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TRAINING YOUNG ADULT MEMBERS OF THE ZION
NUMBER ONE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH IN
BARTON, ALABAMA TO BECOME COMMITTED
DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST

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Karlos Dierecko Felton
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Karlos Dierecko Felton

Read and Approved by:

Joseph C. Harrod (Faculty Supervisor)

Matthew D. Haste

Date _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	v
PREFACE	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	4
Purpose	6
Goals	6
Research Methodology	7
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	8
Conclusion	9
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION TO BECOMING COMMITTED DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST.	10
Biblical Foundation of Romans 12: 1-2: Spiritual Disciplines Foster Renewed Minds	11
Biblical Foundation of 2 Peter 1:3-9: Pursuit of Spirituality	16
Biblical Foundation of Psalm 1: 1-3: Bible Meditation	21
Biblical Foundation of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: Prayer	25
Conclusion	27
3. THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PROCESS OF BECOMING COMMITTED DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST	29
Maturing Christians Grow in Their Practice of Bible Intake	29

Chapter	Page
Maturing Christians Grow in Their Practice of Meditation	37
Maturing Christians Grow in Their Practice of Prayer	46
Conclusion	51
4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT	53
Project Promotion	53
Summary of Project Goals	54
Conclusion	65
5. MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION	67
Evaluation of the Project's Purpose	68
Evaluation of the Project's Goals	69
Strengths of the Project	75
Weaknesses of the Project	77
What I Would Do Differently	79
Theological Reflections	80
Personal Reflections	82
Conclusion	83
 Appendix	
1. DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES PRE-TRAINING SURVEY	85
2. DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	88
3. DISCIPLESHIP COMMITMENT CARD	90
4. CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC	92
5. DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES POST-TRAINING EVALUATION	93
BIBLIOGRAPHY	96

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Z1MBC Bible practices	55
2. Z1MBC Meditation Practices	56
3. Z1MBC Prayer Practices	56
4. Curriculum effectiveness rubric	59
5. <i>t</i> -test pre-test and post-test results	64
6. Pre-test and post-test survey change	75

PREFACE

Implementing this ministry research project proved to be extremely challenging and at times overwhelming. However, because of this project, my understanding of discipleship training broadened since it was introduced to the Zion #1 Missionary Baptist.

I am thankful to God and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for providing me with the vision to pursue this educational endeavor and for enabling me to patiently persevere to complete this project.

I am thankful to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for providing a pathway of training for African American Clergy. This pathway is evident in the Doctor of Educational Ministry Program with emphasis in black church leadership.

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Karlos Felton

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission of The Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church is to create a ministry in which every member grows spiritually to the point that they know their eternal destination is heaven and to be a visible and viable church that ministers to the needs of the community. The church accomplishes this mission by participating in vigorous investigation of God's Word through preaching, teaching, and personal study. Discipleship is the process that Jesus Christ left the world so that followers would be equipped for effective service. The Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church needs to develop more young adults who are themselves growing disciples so that one day, they might actively seek to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

Context

The Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church of Barton, Alabama (Z1MBC) began in 1870 in a brush arbor a few miles from its current location. W. L. Norcross was the church's first pastor and the one who led the congregation into the current structure occupied today. For the past 149 years, the church has displayed a rich history that highlights their determination and commitment to serve the mandates of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. The church is a beacon of light for the local community of Barton and prayerfully seeks to continue to pass down a legacy of service to the next generation.

In February of 2010, I became the seventeenth pastor. Zion currently has a membership of 135 people, of which 75 to 80 are weekly, active worship service attendees. A significant age gap separates the make-up of the congregation: 60 to 70

percent of the congregation are over the age of 55 and the other 30 to 40 percent are between the ages of 1 and 54.

A strength of Z1MBC is the commitment that those members 55 years old and above have to the institution of the historical black Baptist church. The black Baptist church for the Boomer generation was, and continues to be, the bedrock of relief for many who have been exposed to the social and economic injustices of the past and present. The church represents a refuge from the oppressive vicissitudes that plagued many black church members. The church, for the Boomer generation, provides a place where self-worth and meaning were added to the lives of the parishioners who otherwise could not find it in the norms of society. Today, there is a deep-seated recollection in the minds of the congregants of how things used to be versus how things have transitioned for the better in the church. Generally, the 55 and older demographic is a generation whose parents brought them to church, and they had little choice in the matter.

Today, many contemporary parents in the black Baptist church have vacated the practice of bringing their children to church and have moved to parenting styles that seem more driven by whether children desire to attend. The practice of giving children the ultimate choice of attendance has led to a situation where these children, now adults, view church participation as optional, or even unnecessary. When attending church lacks priority, spiritual growth nearly always suffers.

The exposure that the older generation experienced of being pushed to love God has carried over into their senior years in the church. Most members who are over the age of 55 are faithful and available for service in the church every week. This commitment is a result of past leaders' teaching, who stressed the importance of being faithful and committed to the local church. This generation also understands the importance of uniting so that, collectively, the community will be strengthened. The 55 and over members have consistently supported the congregation financially and continue to exhibit dedication in most of the needed areas of ministry.

Another strength of Z1MBC is the continued promotion of social and economic development of the local black community through spiritual formation. The spiritual disciplines of prayer, singing, and giving are the highlights of most of the worship services at Z1MBC. Spiritual stability has been developed in many members by applying biblical mandates to all facets of the congregant's life. The community has a rich history of support for its members during the tumultuous times of rampant social injustice and financial inequality. During this era, most congregants were socially and economically on the same level, which created a "common" state for the members (Acts 2:44).¹ This closeness forged throughout those years at Z1MBC has created a willingness among members to aid and support one another during the times of need.

Z1MBC's greatest strength is being a church with a solid foundation, known within the community for being doctrinally sound in the Word of God. The church has pride in its long history of seminary-trained pastors. The church's desire to continue to call seminary-trained pastors is important because many black congregations have not yet found profitability in calling trained clergy.

For its many strengths, Z1MBC also has areas that need more focused attention. One weakness of Z1MBC is the evangelistic shortfall in effectively reaching the unchurched through evangelistic methods. The community of Barton was once vibrant, with several large families that supported the church. Throughout the years, many of those large families have dwindled. Many of the children born and raised in this community rarely remain in once they finish high school because they generally seek to move to a location that will afford more economic success. Therefore, training young adults is a significant factor to regaining the community and leading lost souls to Christ. The mandate to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" is not very prevalent in the fiber and mindset of Z1MBC members. Members do not oppose reaching others, but the viewpoint is that discipleship happens once someone decides to become a member of the

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

church. The training of young adult members will enhance the possibility of more effectively ministering to the local community. Generation X and generation Y need to be more thoroughly taught the importance of being committed to the institution of the Lord's church.

Rationale

Biblical and spiritual immaturity among members 21 to 50 years old were the main weaknesses this project addressed at Z1MBC. Specifically, this project trained the young adults in this age demographic to become fully functional disciples of Jesus Christ through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

The dynamic of immaturity among young adults in this post-modern era is not exclusively limited to Z1MBC; therefore, this project forged change beyond the walls of this local church. A key question is, "Why should spiritual maturity be taught to the young adults?" Spiritual maturity must be promoted through teaching the Word of God because it is the only viable pathway to develop biblical followers of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews makes this situation clear: in the absence of a diet that progresses from milk to "strong meat," it is inevitable that the believer will struggle to grow into the expected maturity in the Lord (Heb 5:14). Many young adults at Z1MBC fall into the category that the apostle Paul describes as "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim 3:5). Also, current culture has made other issues of life, such as extracurricular activities, social events, and relaxation, more formidable than spirituality, to many young adults.

Scripture teaches that God demonstrated his love by giving Jesus Christ to anyone willing to accept him as their personal Savior (John 3:16). Spiritual maturity must be promoted through teaching the Word of God because it is the only viable pathway to develop biblical followers of Jesus Christ. Paul stated, "All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works"

(2 Tim 3:16-17). Therefore, studying and engaging in the Word is the gateway that will lead to spiritual maturity. Upon engaging in daily intake of the Word, it is also necessary to meditate upon the Word (Ps 1:1-3). This project guided young adults to development in the spiritual disciplines. Discipline is the primary disposition for the Christian who seeks to enhance and achieve spiritual maturity in life. First Thessalonians 5:17 requires believers to interact with the Lord daily through prayer.

The final question is this: What does spiritual and biblical maturity resemble and how will it be manifested? Spiritual and biblical maturity in Z1MBC young adults will be displayed as a group of believers who have developed into committed followers of Christ. This commitment will be manifested by the conviction that comes from daily engagement of reading the Word, studying the Word, and praying about the Word. This process of discipline will cause the Z1MBC young adults to “present” their “bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God” they will be “transformed by the renewing” of their “minds” for the glory of God (Rom 12:1-2).

