840 pounds. In December he opened another home for infants and nine months later a third for boys. Altogether he then had nearly one hundred children under care. This was the beginning of one of the most astounding stories of prayer and faith—what most people regard as a story of miracles. By 1870 the orphan homes, transferred to Ashley Down, had 2,000 resident children.<sup>9</sup>

It was indeed a story of miracles. The miracle of the orphanage is made up of hundreds of smaller stories of God’s provision. Evidently some people during Mueller’s day suggested that he had the gift of faith. For the “common” Christian of his day, there was no other way to explain all of the answers to prayer that Mueller witnessed. Some people estimate that Mueller recorded literally thousands of answers to prayer. Because of the numerous answers to prayer a great number of his contemporaries supposed he had extraordinary faith.

### **Ordinary Faith**

However, did Mueller regard his prayer life as extraordinary? Did he have the gift of faith? John Piper, in a lecture on Mueller, says, “To understand how Mueller

---

<sup>8</sup>Cyril Davey, *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, ed. John Woodbridge (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 322.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 322-23.

himself would answer this question, we have to see the way he distinguished between the extraordinary *gift* of faith and the more ordinary *grace* of faith.”<sup>10</sup> Piper maintains that Mueller made this distinction so that people would not elevate his prayer life above their own. Piper continues, “He constantly insisted that he did *not* have the gift of faith when people put him on a pedestal just because he would pray for his own needs and the needs of the orphans, and the money would arrive in remarkable ways.”<sup>11</sup> Listening to Mueller’s own words is instructive on this issue:

Think not, dear reader, that I have *the gift of faith*, that is, that gift of which we read in 1 Corinthians 12:9, and which is mentioned along with “the gifts of healing,” “the working of miracles,” “prophecy,” and that on that account I am able to trust in the Lord. *It is true* that the faith, which I am enabled to exercise, is altogether God's own gift; it is true that He alone supports it, and that He alone can increase it; it is true that, moment by moment, I depend upon Him for it, and that, if I were only one moment left to myself, my faith would utterly fail; but *it is not true* that my faith is that gift of faith which is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:9.<sup>12</sup>

This understanding of the grace of faith intersects with Mueller’s ambition for the orphanage ministry. What was Mueller’s primary motivation for starting the orphanage? While he mentions a few reasons, the one that stands out as the most important is the aim to use the orphanage to encourage other believers to trust the Lord through simple prayer. This ambition was one that grew over time as Mueller interacted with believers who struggled to trust the Lord for daily provisions in life. The following are his words on this experience and his resulting decision about the orphanage:

All these exercises of my soul, which resulted from the fact that so many believers, with whom I became acquainted, were harassed and distressed in mind, or brought guilt on their consciences, on account of not trusting in the Lord; were used by God to awaken in my heart the desire of setting before the church at large, and before the world, a proof that He has not in the least changed; and this seemed to me best done, by the establishing of an Orphan-House. It needed to be something which could be seen, even by the natural eye. Now, if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith,

---

<sup>10</sup>John Piper, “George Mueller’s Strategy for Showing God,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/george-muellers-strategy-for-showing-god> (accessed October 1, 2011). Emphasis original.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Mueller, *A Narrative*, 1: 302. Emphasis original.



obtained, without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan-House: there would be something which with the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God. This, then, was the primary reason, for establishing the Orphan-House. I certainly did from my heart desire to be used by God to benefit the bodies of poor children, bereaved of both parents, and seek, in other respects, with the help of God, to do them good for this life; I also particularly longed to be used by God in getting the dear orphans trained up in the fear of God ;-but still, the first and primary object of the work was, (and still is:) that God might be magnified by the fact, that the orphans under my care are provided, with all they need, only by prayer and faith, without any one being asked by me or my fellow-labourers, whereby it may be seen, that God is FAITHFUL STILL, and HEARS PRAYER STILL.<sup>13</sup>

Instead of extraordinary faith, it seems as if Mueller suggests his is an ordinary faith, the type that simply trusts the promises of God.

The particular aspect of his personal spiritual journey, which supports this foundational link between Scripture and prayer, centers on a discovery Mueller made years into his walk with the Lord. Mueller traces his growth and answers to prayer to a very simple practice—meditation that leads to prayer. The next excerpts are part of his description of this breakthrough as well as his spiritual advice for all believers.

### **Key Discovery and Change in Practice**

Mueller was several years into his Christian journey when he makes, in his own words, the most important discovery in his devotional life:

Before this time my practice had been, at least ten years previously, as a habitual thing, to give myself to prayer after having dressed in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing was to give myself to the reading of God's Word, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.

I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words of the Lord's blessing upon His precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God, searching as it were into every verse to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. This excerpt is part of an extended explanation by Mueller for the existence of the orphanage, which appears under section II, "Objects of the Institution." Emphasis original.

public ministry of the Word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.<sup>14</sup>

Mueller sought communion with the Lord and in his devotional practice it was prayer that took priority. Prayer was a discipline, a “habitual thing” for Mueller, yet it lacked the kind of power and intimacy that Mueller was seeking. While Mueller mixed both prayer and Scripture together, he indicates that at this point prayer came *first in actual practice*. Ten years into his spiritual pilgrimage he moves meditation to the forefront in his daily disciplines.

Mueller states several purposes for this. First, he speaks of meditating on Scripture prior to praying so that his heart might be “comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed . . .” He also indicates that through the meditation on the Word he is “brought into experimental<sup>15</sup> communion with the Lord.” He searches the Word “to get blessing out of it.” Mueller, the one who was instrumental in feeding thousands, began to understand he needed to meditate first “for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.”

## **Impact**

The impact of this fundamental change in practice was profound. Mueller describes the outcome or fruit of his new order of the disciplines in the following paragraph:

The result I have found to be almost invariably is this, that after a few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less to prayer. When thus I have been for a while making confession or intercession or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next word or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead it, but still continually keeping that food for my own soul which is the object of my meditation. The result of this is that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even

---

<sup>14</sup>Mueller, *A Narrative* 1.3, “May 7.”

<sup>15</sup>Today, the equivalent would be found in the term “experiential.”

sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart.<sup>16</sup>

When changes are made in habits or practices, the results from those changes should be examined. From a pragmatic standpoint only, Mueller's change in devotional practice offers plenty of incentives for others to try the same method. The fruit of this approach he experienced "almost invariably." He did not, as a fallen creature, enjoy or expect perfect results and experiences in the disciplines, but he did find consistent spiritual nourishment. Mueller's personal testimony from several years of practice is that this prescribed procedure generates spiritual support on a regular basis.

Another observable by-product of this approach to prayer is balance. Most would probably agree that personal and public prayer tends to fall into categories of supplication—asking in regard to specific needs. While there is certainly nothing wrong with praying for personal needs, there are commands and promises tied to other aspects of prayer. There ought to be balance in the types of prayers offered at home or at church. Mueller's discovery shows that proper meditation on Scripture tends to move people in the direction of balance.

The reason that this type of prayer promotes balance is due to the fact that it is the Word of God that prompts or guides the prayer. Therefore, if the words of Scripture lead to thanksgiving, then the prayer will be one of thanksgiving to God. If the text points to a particular sin, then the prayer would move to confession. At the same time, what Mueller describes has a natural flow of movement. In other words, the believer is not directed to pray in a mechanical or even methodical fashion—instead he or she is directed to pray as the Word leads.

Mueller maintains that usually this practice also results in his soul being "sensibly nourished." How many contemporary Christians are often able to get up from their devotional practice and say this? While no one practicing the disciplines of

---

<sup>16</sup>Mueller, *A Narrative* 1.3, "May 7."

meditation and prayer should have the expectation that there will never be days of spiritual drought, Mueller says that those days are the exception rather than the norm. It is only with rare exception that this type of prayer does not have him “in a peaceful if not happy state of heart.”

### **Previous Practice versus New**

In the following paragraph, Mueller further elaborates on the differences between his previous and present practice. One might notice the struggles related to prayer in the “old” way of approaching his time with the Lord:

The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer. . . . But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour on my knees before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then really began to pray.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the common problems associated with prayer—both public and private—are all confessed by Mueller. Christians sometimes find that obstacles to prayer exist. One obstacle to prayer is the tendency for the mind to wander about instead of focusing on communicating with God. Many Christians confess that he or she has struggled with “ruts or routine prayers.” These are times when the prayer life is stifled and it is extremely challenging to overcome the spiritual funk. Another hindrance to true prayer can surface when Christians pray the same things over and over and use “filler” prayer.<sup>18</sup> It is remarkable that a prayer giant like Mueller shares this as his testimony concerning prayer. No wonder many Christians face discouragement in prayer—entering into true prayer often does not come with ease. In fact, believers occasionally find that it is only after much time and struggle that both the mind and heart are ready to pray.

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003), 86.

## Strength to the Inner Man

According to Mueller, the spiritual strength that is essential to prayer comes from meditation on the Word:

I scarcely ever now suffer in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word. It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point . . . and yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is to obtain food for the inner man.

Now what is food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again, not just the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it passes only through our minds, just as water passes through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it and applying it to our hearts.<sup>19</sup>

According to Mueller, meditation is the first priority in the disciplines: “The first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning.” He uses the scriptural illustration of the Word of God being nourishment or food for the soul. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). The first thing the child of God is to do is to give herself to obtaining this food.

Simple reading of the Bible is not enough for healthy spiritual formation. Even though Mueller counsels believers to read through the Bible, he presses them to go further than mere reading.<sup>20</sup> Meditation is the “considering,” the “pondering over,” the “applying” what one reads. Reading the Bible without meditation can allow the words to pass through the minds like water passes through a pipe—meditation causes the words of Scripture to soak down into the heart. When the Word has reached both the mind and heart, then the inner man is strengthened to carry out the task of prayer. Mueller mentions this connection:

---

<sup>19</sup>Mueller, *A Narrative* 1.3.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 1. In the first section of his narrative, Mueller comments on the crucial role of reading the Bible: “It is of immense importance for the understanding of the word of God, to read it in course, so that we may read every day a portion of the Old and a portion of the New Testament, going on where we previously left off.”

When we pray we speak to God. Now prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season therefore when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the Word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove. We may therefore profitably mediate with God's blessing though we are ever so weak spiritually; nay, the weaker we are, the more we need meditation for the strengthening of our inner man. Thus there is far less to be feared from wandering of mind than if we give ourselves to prayer without having had time previously for meditation.<sup>21</sup>

Prayer done merely out of routine can be carried out without meditation. Yet, Mueller maintains that true prayer springs from godly desire. In order for this type of prayer (true prayer) to continue for any length of time (whether at a set time of prayer or over the course of one's life), there has to be enough godly strength or desire within the individual to pray. Mueller asserts that this godly desire or strength is the result of meditation. Therefore, prayer and meditation are linked together. While meditation and prayer go hand in hand, Mueller suggests that meditation is to proceed or come before prayer—indeed it enables prayer.