A theology of biblical spirituality reveals the Supreme God’s desire to bring humanity back into a glorious relationship with Himself. Theology is the study of God, His attributes, and how they relate to everything in the world. Charles Ryrie states, “Theology simply means thinking about God and expressing those thoughts in some way.”² Young adults between the age of 23 to 50 years of age appear to be at a loss when it comes to understanding the importance of being in a fruitful and active relationship with Jesus Christ. These young adults tend to be sincere about their belief in God, but there appears to be a disconnect in how they should carry out their relationship in the Lord. Societal trends and current cultural methodologies of religion have infiltrated the historic doctrinal processes in Z1MBC. The young adults of Z1MBC needed training and

² Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 9.

teaching about biblical spirituality and spiritual discipline to improve their understanding about how to fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission.

Biblical spirituality reveals the disciplines that believers must engage in for restoration of the glory of God in man. Whether he knows it or not, man is in desperate need of fellowship with the true and living God. Spiritual disciplines, which develop and cultivate Christlike character, are the actions that believers perform regularly as an ordinary means of grace. The disciplines of studying, praying, and meditation enhance the believer's life and lead to a more perfect man for the glory of God. Kenneth Boa asserts, "Biblical meditation focuses the mind on the nuances of revealed truth."³ Z1MBC young adult members need to grow in the understanding that every word of the Bible is "inspired" by God (2 Tim 3:16a). Inspiration comes from the reality that God breathed out as the authors inhaled God's thoughts so that it could be "profitable" for the those who believe in the Word. The Word of God aids the progressive transformation of believers who willingly and intentionally engage in the discipline of Bible intake and meditation.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the young adult members of the Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church in Barton, Alabama, to become maturing disciples of Jesus Christ through practicing the spiritual disciplines.

Goals

The following four goals were created to measure the success of this project. The first two goals measured the need and the level of interest in discipleship training. The third goal assessed the willingness of the members to participate in the project. The

³ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 84.

fourth goal assessed how successful the young adult members of the ZIMBC have become trained disciples of Jesus Christ.

1. The first goal was to assess current discipleship practices among the young adult members of the ZIMBC.
2. The second goal was to recruit a group of young adults to participate in intentional spiritual formation.
3. The third goal was to refine a discipleship training program for young adult members.
4. The fourth goal was to increase the knowledge and modify practices of young adult members of the ZIMBC related to biblical spirituality.

A defined means of measurement supported these stated goals and served as a benchmark for success.⁴ The following section details the methodology and instruments used in the research.

Research Methodology

The first goal of this project was to assess current discipleship practices among the young adult members of the ZIMBC. This goal was measured by a pre-test questionnaire that gathered data about current discipleship practices.⁵ The return of a minimum of twenty surveys was required for a successful analysis and determined the success of this goal.

The second goal was to recruit a group of young adults to participate in intentional biblical spirituality. This recruitment of young adult members was accomplished by providing a written request of participation to twenty young adults for biblical spirituality training. All participants completed and signed a commitment card documenting their willingness to participate in biblical spirituality training.⁶ The return of

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

⁵ See appendix 1.

⁶ See appendix 2.

a minimum of fifteen commitment cards were required for successful participation and determined the success of this goal.

The third goal was to refine a training program in spiritual formation for young adult members. A three-person team consisting of two graduate level pastors and one female panelist reviewed the curriculum and used a rubric to assess the viability of the lesson plans. A minimum score of 3 on a four-point scale was required for each part of the curriculum and every lesson plan. If any lessons did not meet this minimum score, then the curriculum was revised and resubmitted for review until it attained the level of 3.

The fourth goal of this project was to increase knowledge and modify practices of discipleship among young adult members of the Z1MBC. This goal measurement required each member to complete an eight-week spiritual formation class. Participants had to attend at least seven of the eight sessions. Following the final session, students completed a post-test questionnaire to evaluate the training's impact. Results from the pre- and post-tests were measured using a *t*-test for dependent samples. This goal was considered successful when a *t*-test showed a positive, significant increase in participants' knowledge and change in their practice.⁷

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Discipleship. Within this project, *discipleship*, as explained by Kenneth Boa, is “a single minded pursuit of the Holy One so that [believers] are set apart for the service and surrendered to his purpose in every facet of life.”⁸

Young adults. The young adults in this project refer to members of the church from the age of twenty-three to fifty years old.

⁷ Neil Salkind, *Statistics for People who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016), 93.

⁸ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 218-19.

Spiritual disciplines. For this project, Donald Whitney’s definition of *spiritual disciplines* is utilized: “Those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁹

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project focused only on young adult members. Second, the project was confined to a fifteen-week timeframe. This timeframe gave adequate time to provide a pre-test, refine the curriculum, teach the twelve-week training sessions, and conduct the post-test after sessions were completed. Third, this project taught the spiritual disciplines of study, prayer, and meditation.¹⁰

Conclusion

The Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church can become a formidable force for the Lord, but the young adults of the church must become committed disciples of Christ. Jesus Christ is the Sovereign example of what commitment looks like in this earthly realm. This project trained Z1MBC young adults in the essentials of spiritual formation. The spiritual disciplines of prayer, studying, and meditation were presented from a biblical perspective with a goal of the trainees making application in their lives.

⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 4.

¹⁰ While standard spiritual books identify at least ten disciplines, this project utilized only study, prayer, and meditation because these disciplines address the young adult shortfall in the Z1MBC.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION TO
BECOMING COMMITTED DISCIPLES
OF JESUS CHRIST

An analysis of the command of the Lord to “make disciples” throughout Scripture points to the necessity to mature spiritually. The Word of God must promote spiritual maturity because it is the only viable pathway to develop biblical followers of Jesus Christ. Spiritual formation author Kenneth Boa states, “The spiritual life is an all-encompassing, lifelong response to God’s gracious initiatives in the lives of those whose trust is centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ.”¹ Christians today must respond to God’s goodness by becoming active participants in the discipleship process. Discipleship pivots greatly upon the level of discipline that Christians display in biblical spirituality.

Spiritual maturity in Christ involves the practice of certain disciplines, including Bible intake, meditation, and prayer. Biblical spirituality is a study that encompasses the collection of disciplines to which believers must commit for the benefit of glorifying God. Research Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology Andreas Köstenberger notes, “Biblical spirituality, at its core, entails the presence, activity, and work of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life, beginning at conversion with regeneration and continuing throughout the entire process of sanctification.”² The specific aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed exegesis of Romans 12:1-2, 2 Peter 1:3-9, Psalm 1:1-3, and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 to develop biblical spirituality in Z1MBC members.

¹ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 19.

² Andreas Köstenberger, *Excellence: The Character of God and the Pursuit of Scholarly Virtue* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 27.

For this chapter, an exegesis of Romans 12:1-2 reveals that renewed minds are one outcome of the practice of spiritual disciplines. An exegesis of 2 Peter 1:3-9 discloses that believers must diligently pursue spiritual and moral transformation as they grow in maturity. Psalm 1:1-3 divulges the practice of meditation in the believer's spiritual formation. Finally, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 explains the need for believers in Christ to pray always and about everything in life.

Biblical Foundation of Romans 12: 1-2: Spiritual Disciplines Foster Renewed Minds

The apostle Paul said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:1-2). When believers gain insight into the true knowledge of Jesus Christ, it is necessary that they surrender themselves to the Lord in newness of life.³ Renewal of mind is the expected response of man because of the blessings God has bestowed upon man. American scholar Robert Gundry states of Paul, "After an appeal that believers offer themselves to God as 'living [as opposed to slain] sacrifices,' Paul exhorts his readers not to imitate the outward conduct of non-Christians, but to live pleasingly before God out of renewed mental attitudes."⁴ When the "renewing of our minds" through the Word of God actively changes the Christian family, thoughts will lead to a place of "greater conformity" with the will of God.⁵

³ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 116.

⁴ Robert Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 386.

⁵ Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 386.

Call for Devotion

The beginning words of Romans 12:1 unveil the timeless message of the love of God and the extension of His only son Jesus Christ. Christians experience God's goodness through a person, Jesus Christ, and thus they ought to devote themselves to Jesus for the grace and mercy he extends to sinners. Paul begins this dialogue with the word "beseech," which comes from the Greek word *parakalō*, which means to exhort or to call someone aside.⁶ The apostle Paul's exhortation is a petition extended to believers. The urgency of this request is due to the blessings God has already so graciously afforded his people. Therefore, it is reasonable that man has an ethical obligation to adhere to the call of the Lord. Commentator Robert Mounce notes, "If God had not done what he did for us, there would be no compelling reason why we should now do what he says. The dynamic of God's ethical instruction arises from its logical and necessary relationship to who he is and what he has done on our behalf."⁷ The compelling nature that Paul utilizes when he calls for Christian devotion provides a picture of the urgency he seeks for humanity. New Testament scholar Grant Osborne surmises, "Paul's strong verb "I exhort" refers to an authoritative proclamation that demands serious adherence."⁸

Paul writes in an intentional nature and utilizes the word "therefore" as an indicator to look backwards at what the Lord has already done. According to chapters 1-11, God has extended His mercy to a world of sinners who do not deserve anything beyond the wrath of God. Osborne elaborates further, "The gospel is precisely God's mercy to inexcusable and undeserving sinners, in giving his Son to die for them, in justifying them freely by faith, in sending them the life-giving Spirit, and in making them his children. The total commitment of ourselves to God is based on the totality of his

⁶ Robert Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: B & H, 1995), 231.

⁷ Mounce, *Romans*, 230.

⁸ Grant Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 318.

mercy to us.”⁹ The word “therefore” is also a transitional word designed to shape the believer’s theological view as a grounds for practical implementation of right living. Ultimately, the theology of God is the cornerstone of His practical expectations.¹⁰

Call for Sacrifice

Paul highlights the “mercies of God” as an important attribute of the Lord. Indeed, the “mercies of God” are too many to number or even to write; therefore, believers should be devoted because of the devotion God has extended through His mercy. The “mercies of God” should drive believers to willingly sacrifice themselves for the glory of God. Willing sacrifice is manifested in the believer through the practice of living out biblical mandates. God’s glory should be the driving force behind the believer’s quest to achieve some level of spiritual acceptability. The mercy of God in this text demands that believers commit to “present their bodies as living sacrifices,” which is a depiction of the sacrifices Old Testament believers made with the blood of animals. The request is certainly not a literal request, but instead is a metaphorical call upon believers to sacrifice themselves. Commentator Douglas Moo notes, “As new covenant Christians, we no longer offer animal sacrifices; we now offer ourselves as a ‘living sacrifice.’ ‘Living’ perhaps has a theological meaning: We offer ourselves as people who have been brought from death to life.”¹¹ Readers must consider two questions to understand Paul’s statement: (1) what is a “living sacrifice” and (2) how might believers surrender themselves in this way?

Mounce provides a unique perspective on Paul’s statement of what a “living sacrifice” looks like in the Christian’s life. Mounce suggests Paul’s position is that “the

⁹ Osborne, *Romans*, 318-19.

¹⁰ Mounce, *Romans*, 230.

¹¹ Douglas Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 394.

offering of one's body as a living sacrifice is a spiritual act of worship."¹² The believer who engages in this sacrificial posture will display spirituality in worship, fellowship, and normal living. Paul's request to become "living sacrifices" is a call to some level of consecration. It is also a call to reconstruct the outer man so that it will display the attributes of Christ. New Testament scholar James Dunn makes a viable case about sacrifice: "It is not to be thought of in contrast to an 'inner consecration,' but as the physical embodiment of the individual's consecration in the concrete realities of daily life, a 'somatizing' rather than a spiritualizing."¹³ The irony of this wording "living sacrifice" is that the Old Testament sacrifices were dead once the sacrifice process began; however, Paul in this context calls for believers to do their sacrificing in their live bodies. This sacrifice equates to believers giving everything within their make-up, which includes their time, talents, and treasures. The Christian must exemplify this consecrated sacrificial posture in all of their daily activities which should include their place of work, their times of service to the church, and their times of leisure.

Paul surmises that the result of being a "living sacrifice" will place the believer into a "holy and acceptable" place in the eyes of the Lord. This process of becoming "holy and acceptable" in the eyes of this Lord is the process of sanctification in the life of the believer. It is erroneous for anyone to believe that the sanctification process is exclusively accomplished by the Lord alone. Christian theologian Millard Erickson states, "So while sanctification is God's work, the believer has a role as well, entailing both removal of sinfulness and development of holiness."¹⁴ Spiritually speaking, Paul suggests that sacrifice to the Lord is a worship action that will be pleasing to Him.

¹² Mounce, *Romans*, 231.

¹³ James Dunn, *Romans*, World Bible Commentary, vol. 38 (Dallas: Baker, 1988), 709.

¹⁴ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 900.

Call for Conformity

Paul unveils the process of conformity to the Word of God by emphatically calling upon the believer to resist the ways of the world. Christians manifest the action of “presenting our bodies as living sacrifices” through that to which they are willing to conform to. R. C. H. Lenski asserts, “Our body is the organ for our actions, and when we present that to God, it means that all our actions together with their instruments are to be directed solely by him.”¹⁵ Paul says, “be not conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2). The word *conformed* comes from the Greek word *suschēmatisō*, which speaks of the displayed appearance and/or fashion of a person. The world is certainly impressive and enticing; however, the world is deceptive and extremely dangerous for the believer. While Christians must live in this world, they are not a part of the ways of the world. Biblical scholar C. K. Barrett explains, “Being conformed to this age results in an ‘unfit mind’ (Rom 1:28). To recognize and share the act of redemption accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus means the renewing of the mind.”¹⁶ A Christian’s failure to participate in the organized structure of church fellowship, which includes prayer, preaching, and praising, guarantees that he will inevitably become victimized by the magnetic pull of the world. A Christian who is half-hearted about serving the Lord will begin to resemble and take on the character of the world.

Call for Transformation

Finally, Paul provides the practical conclusion that every believer must gravitate to the development of a renewed mind. Paul was inspired to command believers “to be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). The word *transformed* comes from the Greek word *metamorphousthe*, which means to be radically changed inwardly. Mounce contends, “The transformation of which Paul spoke of in Rom 12:2 is not a change

¹⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, GA: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), 747.

¹⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed, New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1991), 214.

effected from without but a radical reorientation that begins deep within the human heart.”¹⁷ The inner part of every man must be willing to endure the process that God uses to alter the normal and natural inclinations of humanity. The reason that mankind needs this change is because all men are infected and affected by sin. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” The only antidote for sin is the transformation that comes from the Lord. Renewed minds are accomplished when believers and the church allow the power of God to take control of every aspect of their lives: the mind, body, and the soul must be surrendered to His will. Pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes, “It is the form of Christ himself, who came into the world and of his infinite mercy bore mankind and took it to himself, but who notwithstanding did not fashion himself in accordance with it but was rejected and cast out by it.”¹⁸

Biblical Foundation of 2 Peter 1:3-9: Pursuit of Spirituality

For Christians to experience transforming spiritual renewal, they must first come to realize that they need such renewal and ask how such transformation occurs. While some Christians suggest this transformation is immediate, 2 Peter 1:3-9 shows that the believer’s inward spiritual growth is grounded in God’s power and involves the ongoing, diligent pursuit of moral excellence.

Peter wastes no time by using the terminology *divine power* (v. 3), which is designed to highlight the authority of God. The believer who has a clear understanding of the reality that God has total authority over everything has access to unlimited spiritual empowerment through personal obedience. Andreas Köstenberger states, “On the basis of God’s gracious and precious promises, Peter exhorts believers to make every effort to add to their faith the qualities that will produce effectiveness in their Christian ministry and

¹⁷ Mounce, *Romans*, 232-33.

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 267.

result in assurance of final salvation.”¹⁹ Peter highlights the knowledge of Christ as the pathway to everything needed in this world pertaining to humanity’s “life and godliness.” New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner states, “Everything needed for eternal life is mediated through the knowledge of the Christ, who calls believers to himself.”²⁰ The Christian’s earthly life is designed to make preparation for eternal living. While the mandates of Scripture are designed to improve earthly living, the clear goal of growing in the knowledge of Christ is to obtain eternal life. Ultimately, Jesus provides the “power” that sustains believers in this world and the world to come.

“Godliness” is *eusebia* or “piety.” It describes a human’s right ordering of her or his life to live in a way that pleases God. It is God’s expectation that mankind live according to His Word. Commentator Clifton Allen states, “God in Christ supplies all that is needed to provide both *life and godliness*, both life and the acceptable kind of life.”²¹ God is the giver and sustainer of all life. Therefore, it is reasonable that those who are privy to life should accommodate Him with a display of reverent maturity.

The Believer’s Promises

Believers are the recipients of the promises of the Lord. Peter describes these promises as “exceeding great and precious promises.” Gundry surmises, “Peter glories in the magnitude of God’s promises to believers, by which they come to share divine nature, and points out the resultant necessity of nurturing Christian virtues. Correct conduct must undergird correct belief.”²² The grounds of Peter’s argument is the “divine power” of Jesus Christ.

¹⁹ Köstenberger, *Excellence*, 44.

²⁰ Thomas Schreiner, *2 Peter*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 290.