Another important aspect of this paragraph is that it teaches that any person can meditate and pray in this way and every person who does so can benefit—those who are weak and those who are spiritual. Because the Word is deeper and richer than finite minds can fathom, there is always more strength available. Mueller reminds believers of their relationship with God. Disciples of Jesus come to God as the Father and He speaks through His word—providing the very words of relationship that His children turn back to Him in prayer.

### **Tried and Tested Practice**

George Mueller found praying the Scriptures to be immensely beneficial for his soul. It proved to be a way of prayer that not only passed the test of experience, but also passed the test of time:

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow believers to ponder this matter, By the blessing of God, I ascribe to this mode the help and strength which I have had from God to pass in peace through deeper trials, in various ways, than I have even had before; and having now above fourteen years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it.<sup>22</sup>

Mueller humbly and yet confidently recommends this practice to other believers. He ascribes “to this mode,” that is to this method, the help and spiritual strength found during deep spiritual trials. This is a tried and tested practice—one he had at the time of writing—put to use for over fourteen years.

What then was his “spiritual secret?” How can today’s Christian, regardless of age or experience, learn to pray as Mueller did? One of the lessons to learn from Mueller is that he is not alone in his experience of meditation. His “discovery” was also the foundation of the devotional vitality of the Puritans.

### **Meditation and Prayer—the Puritans**

Though there is no evidence that Mueller was influenced by the works of the following individuals, it is crucial to underscore that what he discovered was really at the heart of a long-standing tradition. Three men who stand in the tradition of the Puritans show that scriptural meditation linked to prayer is not an idea unique to Mueller. His “discovery” of the priority of meditation before and with prayer is a constant emphasis of the following men and their specific writings.

#### **Joseph Hall and Meditation**

Joseph Hall’s *The Art of Divine Meditation* stands out as an important work on meditation among the divines of his day. The book was originally published in 1607. It became widely read and was particularly influential among the Puritans. Kaufmann

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

stresses the influence of Hall among the Puritan movement through *The Art of Divine Meditation*:

The central tradition in formal Puritan meditation may be said to begin with Joseph Hall. . . . In its categories and emphases, his *Art of Divine Meditation* . . . proved to be the source of a stream of influence that extended the length of the seventeenth century.<sup>23</sup>

Chapters 1-8 cover the benefits and uses of meditation. In this opening section Hall discusses both extemporaneous meditation and deliberate meditation.

Extemporaneous meditation is that which is prompted by experience; a type of meditation that is initiated by the careful observance of nature. This meditation is also the kind one enters through daily encounters and experiences. Concerning the observance of God's created order, Hall writes, "The creatures are half lost if we only employ them, not learn something from them. God is wronged if His creatures be unregarded; ourselves most of all if we regard this great volume of the creatures and take no lesson for our instruction."<sup>24</sup> Hall's main thrust in the book, however, is deliberate meditation that comes through focusing the mind and heart on one issue, the intentional practice of examining and probing one subject, particularly something found in Scripture.

The second major section, chapters 9-17, explains some of the practical elements attached to meditation such as places and postures. Postures are as varied as the persons meditating are. Whether a person chooses to kneel or to walk, the posture should communicate reverence and further the devotional life. Hall advises, "In this let every man be his own master, so be we use that frame of body that may both testify reverence and in some cases help stir up to further devotion."<sup>25</sup> The best place for meditation is

---

<sup>23</sup>U. Milo Kaufman, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 120-21.

<sup>24</sup>Joseph Hall, *The Art of Divine Meditation* (reprint, Mulberry, IN: Sovereign Grace, 2007), 74.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 82.



where the person can be alone with God: “Solitariness of place is the fittest for meditation.”<sup>26</sup> Hall then cites Jesus, John the Baptist, Isaac, and David as biblical examples of this practice.

Chapters 18-27 cover the method of meditation which Hall elaborates on in great detail. Each chapter is devoted to a different aspect or step in meditation, similar to holding up a diamond and turning it to observe all sides. In other words, the observer may look at the diamond as a whole or look at the parts—this is similar to the work of meditation. Hall takes the reader through the steps or stages of meditation, providing biblical examples as he proceeds. Essentially, Hall bombards the text with questions, some of which are similar to the types of questions normally employed in some modern day textbooks on biblical interpretation.

The questions of Hall may be taken and adapted for modern use. Donald S. Whitney, in his book *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*, provides a list of Hall’s questions adapted to more contemporary language:

1. What is it (define and/or describe it is)?
2. What are the divisions or parts?
3. What causes it?
4. What does it cause, i.e., its fruits and effects?
5. What is its place, location, or use?
6. What are its qualities and attachments?
7. What is contrary, contradictory, or different to it?
8. What compares to it?
9. What are its titles or names?
10. What are the testimonies or examples of Scripture about it?<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>27</sup>Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*, 72-73.

Hall advises readers to begin the work of meditation with prayer. This prayer is to be a brief acknowledgment and request for the Lord's enablement in meditation. After dealing with meditation in great detail, Hall then moves back to the "entrance" work of prayer. Prayer, which marked the entrance to the work of meditation, is now shown to be the fruit or outcome of godly meditation. He discusses this by noting the proper forms or types of prayer that one should work through in response to meditation, including confession, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving.<sup>28</sup> Once again, as witnessed in Mueller, it is seen that exposure to the Word is what fills the mind and fuels the heart for prayer.

In a way strikingly similar to Mueller, Hall practically guarantees spiritual results from this way of prayer:

This course of meditation thus heartily observed, let him that practiceth it tell me he find not that his soul, which at the beginning of this exercise did but creep and grovel upon the earth, do not now in the conclusion soar aloft in heaven and, being before aloof off, do not now find itself near to God, yea, with Him and in Him.<sup>29</sup>

Hall, like many of the Puritans, found this way—meditation and prayer linked together—to be a tried and tested practice that raises even the sluggish soul heavenward.

The connection or link between meditation and prayer cannot be missed when reading Hall. For Hall,

Prayer maketh way for meditation; meditation giveth matter, strength, and life to our prayers, by which, as all other things are sanctified to us, so we are sanctified to all holy things. . . . Prayer, therefore, and meditation are as those famous twins in the story, or as two loving turtles, whereof separate one, the other languisheth.<sup>30</sup>

Christians who follow Hall's counsel will find that meditation and prayer are inseparably linked—to separate them is to bring about spiritual loss. Keeping the two together is the God-ordained path in these foundational disciplines.

---

<sup>28</sup>Hall, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 100-06.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

## Nathaniel Ranew and Meditation

Little is known about Nathaniel Ranew. He is mentioned by Spurgeon, who evidently found Ranew to be a safe and stimulating spiritual guide.<sup>31</sup> In the foreword of his book *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation*, the following information about Ranew is found:

Nathaniel Ranew (1602-1678) was admitted to Emmanuel College in 1617, graduating with a B.A. in 1621 and M.A. in 1624. He was the minister at St. Andrew Hubbard, Little Eastcheap, London from 1627 until 1647, when he was instituted under a parliamentary order to the vicarage of Felsted, Essex. Ranew took a prominent place among Essex non-conformists. He was ejected from Felsted by the Act of Conformity in 1662, and settled in Billericay, where he was buried on March 17, 1678. Edmund Calamy, in his “Non-Conformist’s Memorial,” calls him “a judicious divine, generally esteemed and valued.”<sup>32</sup>

*Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation* is a lengthy treatment on the subject of meditation. The reader can gain insight into Ranew’s thoughts on God’s prescribed path for men to pursue godliness: “We have a saying in divinity, ‘The way to godliness is within godliness;’ that is, the way to learn it is to act it, and the way to facilitate and make it easy, is by exercising ourselves still in it, setting upon and keeping up the practice of it.”<sup>33</sup> It is clear that he practices what he preaches when it comes to meditation. Ranew gives attention to the specific discipline of meditation, providing over three hundred pages of counsel for the reader. The treasures of the book, given its length, are found by consistent searching. The book is best read, it seems, by digesting small sections at a time, for at times Ranew is hard to follow. He spends 340 pages writing about what contemporary writers would do in fewer pages. In part, this also illustrates how little

---

<sup>31</sup>Ranew is cited in Spurgeon’s commentary on the Psalms, Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Classic Reflections on the Wisdom of the Psalms* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 1: 6-7.

<sup>32</sup>Nathaniel Ranew, *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation* (1670; reprint, Charleston, SC: BiblioLife, 2009), preface.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 252.

modern writers (and Christians in general) meditate when compared to Puritans like Ranew.

The spiritual discipline of meditation is acknowledged by Ranew to be difficult: “Meditation is hard, in that it is an acting of the quickest faculty, and the most slippery part of the soul.”<sup>34</sup> But the reader is encouraged to pursue this spiritual exercise through the rewards that are held out by Christ.

Reading, while good, is not as good as reading with meditation. The two are actually made to complement each other. However, in the following comment, Ranew praises meditation’s benefits as superior to that which reading provides:

Reading brings me meat, meditation brings forth the sweetness. Reading brings the coals to the wood, meditation makes the flame. Reading brings me the sword of the word, meditation whets it. Reading barely, proves pouring water into a sieve; meditation is putting gold into a treasury.<sup>35</sup>

It is not as if reading is looked down upon or discouraged. On the contrary, Ranew advises, “Oh let me read much, but let me also meditate much, that meditation and reading may be commensurate; my soul’s digestion proportionate to its reception, its taking in by reading.”<sup>36</sup>

There is a theological reason for embracing the discipline of meditation according to Ranew. Commenting on the relationship between the work of the Spirit and the promises of God,

It is called the Spirit of promise, as conveying and working all to us and in us by the promise. Christ and his grace is not offered by God, nor received by a Christian, by any man, (I mean grown-up person,) but by the offer of him in a promise: there is no immediate acting upon Christ, for a first or after and fuller receiving of him, but by the medium, the way of an intervening promise.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 245.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 104.

In this quotation he indicates that both the initial act of faith, “first receiving” and the ongoing “fuller receiving of him,” comes through a promise. The relationship with Christ depends from the beginning to the end on the reception of the Word: “Fresh receivings from Christ must be founded in fresh meditation on the promises.”<sup>38</sup>

With this theological foundation in place, Ranew emphasizes the crucial importance of meditation to prayer: “Some lively and vigorous meditation should be daily performed, in reference to private prayer; I say for assistance and furtherance of secret closet prayer, that so important and sweet soul exercise.”<sup>39</sup> Closet prayer is described as “that so important and sweet soul exercise.” This exercise is assisted and furthered (and one might assume made sweet) only through meditation. Concerning the tie between mediation and prayer, Ranew counsels,

Therefore for the richest furnishing us with the fittest matter for a best heart frame to perform this daily duty, performing it in the most spiritual and effectual manner, for doing it, as to outdo the former, all former doings, we must look to lay the foundation deeper and larger in better and more suited thinkings and meditating; think to the utmost, to pray to the best.<sup>40</sup>

Whitney’s assessment that “meditation is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer,” is certainly affirmed by Ranew: “Prayer and meditation, like Hippocrates’ twins, were born, lived, and died together; so meditation and prayer rise, and warm, and grow fervent, or cool, fall, and decay together: prayer cherishes meditation, meditation feeds prayer.”<sup>41</sup> These disciplines (meditation and prayer) must not be separated. The success or failure of both disciplines depends in large measure upon how these disciplines are linked together. Ranew not only stresses the indispensable nature of meditation to prayer, but also to every spiritual task for the believer: “Meditation must still lend a hand

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 111.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

of help to every spiritual undertaking; first ponder, then proceed.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Matthew Henry and Meditation**

Matthew Henry was born in 1662 and stands at the end of the movement known as Puritanism.<sup>43</sup> According to J. Ligon Duncan, “Throughout his life as a minister, Henry was a diligent student of the Word, sometimes rising as early as four o’clock in the morning and often spending eight hours a day in his study in addition to his pastoral labors.”<sup>44</sup> Henry is better known among contemporary readers than Hall or Ranew. His most recognizable work is his massive and influential commentary on the whole Bible. Contemporaries of Henry looked to him for solid insights into passages of Scripture. He continues to be a popular resource among pastors and theologians today. *A Method of Prayer* is one of Henry’s lesser-known works. However, this treatment of prayer has the potential to help both individuals and congregations learn to pray more in accordance with the language of Scripture. Duncan reminds Christians how important it is to pray in the language of Scripture: “Resorting to a more Scriptural pattern of prayer may be a simple (but profound) answer to many problems in our practice of prayer. Praying Scripturally will teach us what prayer is, even while we do it.”<sup>45</sup>

How can leaders develop a vibrant prayer life for congregational services? *A Method for Prayer* is an excellent resource for those who find this to be a pressing question. The book, even though prescribing a method, should not be viewed as a quick “how to” manual for instant change. It does, however, give a simple solution to the problems congregations face in prayer—pray the Scriptures.

---

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 232.

<sup>43</sup>J. Ligon Duncan, “A Method for Prayer: Matthew Henry,” in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2004), 239.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 240.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., vii.

Henry's use of Scripture displays a breadth of knowledge of both the Old and New Testaments. There is also a depth to the prayers found in the book. While it is certain that there are many churches in America that move beyond the superficial and the perfunctory in corporate prayer, it is equally certain that prayer in most churches rarely equals the depth offered by Henry in his method for prayer.

The book can be used to stock the mind with a storehouse of Scriptures that are appropriate to pray on any given situation. If one gives himself to read through Henry's book several times, then not only will the structure of the book begin to shape prayer, but also the style will begin to form the prayers being offered.

It is a necessity for pastors and church leaders to teach their members about prayer on a corporate level. If the corporate prayer life of the church is to take the shape it ought, then it will largely be affected by the direction of the personal prayer lives of families. This emphasis is another strength of the book. Henry not only submits what should take place in congregational prayer, but also teaches how families and individuals within families should pray.

Ministers should work to maintain a balance in the *types* of prayers offered in worship. Without consciously and consistently praying the Scriptures, people will tend to offer prayers that are not balanced in their content. Praying the Scriptures will help ensure that believers are balanced in their prayers, both individually and corporately, speaking back to God concerning what He has spoken in His Word. One common acrostic that is used to express a balance in prayer as well as a guide to prayer is

Adoration—Adoration and praise for the Person of God  
Confession—Confession of sins, both personal and corporate; repentance  
Thanksgiving—Thanksgiving to God for particular mercies and provision  
Supplication—Asking God for our needs and the needs of others; intercession

Henry details the following model to follow in prayer: (1) Address to God and Adoration of Him, (2) Confession of Sin and Declaration of Repentance, (3) Petition and

Supplication, (4) Thanksgiving for the Mercies of God, (5) Intercession and Supplication to God for others, and (6) The Conclusion of our Prayers.<sup>46</sup> Scripture should prompt and shape prayer, but it may be helpful in planning worship and in teaching people to pray to offer such guides or “methods,” such as ACTS or Henry’s model, in order to consciously balance and deepen these specific areas of prayer. In each of the above six categories, Henry uses multiple biblical references which the believer may use to offer prayer for each category. Therefore, the “Address to God and Adoration of Him,” is shaped by the Scriptures—passages that reflect the character of God. Likewise, the prayers of repentance/confession offered by individuals or local churches may be the prayers of repentance found in the Bible. The categories of prayer, the “method” proposed by Henry, shape the movement of prayer. However, Scripture forms the substance of the prayer.

Matthew Henry’s work (*A Method for Prayer*) differs from that of Hall or Ranew in the sense that it is a work given primarily to prayer. The overwhelming majority of space is spent on corporate prayer. Each of the six categories in the “model” or “method” for prayer is filled in by Henry with Scripture. However, the book is not without a testimony to the importance of meditation and prayer. In a section concerning how to converse with God on a personal level, Henry writes,

We have the word of God to converse with, and we ought to read a portion of it every morning: By it God speaks to us, and in it we ought to meditate day and night, which if we do, that will send us to the throne of grace, and furnish us with many a good errand there. If God in the morning by his grace direct his word to us, so as to make it reach our hearts, that will engage us to direct our prayer to him.<sup>47</sup>

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

Studies reveal that American culture in general grows increasingly illiterate

---

<sup>46</sup>Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994).

<sup>47</sup>Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 282.



when it comes to rudimentary knowledge of the Bible. In a recent article from *Christianity Today*, Brian Lowery claims that “biblical literacy has reached a new low.” What is his basis for such a claim? Not a new George Barna study, but a citing of the top five Google searches for January 9, 2009. This is after the BCS championship game between Florida and Oklahoma, when Tim Tebow displayed John 3:16, written under his eyes in black. Lowery’s point is that in previous decades, most Americans would have known what John 3:16 said without having to look it up on a Google search. The article argues that the base line of biblical knowledge in America has moved back even further—showing that churches have to start back further in teaching the Bible.<sup>48</sup> Christian leaders cannot assume a certain base level knowledge of the Bible. This is not only true of non-believers, but even proves to be the case for the evangelical church in America. If the remedy for prayer is tied to Scripture, then it follows that people must be taught the Scriptures.

Pastors must also learn to teach the Bible in a way that calls people to action. Marva Dawn, in her book, *Is It a Lost Cause?* mentions how consumerism is affecting believers in America. One of the types of consumerism is what she calls “informational consumerism.” Informational consumerism is a constant overload of new and more information; a steady stream of information for information or entertainment sake—with no action required. In other words, there is a low Information-Action Ratio. A person takes in loads of information (as a consumer) and then does very little with it.<sup>49</sup> The Bible is full of information, but it is information that has both the power and the aim of transformation. Educators of students must work to show how the Bible cannot simply be “taken in” like all of the massive amounts of information they see in everyday life.

---

<sup>48</sup>Brian Lowery, “Biblical Literacy Rate Reaches New Low: Why ‘John 3:16’ being the top Google search isn’t something to celebrate,” *Christianity Today*, <http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives> (accessed March 5, 2009).

<sup>49</sup>Marva Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church’s Children* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 181 ff.

## **Discipleship Efforts**

The efforts of discipleship in a local church context ought to provide believers with the foundation of the disciplines. The spiritual disciplines should be taught in close connection with biblical teaching on the doctrines of grace. Special attention should be given to help believers develop a proper understanding of sanctification and God's use of means to promote growth in the Christian life. Also, the disciplines should be viewed as both a personal and public endeavor.

None of the disciplines is more important than the "twin" disciplines of meditation and prayer. New converts should be given not only the *why* of meditation and prayer, but also the *how* of meditation and prayer. Congregations ought to be exposed to teaching on the importance of meditation and prayer. Small groups should also be led by persons who are capable of modeling these disciplines. One-on-one discipleship efforts must provide practical help for believers, giving resources and hands-on assistance in the formation of these practices.

## **Public Prayer**

Teaching individuals will bring about reform. However, just as leaders tend sometimes to forget the educational impact of what is sung in corporate worship, they also sometimes fail to see the educational impact of how prayers are offered. Members of the congregation will learn about prayer as they attend church. The question is: What are they learning?

In order to ensure that the church is learning good habits in prayer, leaders must saturate prayers with the Word of God. Why should leaders pray this way in public? There are several reasons. First, because it is the example found in Scripture. This chapter has already examined biblical instances of people praying the Word of God back to Him. This is seen from Genesis 32:9, 12 where Jacob "reminds" God of His promises to him in his fear of Esau all the way to Acts 4:23-31 where one finds the early church praying in accordance to the Scriptures that pointed to and were fulfilled in Jesus.

Another reason believers should saturate prayers with the Word of God is because praying the words of God leads to praying the will of God (1 John 5:14-15). It should not be viewed in some mechanical or magical sense, but if individuals and congregations pray in accordance with His revealed will, then both may have confidence of His answers to prayer.

As leaders teach congregations through public prayers they also teach the people to lay hold of God's promises. For example, when a congregation hears the pastor leading in a prayer of confession, "As we have confessed our sins, we thank you that you have promised to forgive us and not only to forgive us, but also to cleanse us," the promise of forgiveness and cleansing from sin becomes more real to them personally. Individuals learn that they too can lay hold of God's promises in prayer. If Christians really believe that the Word of God is living and active (Heb 4:12), profitable for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16-17), then surely consistent prayer that is offered in this way will edify and comfort the people of God. Terry Johnson and Ligon Duncan remind readers that this type of prayer is especially important in light of the current lack of basic Bible knowledge:

One reason why previous generations of evangelicals were more Biblically literate than ours is that there was more Bible content in their services than ours. The word preached and *the word prayed* and the word sung were constantly reinforcing each other.<sup>50</sup>

### **Journaling as a Tool**

It is important to remember that the prayer life of God's people gathered together improve as each individual and family prayer life improves. A vital link exists between personal prayer and public prayer, and because there is a link between personal prayer and public/corporate prayer, then it is crucial that leaders make efforts to help

---

<sup>50</sup>Terry Johnson and Ligon Duncan, "Recommendations for Improving Public Prayer," Nine Marks, <http://www.9marks.org/journal/recommendations-improving-public-prayer/> (accessed March 1, 2009). Emphasis added.

individuals and families grow in prayer. One practical tool to use in this process is the use of a journal.