²¹ Clifton Allen, *Hebrews–Revelation*, The Broadman Bible Commentary, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman, 1972), 176, emphasis original.

²² Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 445.

The word *promises* describes the statement of the Lord bestowed upon those who have displayed a legitimate faith in Jesus Christ.²³ It is important to note that Peter had earlier unveiled in his first letter that Christians would receive an “inheritance” that would be extended due to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:3-13). In this passage the presence of an enhanced inheritance is referenced as being “partakers of the divine nature.” Peter informs his audience that Christians obtain the promises of God through the knowledge of Christ which molds morality through salvation.”²⁴ The knowledge of Jesus is the “divine nature” that provides clarity in every believer’s life.

The Believer’s Obligation

Verses 5-7 inform the believers of their obligation to “give all diligence” and “add” several virtues to their lives. Peter’s language here suggests strongly that it is not enough to temporarily obey the requests of God’s Word, but rather the believer must “add” these virtues to their lives. The first of these virtues that the believer is called to is “faith.” Faith is the bedrock foundation upon which the believer’s obligation should be built. Faith is individual belief in the truths of God, and it is also the cornerstone in which everything in Christianity is built.²⁵ Therefore, the obligation of the believer is to seek to become excellent in the only avenue that has power to enhance the spiritual life of man. Faith is required because the Word informs believers that “without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6). Köstenberger suggests, “The list that follows is not mere moralism, for Peter has already stressed that the foundation that allows the effort to be effectually extended has been laid in salvation, here epitomized in the word

²³ Kenneth Gangel, “2 Peter,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991), 2:864.

²⁴ Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 293.

²⁵ Allen, *Hebrews–Revelation*, 176.

faith.”²⁶ While faith is the initial virtue that Peter calls upon, it is important to note that love is the final virtue required. Oxford University professor J. N. D. Kelly surmises, “This is to be the foundation of all their Christian living and of the realization of the hope to which they look forward.”²⁷ Cultivation of biblical spirituality will increase the “knowledge” in the believer’s faith life.

Peter asserts that once a believer gains knowledge through faith in Jesus Christ, some supporting virtues must accommodate the faith. Temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity are a collection of biblical spirituality principles Christians must practice.

The Believer’s Power

The final two verses of this passage (vv. 8-9) reveal that the believer is given the power to determine whether they will be empowered through the gospel of Jesus Christ or submit to the darkness of the world. Köstenberger explains, “If a person did not engage in the pursuit of Christian virtues, that person was nearsighted to the point of blindness. If he did, he would be rewarded with a rich entrance into God’s kingdom at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁸ The power available to the believer comes through the knowledge found in biblical mandates of Scripture. The evidence that a believer is spiritually healthy and morally stable comes through a careful assessment of whether the life of the believer is growing through the presence of biblical spirituality.²⁹

Peter stresses in verse 8 the importance of accentuating knowledge in the believer’s life. An obvious comparison in these two verses presents a positive outcome

²⁶ Andreas Köstenberger, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 868.

²⁷ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1969), 306.

²⁸ Köstenberger, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 869.

²⁹ David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 11 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 111.

versus a negative outcome based upon the believer's choice. "For if these things be in you, and abound," is a statement that highlights the previous virtues discussed in verses 5-7. Schreiner states of Peter's wording, "His point was that godly qualities must both exist and overflow in the lives of his readers."³⁰

Peter further points out that the presence of the biblical virtues will prevent the believer from being "barren" and "unfruitful" in the "knowledge" of the Savior. Lenski presents a strong point of view: "The sense is that these fruits of faith prove that the full, true knowledge which our Lord has bestowed upon us as the means for granting us 'all things regarding life and godliness' has, indeed, produced what such knowledge should produce."³¹ A hesitancy in the language found in verse 8 reveals that while it is possible to acquire the "knowledge" of Christ, it is equally possible to totally miss the opportunity to gain correct understanding. Walvoord states, "If these qualities are lacking, such persons are blind, and have forgotten about the forgiveness of sins."³² Furthermore, it appears that Peter is making the claim that when a person is without the fruits of faith, then they are without the salvation of Christ. Those who are unwilling to practice godly habits prove that they do not believe the gospel.³³ Biblical spirituality can only be accomplished by intentionally laboring to become more like Jesus Christ. Boa states, "We must affirm and rejoice in the truth of Christ living in and through us, but we should also avoid the passive and inert notion that we are left unchanged."³⁴ Transformation of mind, body, and soul will occur in the lives of those who genuinely surrender to the teachings of Jesus.

³⁰ Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 302.

³¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 271.

³² Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 302.

³³ Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 303.

³⁴ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 122.

Second Peter 1:9 provides the reader with the antithesis of the previous verse. Peter explains that anyone who does not possess the biblical qualities of faith, temperance, long suffering, godliness, and love are nothing more than “blind” men who “cannot see afar off.” This means that the reason that the person is “blind” is because he has decided to close his eyes to what he could see.³⁵ The final conclusion represented in verse 9 is that the person who fails to practice godly virtues has forgotten that Jesus died for his sins. The inability to see circumspectly due to spiritual “blindness” and the lack of memory of how devastating sin was creates forward condemnation from the Lord.³⁶

Biblical Foundation of Psalm 1: 1-3: Bible Meditation

If disciples of Jesus are to live differently from the world and to intentionally pursue godly virtues, then they must engage in new patterns of living that foster such change. Psalm 1:1-3 shows the power of meditating on God’s Word as one of these patterns of living. This passage reveals the blessings that flow from God’s Word. However, there is a requirement of the believer to intentionally meditate upon the Word of God. The Christian’s access to the blessings of God comes through the willingness to avoid the “counsel” of the heathen by meditating upon the path of righteousness found in Scripture. Old Testament Professor Allen Ross contends, “A godly person is influenced not by the unrighteous people but by his meditation on the Word of God. Such meditation necessarily involves study and retention.”³⁷ Meditation is the process of continuing to rehearse the Word of God that will lead to spiritual growth. The Law of the Lord provided the psalmist with a structural pathway on how to live this life.

³⁵ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 122.

³⁶ Walls and Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, 111.

³⁷ Allen Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1:790.

Meditation: Departing from the Wicked

The very first phrase of this Psalm is “blessed is the man,” which can literally be interpreted as happy is the man. “Blessed is the man” presents a picture of how it is possible to avoid the many sorrows of this life if he or she enters into a peaceful fellowship with God.³⁸ A man can choose two distinct directions when encountering Psalm 1: one is the right way and one is the wrong way. Rolf Jacobson provides this insight on the pathway: “These two pathways are not characterized by their terrain or geography...but by the character of the people who tread them.”³⁹ “Blessed” describes the happiness that the believer will experience including never ending peace, prosperity, and total joy which come from the Lord. The antithesis of “blessed” is to be cursed as a result of following after the “counsel of the ungodly.” Peter Craigie asserts, “The righteous person avoids all the dimensions of the way of the wicked; therein lies the source of blessedness or happiness.”⁴⁰

The writer of Psalm 1 provides a vivid picture that parallels the process of how to avoid falling victim to a wicked man’s antics. The instructions require the “blessed” man to refrain from “walking” after the “counsel of the ungodly,” and to refuse to “stand” in the whiles of “sinners,” and to never “sit” with the “scornful.” The words “walketh,” “standeth,” and “sitteth” are not necessarily literal actions of position and posture, but rather they express the behavioral movement of a man embarking upon sinfulness. Concerning the transition of sin, Barker states, “The parallelism is synonymous and profoundly portrays the totality of evil.”⁴¹ Ross argues, “With each parallel unit the expression becomes more intense. This signifies a progression from a casual influence of

³⁸ Kenneth Barker and John Kohlenberger III, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, abridged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 793.

³⁹ Nancy Declaissé-Walford, Rolf Jacobson, and Beth Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 58.

⁴⁰ Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 60.

⁴¹ Barker and Kohlengerger, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 793.

ungodly people to collusion with them in their scorn against the righteous.”⁴² The words “counsel,” “way,” and “seat” are descriptive depictions of those negative attributes that have a tendency to be attractive to the spiritually unstable “man.” Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner states, “Counsel, way and seat (or ‘assembly,’ or ‘dwelling’) draw attention to the realms of thinking, behaving and belonging, in which a person’s fundamental choice of allegiance is made and carried through. . . . Yet certainly the three complete phrases show three aspects, indeed three degrees, of departure from God.”⁴³

Meditation: Devotion to the Word

Verse 2 provides the insight of the absolute necessity of man to “meditate” on the Word of God. The text reveals that the “blessed” man must “delight” in the “law of the Lord.” The law signifies primarily instructions that come from God for the purpose of helping humanity live in harmony with God’s will.⁴⁴ It should certainly be a delightful experience for anyone who has intentionally engaged in meaningful interaction with the Word of God. Daniel Block surmises that the “law” would be totally burdensome for believers if it were not for the joy provided by the covenant relationship given by God.”⁴⁵ The “Law” of God is the life of believers who yield to its teachings.