Whitney defines a spiritual journal as “a place to record the works and ways of God in your life.”<sup>51</sup> A journal may also serve the Christian by assisting the cultivation of the discipline of meditation on Scripture, providing a place to flesh out insights into Scripture and how God is at work in his or her life. D. A. Carson reminds readers that Christians throughout the history of the church have kept writings of their spiritual pilgrimage: “What such journals contain varies enormously. The Puritans often used them to record their experiences with God, their thoughts and prayers, their triumphs and failures.”<sup>52</sup> Adele Calhoun, in her book *A Handbook for Spiritual Disciplines* suggests that journaling can be defined as “a tool for reflecting on God’s presence, guidance and nurture in daily comings and goings.”<sup>53</sup>

Carson suggests several values or benefits from journaling: (1) enforces a change a pace, a slowing down, (2) fosters self-examination, and (3) ensures quiet articulation of both spiritual direction and prayers—thus moving a person toward growth.<sup>54</sup> When these benefits are considered it becomes increasingly clear that all three of these values or products of journaling are needed in the fast-paced, shallow, and vague spirituality of the twenty-first century. Calhoun further reasons,

In a consumerist society it’s easy to accumulate experiences, believing the more we have the better! Yet experiences don’t necessarily bring wisdom, nor do they automatically transform us. We need to listen and reflect on our experiences in the

---

<sup>51</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 205.

<sup>52</sup>D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 22.

<sup>53</sup>Adele Calhoun, *A Handbook for Spiritual Disciplines* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 56.

<sup>54</sup>Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 22.

presence of the Holy Spirit to learn from them. Journaling is a way of paying attention to our lives.<sup>55</sup>

Could the tool of a spiritual journal be used to help an individual grow in the discipline of prayer? Journaling may be viewed as a spiritual discipline by itself, but it also serves to sharpen and strengthen many of the other spiritual disciplines. If Carson is correct, and journaling brings the benefits he describes, then it follows that when journaling is done properly it can strengthen the life of prayer.

One example is that Carson asserts that journaling forces a person to change pace, to slow down. Life in the twenty-first century, at least in America, is a fast-paced, move at break-neck speed life. When life in the fast lane is coupled with the exposure to more and more information, the result is that the soul never seems to slow down. But a person's soul needs to be still before the Lord. Instead of having a quiet time of Bible reading and prayer followed by a quick movement to something else, perhaps the person who uses the tool of journaling will better learn to wait upon the Lord. Meditation involves a slowing down, a careful reflection on the words and works of God. Many people move so fast, in body and spirit, that they cannot hear His words or see His works.

A journal may also serve an individual or family by being a prompter for prayer. The family that records answers to prayer could benefit by reviewing these occasionally and, in turn, give thanks to the Lord for His provision. An individual looking over his journal may call to mind that he still needs to pray for someone he committed to pray for months ago. The journal also serves as a prompter by helping to stir the articulation of meditations and/or prayer even on days when one or both are harder to formulate.

Whitney lists several "helps" that a journal provides for the spiritual life. Among these are (1) help in self-understanding and evaluation, (2) in meditation, (3) in expressing thoughts and feelings to the Lord, (4) in remembering the Lord's works, (5)

---

<sup>55</sup>Calhoun, *A Handbook for Spiritual Disciplines*, 57.

creating and preserving a spiritual heritage, (6) in clarifying and articulating insights and impressions, (7) in monitoring goals and priorities, and (8) in maintaining other spiritual disciplines.<sup>56</sup> Under the heading of “Help in Clarifying and Articulating Insights and Impressions,” Whitney cites the example of Mueller and his writing. His journal was used to stimulate and direct his prayers. The following entry from Mueller’s journal on July 22, 1838 is beneficial to show two important points:

This evening I was walking in our little garden, meditating on Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever.” *Whilst meditating on His unchangeable love, power and wisdom, and turning all as I went into prayer respecting myself; and whilst applying also His unchangeable love, power, and wisdom both to my present spiritual and temporal circumstances—all at once the present need of the orphan houses was brought to my mind. Immediately I was led to say to myself, “Jesus in His love and power has hitherto supplied me with what I have needed for the orphans, and in the same unchangeable love and power He will provide me with what I may need for the future.” A flow of joy came into my soul whilst realizing thus the unchangeableness of our adorable Lord. About one minute after, a letter was brought to me enclosing a cheque for twenty pounds. In it was written: “Will you apply the amount of the enclosed cheque to the objects of your Scriptural Knowledge Society, or of your Orphan Establishment, or in the work and cause of our Master in any way that He Himself, on your application to Him, may point out to you. It is not a great sum, but it is a sufficient provision for the exigency of today; and it is for today’s exigencies that ordinarily the Lord provides. Tomorrow, as it brings its demands, will find its supply.*<sup>57</sup>

From Mueller’s account, the first obvious benefit of the journal is that it provides encouragement to believers who read of God’s timing and provision. This journal entry also enables readers to once again see the connection between meditation and prayer in Mueller’s life. The end result of the prayer is a remarkable answer, one sufficient for the needs of the day. However, the answer to prayer can be traced back to the discipline of meditation. Mueller’s meditation on the text of Scripture led him into “turning all as I went into prayer.” This great man of faith, like many others inside the pages of Scripture and out, shows believers that meditation is indeed the missing link between Bible intake and prayer.

---

<sup>56</sup>Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 207-16.

<sup>57</sup>Mueller, *A Narrative*, Part 2, “July 22,” emphasis added.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Bible provides believers with several examples of prayers that are saturated with Scripture. Followers of the Lord are seen, in both the Old and New Testaments, taking the words from God and, in turn, using those words to speak to Him in prayer. Furthermore, the men and writings explored in this chapter underscore the crucial link between biblical meditation and prayer. A recovery of this time-tested practice will lead to transformation—transformation in personal and corporate prayer.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a sketch of the implementation of the project to teach biblical meditation as a means of transformative prayer to students at Welch College. The project took place within a class administered at Welch College between August and December of 2011. The course titled “Spiritual Disciplines in Youth Ministry,” was offered to students as a ministry elective.<sup>1</sup> The class met two times per week, Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 8:00 to 8:55 A.M. A total of 8 students enrolled in the course. The members of the course included 6 young men and 2 young women, all of which were preparing for some form of vocational ministry.

The primary pedagogical methods used in class were lecture and discussion. Students were also required to read two textbooks, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*, both by Donald S. Whitney. Class members had assignments related to the specific spiritual disciplines of meditation, journaling, evangelism, silence and solitude, and fasting. These assignments were ongoing tasks that were completed throughout the term while the written reflections on these experiences were turned in at the end of the semester.

The project consisted of three major parts. Part 1 included the introduction to the course coupled with an initial student inventory. The second part contained the in-

---

<sup>1</sup>A copy of the syllabus for this course is located in appendix 1.



class lectures on spiritual disciplines. The final aspect of the project was individual meetings with students and the final student survey, followed by a review of the results.

### **Part 1**

The first session involved meeting with all of the students enrolled in the class. A total of 8 students enrolled in the course, including youth ministry and pastoral training majors. Members of the class were given a detailed explanation of the syllabus and the assignments, which included (1) journaling, (2) book reviews, and (3) other assignments related to specific disciplines. The opening class time also provided an opportunity to ask students to share their personal expectations for the class. A high percentage of the students indicated that they desired more spiritual discipline, noting that if they were going to teach others—they should model a disciplined life first.

The second class period involved an overview of the spiritual disciplines. Students also took the spiritual disciplines inventory/assessment. After this session the responses to the survey were reviewed in order to assess each person's involvement in spiritual disciplines. In this initial review it was observed that journaling (as a discipline) was the least practiced among the participants. Biblical meditation (by perception and practice) was another area identified which needed much improvement.

### **Part-2: Lectures and Discussions on Disciplines**

#### **Overview of Disciplines**

Following the introductory week, students were exposed to an examination of the letter of 1 Timothy. Paul's charge to Timothy for personal holiness was the heart of this discussion, with specific attention given to 1 Timothy 4:6-16. This week also involved a lecture/discussion on the doctrine of sanctification. Class members considered the two persons involved in sanctification (God and man) by looking at Scripture, some

points from John Owen's *On Mortification of Sin in the Believer*, and the hymn "I Asked the Lord" by John Newton.

### **Scripture Intake**

Week 3 began with a look into the subject of Scripture intake. Class members were given reasons as to why Bible intake should be considered the most important spiritual discipline. Sessions also focused on the spiritual discipline of meditation. Students pondered the challenges that culture presents and challenges that fight against this timeless practice. Participants also examined and discussed four texts: Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2-3, Philippians 4:8, and 2 Timothy 2:7. After investigation of these texts, consideration was given to different methods to use in meditation.

### **Prayer**

The next major topic of discussion was the common problems associated with prayer. Students were very engaged with the subject of prayer. Participants were able to pinpoint some of their personal struggles/obstacles with prayer. During this session students were instructed to bring their Bibles to class for the next meeting. These preparations were made in order to prepare them to pray through Scripture.

The highlight of the early part of the semester was the time set aside during which students prayed through a passage of Scripture. First, students were given a brief background on the life of George Mueller. Next, these students read through the personal testimony of Mueller concerning meditation and prayer. Class participants were also told that they would be participating in an experience designed for them to practice Mueller's counsel. The following directions were given to the class members concerning this assignment:

Directions (to be completed outside of classroom setting):

1. Select a Psalm.

2. Prayerfully work your way through the Psalm, offering prayer based on the words that relate to your own situation or people you know.
3. Allow the words to dictate the “element” of prayer (Thanksgiving, Confession, Adoration, etc.).
4. Move on to the next phrase or word.
5. Pray through the entire Psalm if possible. If time remains choose another psalm and follow the same format.<sup>2</sup>

Students were given thirty minutes to complete this exercise. When students came back to class a short time of debriefing occurred. The first question asked to the entire group was: “Was there anything different about this time of prayer and your regular prayer time? and What was it?” One student noted that it was hard to do this when “forced” to do it. The student comments were reflective of a personal, internal resistance to this type of exercise. Another student stated that the prayer time was “more focused than normal.” A second question posed to the students was: “Was this ‘method’ of prayer beneficial for you spiritually? Explain.” All seemed to indicate that it was beneficial—in some form or fashion. The final debriefing question was: “Were there any surprises to your time of prayer?” Participants remarked concerning how relevant (even when their selection of the psalm was random) the psalms were to their lives or others.

In the following week, class time was spent allowing the students to examine Mueller’s counsel more closely. After the previous week’s session of praying through a psalm, class members were placed into groups for the purpose of investigating Mueller’s advice and finding relevant information under these two headings: (1) methods, and (2) results. Students were given several minutes to find insights in relation to these two topics. Following this exercise the class discussed the information together.

The second class period of this week began with the subject of public prayer—

---

<sup>2</sup>This outline came from fresh thought, however, it was influenced heavily by the in-class assignment and teachings of Donald S. Whitney, “Introduction to Biblical Spirituality” (Doctor of Ministry Seminar, 80911, January 11-14, 2010).

common abuses or faults in public prayer. Special consideration was also given as to how public prayer is shaped by private devotional practice. Class participants were challenged to place primary emphasis on saturating public prayers with the Word of God. Several reasons were given as a basis for this priority in public prayer.

The classes on the subject of prayer included a high level of involvement from the students. The topic of prayer seemed to bring out more discussion and interest than did the material on meditation. Even though there is an obvious tie/link between meditation and prayer, it was easier for this group to discuss prayer.

### **Evangelism**

After laying the foundation of meditation and prayer, the next subject addressed was the subject of personal evangelism as a spiritual discipline. Students were exposed to the idea that evangelism does not just “happen” but must be cultivated through consistent attention to this spiritual exercise. Students also looked at the “Ten Questions to Turn a Conversation toward the Gospel” from Whitney. A brief discussion was facilitated using these questions.

### **Stewardship**

Stewardship was the next topic of class lectures/discussions. First, class members considered the personal stewardship of time. Participants also examined the spiritual practice of giving. It seemed like a new idea to some in the class that giving could be viewed as a spiritual discipline. In terms of student involvement, this was one of the least interactive class periods of the semester.

At this point of the term, initial consideration was given to the possibility of meeting with students on a one-on-one basis over the last few classes instead of meeting with the entire group. This approach was appealing for two reasons. First, these one-on-

one meetings would better serve the implementation and completion of the project.

Secondly, it was observed that without any form of testing, this group of students did not seem to be getting as much out of the lectures, when compared with a previous class and the same material.

### **Fasting**

The eighth week of the course began with a PowerPoint presentation on the subject of fasting. Students examined (briefly) the expectation of fasting and the reward of fasting from Matthew 6:16-18. Participants also considered the reasons for fasting and what fasting communicates to God and others. Members were asked about their completion of the fasting assignment. Only 1 person (out of 8) had completed the assignment at this point in the semester. The reason for the delayed completion of this assignment could be that college students typically put things off in general, or perhaps the lack of involvement is due to the dread attached to this particular assignment. The one student who had completed it comes from a church where fasting is taught and practiced—she was actually involved in a fast with her church. Therefore, this assignment appeared to be easier for her than it was for other students.

### **Silence and Solitude**

The next class session focused on the book *Margin*.<sup>3</sup> Main points from the book were used to discuss the need for margin or space—margin or space to practice the disciplines. Class participants were also introduced to the questions that would be used to start the next class period on the subject of silence and solitude. An announcement

---

<sup>3</sup>Richard Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995).

was made that each student would meet with the instructor individually to discuss personal progress in the disciplines.

The disciplines of silence and solitude were taught together. One of the assignments for the course was to practice four consecutive hours of silence and solitude.

The following questions were used to spark discussion on the subject in class:

1. How do you avoid or resist silence?
2. Do you like to fill silences with sound or learning—recordings, talk shows, news, and so forth? What does this mean?
3. How much time each day do you give to silence?
4. How and when do you resist or avoid being alone?
5. What do you resort to doing when alone?
6. What troubles you or makes you antsy about being alone?<sup>4</sup>

### **Journaling**

While the journal was discussed early in the semester in relation to class assignments, it was not discussed as a discipline until the week 9 of the project. One of the reasons for this was that the course follows (although somewhat loosely) the format of Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. In this foundational book on spiritual disciplines, journaling comes near the end of the book. Whitney's list of values/benefits of journaling (found in the chapter on journaling) was used to spark discussion on this discipline.

### **Corporate Implementation**

At this point of the course students began to consider how the disciplines might be integrated in a corporate setting, specifically how disciplines can or should be

---

<sup>4</sup>These questions are taken from Adele Calhoun's book, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 109, 113.

implemented in a youth ministry context. This topic was related to one of the assignments students had for the course—to write a 1000 word entry consisting of their personal strategy for implementation in a local church setting. Pastoral students or youth ministry students could write this plan with their own particular setting and calling in mind.

### **Final Sessions**

As the month of November began, the class lectures came to a close. One class session was spent discussing the contemporary challenges that media presents to the disciplines. Special attention was given to the internet and its conditioning of persons, influencing them to (1) practice hurried and distracted thinking, (2) engage in cursory reading, (3) seek immediacy, (4) be shaped by information that is irrelevant, and (5) have diverted attention spans. The final lecture was on the subject of spiritual warfare and its impact on the practice of spiritual disciplines. It seemed that students were more engaged with this subject/material than most any other subject recently covered.

During the last class lecture students also retook the spiritual disciplines inventory/assessment that was administered at the beginning of the semester. Three students were absent and therefore unable to take the assessment. One-on-one meetings began on Tuesday of the following week—where students discussed journals, assignments, and the inventory (those who did not take the inventory made it up during the assigned meeting).

### **Part 3**

The final portion of the project was the individual meetings with each participant. The purpose of this one-on-one meeting was to discuss the course as a whole but also to look at specific changes between the two surveys. Four questions were asked

in order to help students debrief their experience. Comparisons and contrasts between the initial and final surveys were discussed with each class member. Where significant improvement was discovered, the student was asked to pinpoint the possible reason(s) for improvement.

The first question asked in these meetings was: “Which assignment was the most difficult for you? Why?” Students had assignments related to (1) journaling, (2) fasting, (3) silence and solitude, and (4) evangelism. Answers to this question varied. Only 1 student considered the evangelistic assignment the most difficult. This student noted that it was hard to “get outside of the Bible college bubble.” Two students indicated that silence and solitude presented the greatest challenges. Reasons for the difficulties ranged from “people inquiring” to “the ever-present media.” Journaling as a discipline was problematic for 2 students. “The word count stretches me” and “you must consistently remind yourself” were given as obstacles in journaling. One student stated that biblical meditation and reading were hard for her because “I am very easily distracted.” Two students had yet to complete all of the assignments.

The second question posed to participants was: “Which assignment was the most helpful/rewarding? Why?” One student answered, “Journal. Because it forced me to take time and reflect.” Another student stated, “The evangelistic assignment— knowing that I had the assignment did not ‘force’ me to do it, but it helped me to move the conversation toward spiritual things.” A third student reported, “My prayer life grew. I started learning more on prayer than before.” While it does not relate to a specific class assignment (for a grade), perhaps the most encouraging comment came from one student concerning the day in class in which students prayed through a psalm: “It [psalm reading and prayer] was a pivotal day for me. It totally changed my devotional life for the good.”

Thirdly, students were asked to pinpoint possible reasons for improvement



based on the evaluation of their two spiritual discipline assessments.<sup>5</sup> As the two surveys were compared, participants were asked: “To what would you attribute these increases? What were the reasons for the change?” A mixture of responses was given to these questions. Some students were not able to pinpoint one specific reason for their increase/improvement on the survey. Other participants stated that a number of factors collectively contributed to the increase, factors such as personal circumstances, church attendance, specific assignments, and overall exposure to life on campus at Welch College.

The final question was: “Do you have any suggestions for the class?” One student suggested that a tighter system of accountability could be used to help keep them on-track with the journal. Closely related to this idea, another student added, “Instead of turning the journal in ‘all-at-once’ maybe turning in sections or portions.” Another participant said, “I liked praying through a psalm. Any way to experience the methods would be beneficial.” A couple of members remarked that the time slot for the class (8:00 A.M.) was a problem. Both textbooks, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*, received high remarks.

On November 28, 2011 one final group session was held to discuss the class as a whole. Questions related to each assignment for the course were also asked. Students were given the opportunity to describe how they would seek to incorporate the spiritual disciplines in their particular ministry context. Final suggestions or recommendations for the planning and implementation of a future class on spiritual disciplines were solicited from the group. Finally, all members turned in journals and assignments on this date.

---

<sup>5</sup>The student surveys are included as appendix 2 and appendix 3. Also, tables designed to highlight the areas of improvement are provided as appendix 4 of the project.

## **Conclusion**

This completes the chronicle of the implementation of the project to teach biblical meditation as a means to transformative prayer to students at Welch College. The course was administered as planned, with only minor adjustments along the way. Each student enrolled in the class completed the pre-class and post-class surveys, finished class assignments, participated in class discussions, and provided valuable insight during the individual meetings at the end of the term.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

#### **Introduction**

The intent of this chapter is to evaluate the entire project. Several elements of the project will be considered including the original purpose, goals, perceived strengths, and apparent weaknesses. Theological and personal reflections are offered in this chapter in relation to the project implementation. This chapter will also provide some suggestions for improvement related to future ministry settings.

#### **Evaluation of the Purpose**

The purpose as stated in the beginning of this project was “to educate and engage students in the practice of using biblical meditation as the primary means for transformative prayer.” This purpose is essentially twofold. The *education* of students in the disciplines of biblical meditation and prayer took place within the context of an overview of the spiritual disciplines. Education also took place through class lectures, student interaction, textbook readings, and life experiences. The second aspect of the purpose was *engagement*. It is not enough to merely educate students. The overall hope was to see students learn to incorporate these twin disciplines into their daily walk with Christ.

After the completion of the project it was beneficial to review the purpose(s). It is easy to lose sight of the overall purpose of the project even during a fifteen-week period. The two-fold aim of education and engagement was accomplished during the course. If the course is taught again, then these purposes will remain.

## **Evaluation of the Goals**

The project had four basic goals: (1) to assess the current perceptions on prayer and the actual prayer practices among a select group of college students, (2) to expose students to the rich spiritual heritage available in Puritan and early Baptist thought and life, (3) to foster greater confidence in prayer for students, and (4) to become more effective as a minister in teaching and modeling prayer. Obviously, three of these goals are related to intended student outcomes. The last goal is personal.