It is important to point out that careless reading of the Word will not supply the believer with the substance available to those who truly “meditate” through study and prayer. Pastors Kent Hughes and Carey Hughes note, “From this we understand that biblical meditation requires the use of both mind and mouth. Personally, this means that (along with regular reading of the Bible) we must choose especially meaningful passages

⁴² Ross, “Psalms,” 790.

⁴³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 64.

⁴⁴ Barker and Kohlengerger, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 793.

⁴⁵ Daniel Isaac Block, *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), xii.

of Scripture to reverently murmur.”⁴⁶ The call being made here requires deliberate engagement with the Scripture. Biblical Spirituality Professor Donald Whitney says, “I believe meditation on Scripture is the single greatest devotional need of most Christians however, meaningful meditation requires concentration not often developed in our fast-paced, media-distracted society.”⁴⁷ The believer must develop the discipline to withdraw from the distractions of the world and “draw nigh unto Christ” through meditation.

The final picture that verse 2 presents is of a man “meditating day and night” on the Word of God. The depiction of the phrase “day and night” is one of a man continuing with persistence in the study of Scripture. When the operation of the Holy Spirit transforms man’s mind, he will stop resisting the law because he loves God’s law and the expectations found in God’s law.⁴⁸ The man who resolves to make a devoted commitment to “meditating” daily upon the Word will experience a clear understanding of God’s will for his life. R. Kent Hughes states, “Meditation begins with listening to the Word. This isn’t just hearing or reading—but really listening.”⁴⁹ The more energy that man places on God’s Word, the more powerful he will become through the Lord.

Meditation: Drawing God’s Blessings

Psalms 1:3 provides the reader with the imagery of a “tree planted by the rivers of water.” The author highlights trees that have been placed purposely near “irrigation canals.”⁵⁰ Spiritually speaking, the believer who experiences this blessing from the Lord will perpetually enjoy the prosperity that comes from godliness. These blessings are

⁴⁶ R. Kent Hughes and W. Carey Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Young Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 75.

⁴⁷ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 254.

⁴⁸ James Montgomery, *Psalms 1-41: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 17.

⁴⁹ Hughes and Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Young Man*, 74.

⁵⁰ Baker and Kohlenberger, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 794.

perpetual because, unlike normal trees that wither seasonally, this analogy of being “planted by the river” suggests that there are no seasons of fruitlessness.

Biblical Foundation of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: Prayer

First Thessalonians 5:16-18 reveals the necessity of believers to seek the Lord through prayer always. Prayer is a spiritual discipline that every believer must consistently exercise in their daily living. Prayer is vertical communication in which the believer is able to talk to God and God is able to converse with the believer. Biblical spirituality professor Donald Whitney notes, “Prayerful people become godly people, for prayerfulness with God cultivates godliness in all of life.”⁵¹ This text clearly explains that the will of God is for Christians to practice their faith through rigorous prayer. Paul writes verses 16-18 on the heels of the Church at Thessalonica’s warning about the importance of “following that which is good” (1 Thess 5:15). Paul wanted the believers there to be filled with joy and happiness because of what Christ had already done in their lives. Jesus granted salvation to the believers there by dying for their sins (1 Thess 5:9-10). In the same manner, the extension of the Lord’s grace and mercy is available to believers of today. Therefore, the believer can strengthen his inner life by following the command to “rejoice,” “pray,” and “give thanks” for all that He has done. Commentator Michael Martin suggests, “Rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks, were not exclusively personal spiritual experiences. They were just as much, if not more so, public expressions characteristic of the church assembled.”⁵²

Rejoice Always

Paul begins by calling upon the Thessalonian believers to “rejoice evermore.” The word *rejoice* literally means to be joyful. The fact that God has provided salvation

⁵¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 99.

⁵² D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 33 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 180.

even in times of suffering and pain is enough reason to always be filled with joy. Pastor Knute Larson says, “Christian joy is not bound by circumstances or hindered by difficulties. In fact, joy in the New Testament is often coupled with sorrow or suffering.”⁵³ The word “always” is equally as important as the command to “rejoice” because there should never be a time in the life of believers when they fail to perform this action. Church history author Tim Shenton surmises, “A Christian’s joy is not a natural joy that ebbs and flows according to circumstances that surrounds us, but a supernatural joy that comes from God and is rooted in our relationship with him.”⁵⁴

Pray Always

The next instructive command Paul gives is to “pray without ceasing” (v. 17). Prayer is the avenue in which God has constructed for believers to communicate with him. Prayer enables believers to participate in meaningful fellowship with God. The word *prayer* (*proseuchomai*) strongly suggests that believers are to have an attitude of worship when they attempt to come before God.⁵⁵ Every believer should make sure that “prayer” is a daily spiritual discipline in which they engage.

Prayer is to be practiced “without ceasing,” or it is to be continually performed in the believer’s life. The practice of continuing in prayer does not mean to constantly pray without a pause or break, but rather it means that prayer should be an ongoing fellowship with the Lord. Hughes and Hughes suggest, “The prayer called for here is not so much the closing of our eyes, with our hands together, speaking audible words but, rather, the inclination and attitude of our hearts.”⁵⁶ So, hearts must be focused always

⁵³ Knute Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 9 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 74.

⁵⁴ Tim Shenton, *Opening up I Thessalonians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One, 2006), 108.

⁵⁵ Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 181.

⁵⁶ Hughes and Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Young Man*, 86.

upon the Lord and the understandings that learned through His Word. While on the surface it might appear that “praying without ceasing” may be a difficult task, the reality is that it is possible, and it is the expectation of God that believers exercise diligently in prayer.

Be Thankful Always

The final verse for consideration in this assessment calls for the believer to “give thanks” in all things pertaining to life (v. 18). The phrase *in everything* means that the believer is to exhibit a thankful heart toward God even when things are not perfect. Martin states, “Paul never instructed the church to thank God for evil events but to thank God that even in evil times and circumstances our hope remains, and God continues his work in our lives.”⁵⁷ Paul shared with the Roman church that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28).

The conclusion of verse 18 is that when the believer is obedient to the command of God concerning being thankful always, then the “will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” will be fulfilled. Köstenberger states, “Throughout this passage, growth in spirituality is evidenced in the form of active obedience, love, mission, and corporate unity and peace.”⁵⁸ Believers in Christ are required to express a thankful disposition in their every walk of life.

Conclusion

The narrative of Scripture provides a decisive picture of the importance of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity must be promoted through exposure to the Word of God. God’s Word is the prescription for those suffering from spiritual starvation. Köstenberger poses a serious question that every person must ponder in this life: “Are you committed to excellence”? He says, “We must commit ourselves to the pursuit of

⁵⁷ Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 182.

⁵⁸ Köstenberger, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 75.

excellence in the vocational, moral, and relational realms.”⁵⁹ It is imperative that all believers experience this level of excellence by renewing their minds through the transformational power of the Word of God. Spiritual transformation can be achieved when there is a radical change from within the hearts of believers. The inner part of every man must be willing to endure the process God uses to alter the normal inclinations of humanity.

There must also be an intentional practice of avoiding that which is ungodly and a gravitating to that which is found in the Word of God. The greatest risk humanity faces today is falling victim to the wiles of this world due to unchanged minds. Theologian Harry Blamires notes, “The Christian mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness and nervelessness unmatched in human history.”⁶⁰ God’s authority is exhibited throughout Scripture, therefore, the mandates found in Scripture must be lived out in the lives of believers if hearts are to be changed.

Finally, Christians should be filled with joy, prayer, and thankfulness always. The Lord has been consistent in the overflow of providing blessings and it is sensible that the response of the Christian would be one of graciousness toward the Lord. Never ending joy should be the response of every believer who has experienced the salvation of the Lord. Prayer should be the mode of communication utilized to continue in fellowship with God. Thankfulness is the spirit that believers should display in good times and in bad times. The more believers grow in these biblical graces, the more spiritually mature they will become.

⁵⁹ Köstenberger, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 231.

⁶⁰ Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publishers, 1978), 3-4.