It is helpful and necessary as an educator to know where students are spiritually. The first goal for the project provided a basis to understand the spiritual practices of a select group of students. While the group represented only a small percentage of the entire student population of Welch College, the class was composed of a cross section of students that provided a view of what is most likely normal for the entire campus. The research instrument and class interaction were the two primary means used to assess the spiritual practices of the students. Looking through the journal entries at the end of the semester also afforded insight into the spiritual depth of individuals within the group.

The second goal was to expose students to the rich spiritual heritage available in Puritan and early Baptist thought and life. This goal is a worthy goal for two reasons. First, with so much discussion in contemporary culture on spirituality it is crucial that people are pointed to safe and reliable spiritual examples. Evangelical Christians need to be shown that a deep and thoroughly biblical spirituality is found within their own tradition. The goal of exposing students to spiritual forefathers is worthy also because of the philosophy at Welch College. Since the college is a denominational institution, one of the ongoing aims of education at the college is to teach students about important aspects of their history and heritage.

After examining this particular goal and the actual project implementation at least two failures surface. Much space in the course lectures and discussions was given to George Mueller. However, little attention was given to examples within the Puritan and early Baptist tradition in actual class instruction. If students were exposed to others, then it was through their reading of course texts. While this exposure is certainly good, it is necessary to specifically point out these examples in class rather than relying on students to catch it from what is sometimes cursory or hurried reading. The second major error of this goal was that it did not have any means of assessment. Nothing was in place at the beginning of the course or at the end that evaluated students' knowledge of this section of church history.

The third goal was to foster greater confidence in prayer for students. In some ways this goal could be seen as the most important since the overall purpose was to educate and engage students in meditation for transformative prayer. One of the possible byproducts of prayer that is rooted in biblical meditation is an increase in confidence that prayers are being heard/answered. Two questions on the student survey/assessment were directly tied to this goal: "I am able to pray with confidence that God is hearing my prayers" and "I frequently receive answers to prayer." As the initial and final surveys were compared it was clear that overall there was a perceived increase in the students' confidence in prayer.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, it seems this goal was achieved. It is admitted that this is an area which is obviously subjective. Confidence is something that in one sense cannot be measured with numbers. Yet, given the results from the surveys, it is safe to conclude

---

<sup>1</sup>The initial and final surveys are included in appendix 2 and appendix 3 of the project. Appendix 4 includes a chart that compares student responses.

that enough ground was gained in this category to affirm that this way of prayer increases confidence.

The final goal for the project was to become more effective as a minister in teaching and modeling prayer. Instead of focusing on student outcomes, this goal centers on personal development. However, other than student responses from the surveys, nothing was in place to determine the achievement of this goal.

### **Strengths of the Project**

The first strength of the project, based on student responses, was the required reading. The books *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*, both by Donald S. Whitney, received praise from the readers. The responses were gathered by verbal questions and answers as well as through a critical book review that was required for both books. The amount of reading in this class compared to others at this level was somewhat low. Perhaps the lower count of pages allowed participants to take in what they were reading at a deeper level—and if so, this may have contributed to the students' satisfaction with the textbooks. Several participants stated their intentions of using these books in future ministry settings.

The assignments for the course were also a strongpoint. Even though meditation and prayer were at the heart of the course, the class was designed to have students practicing other disciplines as well. Fasting, evangelism, silence and solitude, and journaling were the disciplines that were incorporated into outside class assignments. It is fair to say, in light of class input, that these assignments were spiritually beneficial for the students.

Class size was a third positive aspect of the project. Since the class was made-up of only eight students it allowed for healthy interaction and discussion. Class members were able to hear from other classmates concerning their perception and practice of

spiritual disciplines. When a class is this small it enables the teacher to focus more on individual students.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The lack of assessment for two of the four goals for the project is one glaring weakness. When there is little or no means for evaluation an environment is established that ensures little or no specific growth. The results of these two areas become entirely subjective, based on personal observation and feeling rather than objective research and evaluation.

Another weakness of the project was the time of the day the class was offered (8:00 AM). Students at the college, like most other college students, typically do not get enough sleep. A normal night in the life of dorm students is one in which he or she stays up late. Therefore, it was difficult on some days to gain and maintain attention and involvement. This personal observation was confirmed by a few of the suggestions and remarks about the class.

One final weakness surfaced through the debriefing time near the end of the course. Students proposed that it might be helpful to have a tighter system of accountability for the journal. For example, instead of having the one-on-one meetings with students only at the end of the term it would work better to have a greater frequency of these meetings throughout the term.

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

After reviewing the entire project, there are four areas that I would change. First of all, a means of assessment should be established for all of the goals. One of the project's goals was to teach students about the rich spiritual heritage available in the Puritan and early Baptist tradition, however, there was nothing in place to ensure that this

goal was reached. If this project is implemented in a college setting again, then perhaps some sort of pre-course survey could be administered to assess if students have a general knowledge of some of the key figures and their writings. Selected readings and class lectures throughout the term would provide class members with the necessary exposure from this period of church history. Based on these readings and lectures, a final post-course survey could be used to see how participants' knowledge changed as a result of this class.

On a personal level, another goal without a means of assessment was the goal of becoming more effective at teaching and modeling prayer. The apostle Paul wrote of the necessity of his own development in 1 Corinthians 9:27: "But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." Even though "modeling" of prayer happens in the classroom as public prayer is offered, I want to have goals in place that help me to grow in my "private" prayer life. It is possible that this goal could be measured primarily through objectives monitored in my own journal.

The second area to change is the time of the class discussions. It is observed that college students, generally, function better in classes offered a bit later in the day. If this course is offered again in the future, then it should be given a different time slot. The group met two times per week, which seemed more than sufficient to cover the material.

Thirdly, some form of accountability with assignments should be implemented earlier in the term. The means of accountability and assessment were fixed at the end of the semester. Students were required to turn in all of the assignments, which included their ten-week journal, at the very end of the semester. Participants suggested that more accountability and structure would be beneficial to keep them on track. Another implementation would be an increase in the number of individual meetings with students.



Even if there were only two or three of these meetings throughout the semester, it would provide greater insight into how much of the material is perceived and practiced.

The fourth and final area for change is in the realm of teaching methodology. While the teaching methods of lecture and discussion should remain as the primary methods, other practical methods could be used in classroom lectures. Students benefitted from the day in class in which they were given time to pray through a psalm: the class on praying through a psalm was taught, they were given time to actually practice praying through a psalm of their choice, and then time was spent debriefing the experience. While it is not completely clear how to do this with all of the other disciplines, more space could be given to “hands-on” ways to experience them. The spiritual disciplines of fasting and evangelism as an immediate “in-class” assignment present obvious difficulties. However, one could teach on journaling and allow time for students to practice it. A lesson might be taught on silence and solitude and then an assignment could follow during class time for members to experience these disciplines. This change will obviously require more time and energy in lesson planning.

### **Theological Reflections**

Upon reviewing the entire project experience, several theological reflections are observed. First, the project presented a fresh reminder for the need of sound teaching on the subject of sanctification. People come from various backgrounds and understandings on the nature of sanctification. One extreme in the area of sanctification is to “let go and let God.” Other people swing the pendulum in the opposite direction and make growth in the Christian life all about self-effort apart from grace. Students must be taught consistently to “work out their salvation,” with the constant reminder that they are empowered to do this because “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

Second, the project proved again that it is difficult to teach people what they feel is already “known.” This challenge was certainly presented in teaching students who feel as if they already “know” the subject matter of the disciplines. Humility is not only a mark of the Christian, it is a necessary characteristic of anyone who wishes to grow in the faith. The psalmist stated, “I have more understanding than all my teachers” (Ps 119:99a), yet it was an affirmation rooted in the reality of God’s word, a word both meditated on and lived out in actual practice. Christians, at every stage of the Christian life, need the perspective held in 1 Corinthians 8:2: “If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.”

Several reflections spring from the project concerning the subject of spirituality. Christian spirituality is one which is rooted in Scripture. Reading the journal entries of students gave insight into each of their lives. It also backed up what is typically displayed in conversation. Those students who display a superficial spirituality in conversation tended to be those whose meditations were superficial and often unrelated to Scripture. Those participants who regularly speak with depth and sobriety are those whose journal entries carried scriptural weight.

True spirituality is one that is practiced. A person can intellectually know about the spiritual disciplines and yet not know them in the biblical sense. For example, a church may consider itself to be an evangelistic church, yet if the people do not practice evangelism, then it follows that the church is not as evangelistic as it thought. In a similar way, people are sometimes prone to consider themselves to be spiritual because of an acquaintance with spiritual disciplines instead of an actual living practice of them. True spirituality is the life of Christ pervading over and into all areas of life, a life that is marked by grace-empowered obedience to the commands of Christ.

The Bible presents spirituality as something that develops primarily over time.<sup>2</sup> Instead of change coming quickly, change in the Christian life in general is slow and steady. This idea, which is found in the Scriptures, was backed up by the experiences of the students who took the course. The spiritual disciplines are not to be viewed or taught as habits that produce instant “results.” Instead, these are practices or tools for the journey of faith, a journey of transformation and growth that lasts for a lifetime.

### **Personal Reflections**

This was one course out of four that I taught during the fall semester of 2011. It was, perhaps, the one course that I was most excited to teach. This anticipation and excitement was present for two reasons. First, the course was taught in the previous school year using the same basic material. During that particular course there was great student involvement. Anticipation for the same or greater level of student involvement existed before this particular class started. The second reason for looking forward to this class was due to the subject matter. The subject of spiritual disciplines is a subject of great personal interest and the hope was that the subject would be both interesting and helpful to students as well.

Based on these internal expectations there was a certain level of frustration encountered throughout the semester. When student attention was high (as it was during the section on prayer), then the personal level of satisfaction in teaching was high as well.

---

<sup>2</sup>Several images are used in the Scriptures which support the notion that spiritual growth and change is typically a process. One could point to the Psalmist’s use of a “tree planted by rivers of water” (Ps 1), or to Paul’s admonition to “put off the old man and put on the new” (Eph 4), as examples that illustrate the ongoing change in a believer’s life by God’s divine enablement. Perhaps, one of the clearest statements on this process is found in 2 Cor 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Emphasis added.

When it was discovered that student involvement in other subjects did not meet previously held expectations, the class seemed to be more of a failure.