CHAPTER 3
THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PROCESS
OF BECOMING COMMITTED DISCIPLES
OF JESUS CHRIST

Chapter 2 identified how maturing disciples ought to grow in their practice of Bible intake, meditation, and prayer. This chapter provides a practical overview of ways Christians might grow in these three practices. The exposition in chapter 2 also supports the argument that certain spiritual disciplines will promote maturity in the lives of Christians. First, Bible intake provides the maturing disciple with the blessings that flow from engaging in the Word of God. Reading the Bible regularly is the blessing that will provide a factual framework of understanding God, his work, and his world. Second, meditation is a process that causes the maturing disciple to carefully consider Scripture and thus grow deeper in his knowledge of God, faith in God, and desire for God. Third, prayer is the avenue of communication with God that has been extended to maturing disciples, enabling them to maintain ongoing fellowship with the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit. Maturing disciples' prayer lives will become more personal and more powerful as they learn how to effectively practice prayer on a daily basis. Though other practices have an important role in forming disciples, these three disciplines are foundational for Christian growth.

**Maturing Christians Grow in Their
Practice of Bible Intake**

God reveals Himself through the Scripture; therefore, it is important for the maturing Christian to have a foundation in the truth of the Bible. This foundation begins with the intake of Scripture. Disciples of Jesus are to live a transformational life apart from the world by intentionally pursuing godly virtues. The transformation also requires

the maturing believer to engage in new processes of living that will forge change. The Christian gospel is a call to take on a new identity that is patterned after Jesus (Rom 8:29). Although some teachers reduce the gospel message to justification—God’s declaration of innocence in light of Christ’s atoning death—a thoroughly biblical gospel also includes sanctification—a growing, transformed life. Growing individuals understand the gospel will greatly shape their understanding of how they read the Bible.

What does the practice of Bible intake look like? Scripture intake includes practices such as hearing the Bible read aloud in public worship, in small gatherings, or in private. For much of the church’s history, hearing the Bible read aloud was the primary way Christians engaged in Scripture intake. In many parts of the world, where literacy rates are low, hearing the Bible remains the most significant form of Scripture intake. In much of the Western world, Scripture intake involves reading the Bible for oneself. The widespread availability of printed and digital Bibles has made access to Scripture so common that modern Christians often have multiple copies of a Bible readily available. Reading the Bible or hearing it read are the most common forms of Scripture intake.

Why does reading the Bible or hearing it read make such a difference in the life of a disciple? At the basic level, a “disciple” is a “student,” and students are those who need to be taught. The maturing Christian should be driven to read and study the Bible primarily because it contains the message of the gospel which has saved their souls. Jesus Christ is the only person who can connect the believer in a relationship with God (1 Tim 2:5-6). Jesus is mediator and teacher; the one who uniquely knows God and makes him known. Christians who ignore the Bible cannot, then, rightly be called “disciples” if they fail to listen to their teacher. Christians have long held other reasons to engage Scripture, such as theological reasons related to the Bible’s very nature. Among these theological reasons are the Bible’s inspiration, inerrancy, and the importance of interpretation. The maturing Christian needs to understand the meaning of Bible

inspiration, Bible inerrancy, and Bible interpretation, which will ensure that the practice of Bible intake is properly achieved in their lives.

The Inspiration of the Bible

The inspiration of the Bible is teaching about the Bible that provides the framework for engaging in the practice of Bible intake. God is the originator of the content written in the Bible. Therefore, Christians who intend to mature through Bible intake accept the truth of Bible inspiration. The apostle Paul affirms, “All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). The term *inspired* means that the Scripture is the breath or the authentic production of God. Paul Enns defines inspiration as “the act of the Holy Spirit in which He superintended the written Scriptures so that, while writing according to their own styles and personalities, they produced God’s written, authoritative trustworthy, and free from error in the original writings.”¹ A sovereign God has saved those who believe in the gospel message about Jesus Christ.

God’s sovereignty has also ensured that what is written in the Bible is true and contains no error. A desire and willingness to read the Bible is an initial indicator that the maturing Christian understands the inspiration of Scripture. Maturing Christians should understand that although the Bible was physically penned by men, the insufficiencies of men were superseded by the power of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Peter 1:21, the apostle Peter states, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” This passage is key to validating the premise that *all Scripture is inspired by God*. In his book *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, John Piper explains, “God’s intentions are present in all of Scripture, and they are mediated to us through a proper understanding of what the human authors intended to communicate

¹ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 750.

when they wrote.”² The authority God used to introduce His only begotten Son to the world as a man is the same authority God used to introduce His inspired Word to the world through Scripture.

The Inerrancy of the Bible

The inerrancy of the Bible is the belief of biblical truth that maturing Christians must subscribe to during their daily engagement in Bible intake. The question that should be considered is, why is it important for maturing Christians to believe in the inerrancy of the Bible? The belief that all Scripture is true provides the Bible reader with a basis of dependability that what is being read is totally accurate. Millard Erickson explains inerrancy as the “means that the Bible, when judged by the usage of its time, teaches the truth without any affirmation of error.”³ Piper writes, “The Bible has final authority over every area of our lives, and that we should, therefore, try to bring all our thinking and feeling and acting into line with what the Bible teaches.”⁴ God is unable to operate in half-truths or untruths. Therefore, it is necessary for the Christian Bible reader to approach every aspect and detail of the Scripture as being absolutely accurate. The world today is filled with atheists and half-hearted believers who are anxious to disavow the total accuracy of Scripture. An unsuspecting Christian who has not yet grown to a significant level of maturity could be prone to doubt portions of the biblical narrative. Andreas Köstenberger concludes, “Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the

² John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 316.

³ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 188-89.

⁴ Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, 33.

social, physical, or life sciences.”⁵ When a maturing Christian engages in the practice of reading the Bible, he should approach it with an understanding that it is the inerrant Word of the living God. Ultimately, the maturing Christian enhances his worldview when he practices meaningful Bible intake. John Jefferson Davis, author of *Meditation and Communion with God*, explains *worldview*: “By worldview I mean a comprehensive framework or set of assumptions about the nature of the world, reality as a whole and humanity’s place and purpose in relation to the world.”⁶

The Interpretation of the Bible

Due to the presence of false doctrine, interpreting the Bible correctly is vitally important in the lives of maturing Christians. As stated on the onset of this chapter, God extended the gospel to believers. The gospel message is the motivation for learning how to accurately interpret the Bible. Accurate biblical interpretation should be the goal of every maturing Christian. There is a need for training in basic interpretation methods so that maturing Christians will be equipped to recognize biblical truth and discern when error is presented. Ultimately, accurate biblical interpretation helps to alleviate potential ambiguity when Scripture is encountered. Köstenberger surmises, “Our conviction that God’s Word is the most precious commodity there is fuels a desire to extract even the last ounce of meaning from the biblical text no matter how much effort or learning it takes to recover it.”⁷ Knowledge of biblical interpretation provides the mature Christian with a concise understanding of the voice of God and his desire for believers to carry out His message.

⁵ Andreas Köstenberger, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 54-55.

⁶ John J. Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 66.

⁷ Andreas Köstenberger, *Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 59.

Every text of Scripture presents a unique history, literary presentation, and theological view about God. It is the responsibility of maturing Christians to seek to uncover the truth of God's Word by engaging the Bible through this lens of interpretation. The totality of Scripture is *inspired* by God; therefore, personal preferences held by the readers of Scripture should be surrendered for the sake of accurate interpretation. With the truth of God's Word in mind, it is important to point out that there are difficulties in biblical interpretation. Inaccurate history, barriers of language in the written texts, and erroneous assumptions about God in Scripture are a few of the areas that must be addressed when interpreting Scripture.

To begin an accurate interpretation of Scripture, the reader must be totally concerned about gaining insight of the meaning of the text. Understanding the meaning of any text is centered around the author's intentions for writing the text. Piper explains, "The meaning of a text never changes. That is, what the author intended to communicate is a once-for-all historical event, and the past cannot be changed."⁸ Following the author's intentions for writing ensures that the reader will not be swayed by preconceived ideas or erroneous opinions that may otherwise arise when engaging the Scriptures. God is the source of authority of all Scripture and His wisdom has directly impacted the will of those chosen to record the Bible. The maturing Christian can be ensured by the power of the Holy Spirit that if he practices Bible intake through the interpretive lens of the author during his time of devotional reading, his conclusions will be more accurately aligned with God's intention in the text. Adele Calhoun explains of devotion: "Devotional reading is not an exercise in mentally critiquing or exegeting the text. It exists to further divine companionship."⁹ Nothing can draw the maturing Christian into an intimate relationship like reading God's Word with a meditative focus.

⁸ Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, 309.

⁹ Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transforms Us* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 188.

The Practice of Bible Intake

The practice of Bible intake goes beyond simply having knowledge about the Bible. Calhoun states, “Throughout the ages God has spoken to us through the written Word, the spoken word and the incarnate Word.”¹⁰ One common way that believers practice Bible intake is by hearing it audibly during a worship service or Bible study. In an article titled “Why You Should Read the Bible Over and Over,” Professor Joseph C. Harrod explains, “Regular Bible readers have continual reminders of God’s meticulous works of providence, Jesus’ present lordship, and the Spirit’s leadership.”¹¹ The maturing disciple must develop a habit of Bible reading that will mold his daily life into a vessel intentionally consuming the life altering principles of Scripture. Harrod suggests, “One strategy that has helped [him] in this regard is to read aloud, often sub-vocally, with a pencil or an extra-fine point pen in hand.”¹² This process of marking the Bible while reading provides the practitioner the ability to recall Scripture and highlight biblical ideas that need more attention. Harrod concludes, “By preserving these notes now, I begin to read at a deeper level of attention, moving between reading and meditation, and this approach helps me listen to what the Spirit is saying through this passage to my circumstances today.”¹³

An issue that some disciples have when it comes to reading the Bible is finding the time. Ultimately, maturing Christians must discipline themselves to find the time to engage in daily Bible intake. Donald Whitney states, “If we don’t discipline ourselves to hear God’s Word regularly, we may hear it only accidentally, just when we feel like it, or

¹⁰ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 183.

¹¹ Joseph C. Harrod, “Why You Should Read the Bible Over and Over,” *Southern Equip*, July 12, 2019, <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/why-you-should-read-the-bible-over-and-over/>.

¹² Harrod, “Why You Should Read the Bible.”

¹³ Harrod, “Why You Should Read the Bible.”

never hear it at all.”¹⁴ There is no set amount of time required for daily Bible reading; rather, varying processes of Bible reading will ensure the believer’s success when practicing Bible intake. The maturing Christian must establish a discipline for Bible intake by committing to daily interaction with the Word.

The Bible contains the revelation of God, thus providing believers with information about the entirety of life. This reality makes it sensible that reading through the entire Bible should be a part of believer’s practice. Calhoun emphasizes, “Scripture is a primary way that the Holy Spirit opens us up to the God who is beyond us.”¹⁵ While reading through the Bible is a good practice, for many believers the process of fulfilling that goal is difficult due to not having a guided process of reading. Whitney explains, “Perhaps one of the main reasons Christians never read through the entire Bible is discouragement.”¹⁶ The length of the Bible can be intimidating to new practitioners of Bible reading. The maturing Christian can exchange some of their leisure television consumption and accomplish Bible reading with that time. Whitney states, “Recorded readings of the Bible have proven that you can read through the entire Book in seventy-one hours.”¹⁷ While that process may be difficult for some believers, this method can be effective. Calhoun explains that listening to the Bible on audible devices such as tapes or CDs during exercise is a viable means for Bible intake.¹⁸ Along with audible versions of Bible intake are devotionals designed to carry believers through the entire Bible.

A Bible reading plan for individual study or group interaction can provide a method of direction and accountability in reading through the Bible. Whitney states, “Try

¹⁴ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 23.

¹⁵ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 181.

¹⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 28.

¹⁷ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 29.

¹⁸ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 186.

to make it the same time every day. If possible, read the Bible at a time other than just before you go to sleep.”¹⁹ Finding a reading plan or determining to read a book of the Bible or a few chapters of Scripture per day is a good practice. Churches, Christian bookstores, and the internet are good places to find reading plans for Bible intake.

Reading whole books of the Bible can improve the sanctification of those who engage in this practice. Harrod states, regular Bible reading serves as an anchor to ultimate reality.”²⁰ The goal of all maturing believers should be to read Scripture purposefully, believing that God will reveal his will for their daily lives. The hope of the believer in reading Scripture is directly connected to the supernatural act of the Holy Spirit performing its work according to God’s will. Piper explains, “In essence it is a reliance on God, and the Spirit, and Christ to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves as we seek to see what is really there in Scripture, and as we seek to savor it and be transformed by it.”²¹ God, through this supernatural act of Bible intake, supplies the disciple with everything needed to navigate through this journey of life. Piper concludes, “If we aim to read the Bible with the goal of seeing and savoring the glory of all that God is for us in Christ, then reading must be a supernatural act.”²² The practice of Bible intake exposes the maturing disciple to meaningful engagement with God through dedicated times of reading, guided methods of reading, and openness to the message that God reveals from the reading.

Maturing Christians Grow in Their Practice of Meditation

Maturing Christians grow in their practice of meditation. Meditation is a process that requires reading Scripture and then focusing intently on the passage to gain accurate

¹⁹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 29.

²⁰ Harrod, “Why You Should Read the Bible.”

²¹ Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, 189.

²² Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, 194.

insight. Psalm 1:1-3 shows the power of meditating on God's Word as one of these processes of living. Christians ought to intentionally meditate upon the Word. Maturing Christians grow as their foundation of understanding the intention of God's extension of the gospel becomes clear. The center piece of the gospel is Jesus Christ who suffered the ultimate cost of death on a cross so that the world might be redeemed from their personal sins. Kenneth Boa, author of *Conformed to His Image*, explains, "To meditate on the Word is to take the time to ponder a verse or passage from Scripture so that its truth can sink in deeply into our being."²³ Calhoun writes, "Christian meditation opens us to the mind of God and to his world and presence in the world."²⁴ The maturing Christian must understand that biblical meditation, unlike other forms of meditation, is designed to turn the maturing Christian's heart toward God. This section will also highlight the benefits of biblical meditation, which includes communing with God and the ultimate purpose for meditating biblically. Ultimately, biblical meditation ushers the believer into personal communion with God, providing the reader with an intimate understanding of God's intentions.

The Purpose of Meditation

The primary purpose of biblical meditation is to usher the mind of believers into the wealth of insights found in the Word of God. God's Word contains clarity and comfort for the issues of this life. Meditation places the believer in a position that allows God to clarify His intentions through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It is important to note that meditation is not a place for new revelation. Charles Ryrie states, "Some give at least the impression that what is revealed through general revelation proves the existence of the true God of the Bible."²⁵ This general revelation creates a false perception of how

²³ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 84.

²⁴ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 192.

²⁵ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 37.

the revelation of God works in the life of believers. Illumination, according to Millard Erickson is how “the Holy Spirit works internally in the life of the believer, witnessing to the truth and countering the effects of sin so the inherent meaning of the Bible can be seen.”²⁶ Calhoun states, “Illumination is the stage where being in love with God gives rise to the desire to live totally in and for God’s glory.”²⁷ This level of love for God will influence the believer to routinely pray to God. The more this routine of prayer is exercised by the believer, the more access the believer will have with the indwelling of the Spirit. The term *illumination* is an explanation of how figuratively the light is turned on in the heart of believers, enabling them to see God’s intentions. Calhoun concludes, “Illumination finds evidence of God in pain and sorrow as well as joy and peace.”²⁸ Davis states, “The illuminating work of the Spirit in informing the mind as to truth and engaging the will for trust and obedience is well attested in the Scripture.”²⁹ The maturing Christian must use the practice of meditation to overcome the normal tendencies of the mind to be consumed with worldly thoughts. Calhoun surmises, “Meditation is a way we train the mind to stay put so it can explore appropriate associations.”³⁰ It is common for the mind to wander and casually stroll uselessly when there is no clear guidance to control it. Boa explains, “The discipline comes in the effort to deliberately choose that upon which we will set our minds and in the skill of gently returning to it when we find that we have wandered.”³¹ The goal of the believer is to be receptive to the voice of the Lord by alleviating the common whiles of life that can tend

²⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 225.

²⁷ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 328.

²⁸ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 328.

²⁹ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 101.

³⁰ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 192.

³¹ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 91-92.

to be a distraction. The believer's attention must be totally focused on hearing and understanding the voice of the Lord.

Equally as important as understanding the purpose and manifestation of meditation is an understanding of what meditation does *not* look like. Kent Hughes and Carey Hughes explain in their book *Disciplines of a Godly Young Man* that “meditation doesn't mean sitting around on a mat in a yoga position humming to yourself while incense candles burn in the corner.”³² Religious pluralism, which is a belief that several different religious ideologies should co-exist in society, is responsible for misguided practices of biblical meditation. Several forms of religious pluralism surfaced in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth century. This diversity opened the door for non-traditional practices of religion such as Buddhism and Hinduism, which are Eastern influences of religion. As a result of these influences, some Christians began to practice their method of transcendental meditation. Davis explains *transcendental meditation* as “a technique, like speed reading, that could help the practitioner achieve stress reduction, concentration and health benefits.”³³ Christians who are influenced by this process of meditation show they are ignorant concerning biblical meditation practice. David Mathis in his book *Habits of Grace* states of meditation, “It is not, like secular meditation, ‘doing nothing and being tuned in to your own mind at the same time,’ but it is feeding our minds on the Words of God and digesting them slowly, savoring the texture, enjoying the juices, cherishing the flavor of such rich fare.”³⁴ This process of feeding the mind is achieved by harnessing the thoughts by filling it up with God's Word. The more the maturing believer consumes Scripture, the better they will become at deeply reflecting on the Word through meditation.