The one-on-one interactions at the end of the term/project were very encouraging. It was during these times that the course began to appear successful. Several of the students offered answers to questions (from the student surveys/assessments) which served as a personal buoy to previously sinking hopes for outcomes for the course. Statements like, “My prayer life grew. I started learning more on prayer than before,” caused me to think that more happened in the students than previously thought. One participant said, “It [psalm reading and prayer] was a pivotal day for me. It totally changed my devotional life for the good.” This one discovery and response was enough to declare the entire course a success—if indeed his personal walk with Christ was changed for the rest of his life.

### **Further Considerations for Research**

Anticipating future use of the material from the project causes one to consider some areas to monitor as the aforementioned changes are made. It would be interesting to compare future classes with the class that participated in this project. Questions begin to rise concerning teaching methods and student outcomes: If a tighter system of accountability were in place would there be greater participation throughout the semester? If testing were a part of the course, would there be a higher level of interest and improvement? How would student satisfaction in the course improve if there were more “interactive” sections like the one where students prayed through a psalm? These questions could only be answered as these methods are used in future courses.

As stated earlier in this chapter, many students tend to stay up late. Given this a reality, what would be the most opportune time to teach a class on spiritual formation? One might argue that the early time slot is the most appropriate since it is signaling the

importance of a disciplined life in general. However, the in-class experience could possibly be more effective when students are more alert later in the day.

Another possible area to investigate is actual class meetings. Since the course demands a requisite number of hours of instruction, it is worth examining how those hours are best configured. Would the class be more effective with more meetings during the week or less? In other words, would the students benefit more, given the subject matter, from meeting five times per week instead of two? Or, if fewer meetings were chosen (from two per week to one), then perhaps more time could be given after the in-class instruction to the actual experience of some of the disciplines.

If the course is taught again, the final area to research is the connection between journaling and the twin disciplines of meditation and prayer. Scripture intake and prayer, it may be argued, are the two most foundational or essential disciplines. Does a student find assistance and even greater enjoyment in practicing these disciplines through the use of a journal? D. A. Carson would seem to suggest that journaling does aid in the practice of prayer. In his book, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*, Carson argues for several values or benefits of journaling including that it (1) enforces a change a pace, a slowing down, (2) fosters self-examination, and (3) ensures quiet articulation of both spiritual direction and prayers—thus moving a person toward growth.<sup>3</sup> In the future administration of this class, a portion of the research instrument, as well as the personal interview questions, should help assess not only the frequency of journaling, but also the value students attach to journaling when it comes to assisting their practice of meditation and prayer.

---

<sup>3</sup>D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 22.

## Conclusion

Overall the project was a success. Much was learned about the spiritual lives of the students in the course. While the project proved to be challenging, significant improvement was witnessed in the students' lives in terms of their actual practice of the disciplines. Several areas of the project call for revisions, as noted previously, and had these adjustments been made the project would have been strengthened so as to better equip students to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even though the project itself is complete, future challenges remain for my personal life and ministry. First, I must discipline *myself* for the purpose of godliness, seeing the disciplines as pivotal to my walk with Christ. The heart of the project, meditation and prayer, will continue to be crucial for my personal progression in developing intimacy with the Lord. Secondly, I must seek to instruct others in the disciplines, making the investments of teaching and time, so as to see them grow in Christ-like character and conduct. Time invested in the disciplines will prove to be fruitful in this life and in the life to come.

APPENDIX 1  
COURSE SYLLABUS

YM 330          Spiritual Disciplines in Youth Ministry          2 hours

Fall Semester 2011

Location: Johnson 107          Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 8:00-8:55 A.M. (1<sup>st</sup> hour)

Instructor: Barry Raper, Program Coordinator, Christian Education and Youth Ministry  
D. Min. in Progress, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary  
M. Div. in Christian Education, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002  
B.S. Pastoral Ministry, Free Will Baptist Bible College, 1999

Office: Johnson Classroom Building, 308B

Office Phone: 844-5256

Office Hours: Mondays (by appointment)

***The mission of Welch College is to educate leaders to serve Christ, His church, and His world through Biblical thought and life.*** The course “Spiritual Disciplines in Youth Ministry” seeks to help the college fulfill this mission with the following description and objectives:

**Course Description:** This course provides a foundational overview of the spiritual disciplines in the formation of the minister and students. Particular attention will be given to individual spiritual disciplines with the aim of students learning practically how to incorporate them into their walk with Christ. Special attention will be given to the two most important disciplines of meditation and prayer. The course should enable the minister to effectively equip youth and youth leaders in the practice of spiritual disciplines in a youth ministry context.

As a result of this course, the student should be able to:

- A. Understand the Biblical teaching on spiritual disciplines and how they function in God’s purpose of sanctification in the life of the believer.
- B. Practice spiritual disciplines in measurable ways.
- C. Equip other students to practice the spiritual disciplines.

**Course Texts:**

Whitney, Donald. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991.

Whitney, Donald. *Simplify Your Spiritual Life: Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2003.

## Course Assignments

- A. Students will keep a journal for 10 weeks of the course. The journal entries will be made two times weekly for a total of 20 entries. The entries must be alternated between a Scripture entry and a life/experience entry. For example, entry #1 in week one might be on your thoughts from your Bible reading of Ephesians 3:14-21. Entry #2 of the same week would then be on a life experience—something that causes you to reflect and grow as a Christian. The journal will also include some designated entries from other assignments given in the course (these assignments will be listed below: B, C, etc.). However, the Scripture and Life entries are the bulk of the journal.
  - a. The journal must be computer generated, Times New Roman font (12pt.)
  - b. The journal entries must be at least 200 words (400 minimum for the week)
  - c. You must have a cover/title page, stapled in the upper left hand corner. No journals should be turned in with a binder.
  - d. The student must follow the format provided at the end of the syllabus for the entire journal. Any deviation from this format will result in a loss in the number of points awarded for the assignment.
  - e. The journal will be due on the last regularly scheduled class period.
- B. Students will participate in a fast during this course. The student will be required to fast for at least two meals. Fasting is typically joined with prayer. Therefore, the student will wish to use the times normally given to the meals to pray (or to do some other good deed or ministry). The student will then write his/her reflections about the fast. This reflection will be placed in the journal under the heading “Fasting Entry”. This entry should be at least 400 words.
- C. The third assignment is for students to practice at least 4 hours of silence and solitude. This assignment will require planning. Given the living situations for most students (dorm life!) and job/ministry requirements, the student must plan ahead to get away for this assignment. The four hours of silence and solitude must be practiced in one session (in other words, you cannot practice one hour today, one tomorrow, etc.). A suggested plan for what the student might do during this time will be provided at the end of the syllabus—though the student is not required to follow it slavishly. It is also suggested (though not required) that the student do this assignment in connection with the fasting assignment. After completing this assignment the student will write a reflection under the heading “Silence and Solitude Entry” in his/her journal. This entry should be at least 400 words.
- D. The fourth assignment involves an evangelistic encounter that the student has during the course. The student is to write about an evangelistic conversation that he or she has which occurs during the entire duration of the course. The conversation may take place before the journal’s ten weeks begins, but should not be prior to the beginning of the course. This entry should be at least 400 words and should be placed in the journal under the heading “Evangelistic Encounter”.
- E. The student will write book reviews on the two main textbooks for the course: *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and *Simplify Your Spiritual Life* (both by Donald Whitney). The format for these reviews is found at the end of the syllabus.
- F. At the end of the course the student will write an entry of at least 1000 words which explains his or her (personal) view of the role of spiritual disciplines in the life of youth ministry. The student may wish to use this entry in the form of a strategy for implementing the spiritual disciplines in future youth ministry contexts. This entry should appear in the journal under the heading, “Spiritual Disciplines in Youth Ministry”.



## Grading

### Point System

Journal	50 %
Fast and Reflections	5%
Silence and Solitude & Entry	5%
Evangelistic Encounter & Entry	5%
Book Reviews	25%
Implementing Disciplines in YM Entry	10%

### Grade Scale

	Grade with explanation	Grade points per hour
A	93-100 Superior	4
B	85-92 Above Average	3
C	77-84 Average	2
D	70-76 Below Average	1
F	Under 70 Failure	0

## Bibliography

- Edwards, Jonathan. *A Jonathan Edwards' Reader*. Yale Nota Bene, 2003.
- Hall, Joseph. *The Art of Divine Meditation*. Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2007.
- Howard, Evan B. *Praying the Scriptures: A Field Guide for Your Spiritual Journey*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.
- Hull, Bill. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006.
- St. Clair, Barry. *Spending Time Alone with God*. Norcross, GA: Reachout Youth Solutions, 2002.
- Swenson, Richard. *Margin*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004.
- Whitney, Donald. *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church*. Chicago, IL: Moody, 1996.
- Whitney, Donald. *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001.
- Wilhoit, James. *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Yancey, Philip. *Prayer: Does it Make Any Difference?.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

## Course Schedule

### August

- 23 Introduction to the course, syllabus explanation
- 25 Students take spiritual inventory/assessment; discussion of experience with disciplines
- 30 I Timothy 4 and the call for personal discipline

## September

- 1 Sanctification: What role does God play? What role do I play?
- 6 Scripture Intake: The most important spiritual discipline
- 8 Meditation: Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1-3
- 13 Meditation: Philippians 4:8 and II Timothy 2:7; methods of meditation
- 15 The Link between meditation and prayer: The discovery of George Mueller
- 20 Prayer Continued
- 22 **Note: Journals must start by this date to get in the full ten-week requirement**
- 27 Evangelism as a spiritual discipline
- 29 Evangelism as a spiritual discipline

## October

- 4 Serving
- 6 Stewardship—Time
- 11 Stewardship—Giving
- 13 Fasting—What is fasting and why should I do it?
- 18 Fasting
- 20 Silence and Solitude: Why we need silence and solitude
- 25 Silence and Solitude
- 27 Journaling: The benefits of journaling your spiritual journey

## November

- 1 Tying the Personal Disciplines with the Corporate
- 3
- 8 Contemporary Challenges against the disciplines
- 10 Contemporary Challenges against the disciplines
- 15
- 17
- 22
- 29 Students will take the spiritual disciplines inventory/assessment

December 1—Journals will be turned in and discussed in class; review of changes in spiritual disciplines in students' lives

APPENDIX 2  
PRE-COURSE SURVEY

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate your current perception and practice of certain spiritual disciplines. This research is being conducted by Barry Raper for his Doctor of Ministry project involving the teaching of biblical meditation as a means for transformative prayer in a class at Welch College. In this research, you will answer basic questions about your understanding of spiritual disciplines as well as your actual practice of select disciplines for the purpose of evaluating any personal growth that occurs as a result of the fifteen weeks of studying biblical meditation and its link to prayer. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Using the following scale, please indicate the number that corresponds with your personal response to the following statements:

---

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain/ Sometimes	Agree	Strongly Agree

- \_\_\_ 1. I would describe my understanding of spiritual disciplines to be very thorough
- \_\_\_ 2. I have a daily time alone with God
- \_\_\_ 3. I know what is meant by the term Biblical meditation
- \_\_\_ 4. I practice the discipline of Biblical meditation on a daily basis
- \_\_\_ 5. I pray on a daily basis
- \_\_\_ 6. I would characterize my prayer life as growing
- \_\_\_ 7. I am able to pray with confidence that God is hearing my prayers
- \_\_\_ 8. I frequently receive answers to prayer
- \_\_\_ 9. I frequently record significant aspects of my life of faith in a journal

## APPENDIX 3

### POST-COURSE SURVEY

#### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate your current perception and practice of certain spiritual disciplines. This research is being conducted by Barry Raper for his Doctor of Ministry project involving the teaching of biblical meditation as a means for transformative prayer in a class at Welch College. In this research, you will answer basic questions about your understanding of spiritual disciplines as well as your actual practice of select disciplines for the purpose of evaluating any personal growth that occurs as a result of the fifteen weeks of studying biblical meditation and its link to prayer. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Using the following scale, please indicate the number that corresponds with your personal response to the following statements:

---

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain/ Sometimes	Agree	Strongly Agree

\_\_\_ 1. I would describe my understanding of spiritual disciplines to be very thorough

\_\_\_ 2. I have a daily time alone with God

\_\_\_ 3. I know what is meant by the term Biblical meditation

\_\_\_ 4. I practice the discipline of Biblical meditation on a daily basis

\_\_\_ 5. I pray on a daily basis

\_\_\_ 6. I would characterize my prayer life as growing

\_\_\_ 7. I am able to pray with confidence that God is hearing my prayers

\_\_\_ 8. I frequently receive answers to prayer

\_\_\_ 9. I frequently record significant aspects of my life of faith in a journal

APPENDIX 4

COMPARISONS BETWEEN PRE- AND  
POST-COURSE SURVEYS

Table A1. Question 1: I would describe my understanding  
of spiritual disciplines to be very thorough

Student	Pre-Course Survey	Post-Course Survey
A	3	5
B	3	5
C	4	4
D	3	4
E	4	5
F	2	4
G	4	4
H	3	5
Average Score	3.25	4.50

Table A2. Question 2: I have a daily time alone with God

Student	Pre-Course Survey	Post-Course Survey
A	4	4
B	4	5
C	4	4
D	5	5
E	3	4
F	1	3
G	3	3
H	4	4
Average Score	3.50	4.0

Table A3. Question 3: I know what is meant by the term Biblical meditation

Student	Pre-Course Survey	Post-Course Survey
A	4	5
B	5	5
C	3	4
D	4	5
E	3	4
F	4	4
G	4	4
H	4	4
Average Score	3.875	4.375

Table A4. Question 4: I practice the discipline of Biblical meditation on a daily basis

Student	Pre-Course Survey	Post-Course Survey
A	2	4
B	4	4
C	3	3
D	4	4
E	3	4
F	2	3
G	2	3
H	3	4
Average Score	2.875	3.625

Table A5. Question 5: I pray on a daily basis

Student	Pre-Course Survey	Post-Course Survey
A	3	4
B	3	5
C	5	4
D	5	5
E	4	5
F	3	4
G	4	5
H	4	4
Average Score	3.875	4.50

Table A6. Question 6: I would characterize my prayer life as growing

Student	Pre-Course Survey	Post-Course Survey
A	3	5
B	3	5
C	4	4
D	4	4
E	4	4
F	2	4
G	3	5
H	3	5
Average Score	3.25	4.50

Table A7. Question 7: I am able to pray with confidence that God is hearing my prayers

Student	Pre-Course Survey	Post-Course Survey
A	4	5
B	4	5
C	5	4
D	3	4
E	3	4
F	3	4
G	5	4
H	5	5
Average Score	4.0	4.375

Table A8. Question 8: I frequently receive answers to prayer

Student	Pre-Course Survey	Post-Course Survey
A	4	5
B	3	5
C	5	3
D	4	4
E	3	3
F	4	4
G	3	4
H	3	4
Average Score	3.625	4.0

Table A9. Question 9: I frequently record significant aspects of my life of faith in a journal

Student	Pre-Course Survey	Post-Course Survey
A	1	4
B	3	4
C	1	3
D	4	5
E	1	2
F	2	3
G	1	2
H	3	4
Average Score	2.0	3.375

Conclusions: The responses indicate positive increases in every area. Questions which showed the smallest increases were numbers 7 and 8 (both related to prayer), gaining only (.375). Areas which displayed the most significant improvement were Question 1 (+1.25), Question 6 (+1.25), and Question 9 (+1.375).



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- Alexander, Donald L., ed. *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989.
- Anders, Max. *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999.
- Beeke, Joel R. *Overcoming the World: Grace to Win the Daily Battle*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Psalms*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.
- Brown, Colin, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Brown, F., S. Driver, and C. Briggs, eds. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.
- Bunyan, John. *Grace Abounding*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1993.
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005.
- Calvin, John. *Commentary: The Book of Joshua*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949.
- Carson, D. A. *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.
- Davey, Cyril. *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*. Edited by John Woodbridge. Chicago: Moody, 1998.
- Dawn, Marva J. *Is It a Lost Cause?: Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997.
- Duncan, J. Ligon. *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004.
- Foster, Richard J. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- Gangel, Kenneth O., and James C. Wilhoit, eds. *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.
- Green, Joel B., and Scot McKnight, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992.

- Gromacki, Robert. *Stand United in Joy: An Exposition of Philippians*. The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian, 2002.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Hall, Joseph. *The Art of Divine Meditation*. 1607: Reprint, Mulberry, IN: Sovereign Grace, 2007.
- Harris, J. Gordon. *Joshua*. New International Biblical Commentary. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000.
- Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody, 1980.
- Henry, Matthew. *A Method for Prayer*. Edited by J. Ligon Duncan: Reprint, Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic, 1994.
- Hess, Richard. *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996.
- Howard, David. *Joshua*. New American Commentary, vol. 5. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999.
- Howard, Evan B. *Praying the Scriptures: A Field Guide for Your Spiritual Journey*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999.
- Hughes, R. Kent, and Bryan Chapell. *I & II Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000.
- Hunt, T. W. *The Life-Changing Power of Prayer*. Nashville: LifeWay, 2002.
- Jensen, Rosemary. *Praying the Attributes of God: A Guide to Personal Worship through Prayer*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002.
- Kaufman, U. Milo. *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966.
- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 1-71: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1973.
- Knight, George W., III. *The Pastoral Epistles*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992.
- Lea, Thomas D., and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*. The New American Commentary, vol. 34. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- Longman, Tremper, III. *How to Read the Psalms*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988.
- Lovelace, Richard F. *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979.
- Melick, Richard R. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. The New American Commentary, vol. 32. Nashville: Broadman, 1991.

- Mueller, George. *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Mueller: Written by Himself, Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Mueller Complete and Unabridged*. 2 vols. Reprint, Muskegon, MI: Dust and Ashes, 2003.
- Murray, Andrew. *The Practice of God's Presence*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1999.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *The Epistle to the Philippians*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991.
- Owen, John. *Of Mortification of Sin in Believers in Overcoming Sin and Temptation*. Edited by Justin Taylor and Kelly Kopic. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006.
- Petitt, Paul, ed. *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008.
- Polhill, John B. *Paul and His Letters*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999.
- Ranew, Nathaniel. *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation*. 1670: Reprint, Charleston, SC: BiblioLife, 2009.
- Ryken, Leland. *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Silva, Moses. *Philippians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.
- Smith, John, Harry Stout, and Kenneth Minkema, eds. *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Spurgeon, Charles. *The Treasury of David: Classic Reflections on the Wisdom of the Psalms*. Vols 1 and 3. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988.
- Stott, John. *The Message of Acts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990.
- St. Clair, Barry. *Spending Time Alone with God*. Norcross, GA: Reach Out Youth Solutions, 2002.
- Swenson, Richard. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. Colorado Springs: Navigators, 2004.
- Towner, Philip H. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006.
- Wallace, Howard Neil. *Words to God, Word from God: The Psalms in the Prayer and Preaching of the Church*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.
- Wells, David. *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*. Chicago: Moody, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*. Colorado Springs:  
NavPress, 2001.

Wilson, Gerald H. *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*. Leicester, England:  
Apollos, 2005.

### Articles

Johnson, Terry, and Ligon Duncan. "Recommendations for Improving Public Prayer."  
*Nine Marks*. [http://www.9marks.org/journal/  
recommendations-improving-public-prayer](http://www.9marks.org/journal/recommendations-improving-public-prayer) (accessed March 5, 2009).

Lowery, Brian. "Biblical Literacy Rate Reaches New Low: Why 'John 3:16' Being the  
Top Google Search Isn't Something to Celebrate." [http://blog.christianitytoday.com/  
outofur/archives](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives) (accessed March 5, 2009).

Piper, John. "George Mueller's Strategy for Showing God." [http://www.desiringgod.org/  
resource-library/biographies](http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies) (accessed October 1, 2011).

## ABSTRACT

### TEACHING BIBLICAL MEDITATION AS A MEANS TO PRAYER TO STUDENTS OF WELCH COLLEGE, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Barry Glendon Raper, D.Min.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Donald S. Whitney

This project sought to educate and engage college students in the spiritual disciplines with special focus on the twin disciplines of meditation and prayer. Chapter 1 introduces the context of Welch College and provides the rationale for the project. Chapter 2 examines the biblical and theological basis for meditation in the Old and New Testaments. Chapter 3 focuses on the link between meditation and prayer with special emphasis on George Mueller. Chapter 4 provides the reader with a look at what actually took place within the project. Chapter 5 evaluates the project and gives theological and personal reflections.

## VITA

Barry Glendon Raper

### EDUCATIONAL:

Diploma, Red Bay High School, Red Bay, Alabama, 1993

B.S., Free Will Baptist Bible College, 1999

M. Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002

### MINISTERIAL

Associate Pastor, Red Bay Free Will Baptist Church, Red Bay, Alabama 2002-2003

Pastor, Red Bay Free Will Baptist Church, 2003-2005

Pastor, Bethel Free Will Baptist Church, Chapmansboro, Tennessee, 2009-