³² Kent R. Hughes and Carey W. Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Young Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 74.

³³ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 15.

³⁴ David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus Through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 56.

The human mind does not stop thinking and reflecting on something when a person is conscious; therefore, the practice of biblical meditation must specifically target the subject of consuming Scripture. The process of spiritually digesting the Word requires more effort than simply deciding to meditate on the Word. Hughes and Hughes provide an analogy of meditation with the difficulty of eating a steak. They explain, “Steak dinners cannot be swallowed whole—they need cutting up, chewing, and digesting.”³⁵ Similarly, the maturing Christian must be trained to cautiously dissect, consume, and reflect upon the spiritual meat of the Scriptures. Thus, the Psalmist points to a practice of “meditating on his law, day and night” (Ps 1:2). Mathis concludes, “The blessed one, the happy one, who delights in God’s word, doesn’t avail himself of the words of life merely with some quick breadth reading, punctuated with blocks of study, but ‘meditates day and night.’”³⁶ Biblical meditation, in conjunction with the practice of other spiritual disciplines, has proven to be an empowering influence on the lives of maturing believers.

The Process of Meditation

Meditation is the process of continuing to rehearse the Word of God for the purpose of spiritual growth. This section on process will provide the maturing Christian with some possible methods of meditation which will be profitable to their personal growth. Psalm 1 highlights “the law of the Lord” as the provision that provides a structural pathway on how to live this life. Meditation also requires the maturing Christian to differentiate between societal practices of meditation and the practice of biblical meditation. Some key components to biblical meditation are listening to Scripture, reading Scripture, studying Scripture, memorizing Scripture, and reflecting upon Scripture. It is possible to practice these components and still be void of true biblical meditation. When the believer exercises biblical meditative practices, the results are a believer who is more

³⁵ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 56.

³⁶ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 57.

literate in Scripture and who walks in closer fellowship with God. Davis explains that meditation and fellowship with God should be based on the biblical principles that shape the Christian worldview and the supporting research and literature that conforms to the Christian faith.³⁷ Meditation is the practice that provides meaning to the believer's life and access to God's blessings.

Numerous practices are available for biblical meditation that have been proven to be effective. Whitney provides seventeen meditation processes in his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Some of the meditative practices Whitney provides focus on words in the text, writing the text in your own words, illustration of the text, application of the text, the presence of Jesus in the text, praying through the text, and memorizing the text.³⁸ Mathis explains his personal meditation process which includes prayer, planned Bible reading, identifying Christ in the reading, questioning the text, and fellowshiping with God again through prayer concerning the text.³⁹ This process explanation is a viable option of meditation that could lead maturing believers into closer fellowship with God

Davis provides a sensible process of meditation that exposes the societal restrictions that hinder effective meditation and scriptural foundation of meditation designed to draw believers closer to God. Ultimately, the goal of every maturing Christian should be to live this life in communion with God in a quest to spend eternity with Him. Davis explains that historically there have been categories of Christian spirituality which include the immature, the in between, and the mature. The intention of Davis' Five Practices of Right Comprehension is to train beginners of biblical meditation. Davis' influence for the practice of biblical meditation is M. Basil Pennington who was a monk

³⁷ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 18.

³⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 56-67.

³⁹ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 60.

in Massachusetts.⁴⁰ Pennington’s meditative practice is based heavily upon a practice called “contemplative prayer.”⁴¹

Contemplative prayer is different from the normal practice of petitioning God for the things that are desired or needed in life. Contemplative prayer is practiced by being sensitive to what God desires by remaining quiet and focused on hearing God’s voice. Calhoun explains, “In contemplative prayer we rest in God, depending on him to initiate communion and communication. We don’t ask for things, we simply open ourselves to the Trinity, trusting we will be received into restful arms.”⁴² When practicing contemplative prayer, the believer gains access to the depths of knowledge found in Scripture. Contemplation, in particular over Scripture, forges a stable foundation of faith in the heart of those who practice it. Pastor and author Timothy Keller conveys, “When we respond in trust to the Word of God, then prayer becomes a conversation with God.”⁴³ The goal of contemplative prayer is to spiritually open up the ears of the believer so that he can clearly hear what the voice of the Lord is saying.

Contemplative prayer is not without controversy in the realm of evangelicals because of practices that do not align with the Word. Contemplative prayer can diverge widely from biblical moorings. Christian apologists Douglas Groothuis and Sarah Geis provide the criticism that contemplative prayer has its roots in Eastern cultures of religion. They explain of Eastern prayer practices: “They instruct the meditator to transcend the illusory material world by seeking a higher state of consciousness.”⁴⁴ They further explain

⁴⁰ M. Basil Pennington, “The Method of Lectio,” in *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 151.

⁴¹ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 125.

⁴² Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 240.

⁴³ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 145.

⁴⁴ Douglas Groothuis and Sarah Geis, “Examining Contemplative Prayer,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172 (2015): 16.

that in the practice of prayer, the mind must eliminate the false and selfish views that hinder transcendence. While the term *contemplative* should normally mean to be aware and focused on the subject of prayer, Groothuis and Geis maintains that this is not always the case in contemplative prayer.⁴⁵ Director of the Institute at Talbot School of Theology, John Coe, states, “Contemplative prayer is often raised as one obvious spiritual practice that is foreign to the Scriptures and a Christian world-view, and more akin to New Age and eastern religions.”⁴⁶ This New Age worldview does not rely upon God manifesting himself. Furthermore, the Eastern practice of contemplative prayer denies that the practitioner needs access to Christ and his redemptive work on the cross to approach God. Coe writes, “Unbiblical and sub-Christian approaches to contemplative prayer represent the attempt of human effort and natural fortitude to meet the deeper hunger for God apart from the revelation of God in Christ and the empowering work of his Indwelling Spirit.”⁴⁷ While the criticisms that have been levied have some validity, it is important to note that some areas within the contemplative prayer structure align with Christian views of God in Scripture. Coe is critical of contemplative prayer yet believes that there is a difference between authentic biblical practices of contemplative prayer and the Eastern practices of contemplative prayer. He concludes, “If God is to be known, it must be by his initiative to break into the finite, created realm to reveal himself,”⁴⁸ God provides the human practitioner of contemplative prayer with Jesus, who was manifested as God in the flesh to the world.

Davis’ biblical meditation process includes an *adapted version* of the Five Practices of Right Comprehension, which includes the following four steps: Intention and

⁴⁵ Groothuis and Geis, “Examining Contemplative Prayer,” 16.

⁴⁶ John Coe, “The Controversy Over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer: A Historical, Theological, and Biblical Resolution,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 10 (2014): 140.

⁴⁷ Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 144.

⁴⁸ Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 146.

invocation, Reading and reflection, Prayer, and Recollection.⁴⁹ *Intention and invocation* practice is designed to usher maturing Christians into the realm of God’s dwelling by empowering them through the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables the believer, by faith, to understand the Scripture being considered because the Spirit joins the believer to Christ. *Reading and reflection* is the actual process of systematically analyzing the text with caution so as to not miss any of the implications found within the text. Davis argues, “We gaze and ruminate on the text in a very leisurely and contemplative manner, having no real agenda other than to be in Christ’s presence.”⁵⁰ *Prayer* is the next step that follows, which is designed to personally let God know how appreciative the practitioner is to be a recipient of God’s fellowship and God’s provision of guidance in the Scripture. The believer has an obligation to *respond* to the goodness of God and glorify Him for his wonderful works. Finally, *recollection* is simply a rehashing of the *intention, reading,* and *prayer* that the believer was blessed to engage in with the accompanying of the Lord and the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ Davis concludes, “It is helpful for our spiritual growth if we intentionally make the effort to remember at some later time during the same day the insight, word, phrase, image or feeling that might have been impressed upon us during our time of meditation.”⁵² This process of meditation has proven to be a good practice because it only requires the maturing believer who will commit to it. This is a vitally important aspect of the meditative process due to the busy culture with which many believers are faced.

The final area of consideration in the process of biblical meditation is the selection of the text to be considered. The Bible teaches that “all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16). Therefore, there is not a specific text that should or

⁴⁹ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 122-26.

⁵⁰ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 127.

⁵¹ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 125-26.

⁵² Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 128.

should not be meditated upon. A good practice is to consider some area in life that might pose a problem or an area that there might be some uncertainty. Ultimately, the maturing Christian could be blessed if he practices biblical meditation. It is suggested by most meditation literature that the actual meditative process should be a quiet and solace place for the most effectiveness. The practice of finding a quiet place will help alleviate the possibility of being distracted or otherwise mentally removed from hearing the voice of the Lord.

Maturing Christians Grow in Their Practice of Prayer

Prayer is the process God provided for his believers to communicate with him. Prayer, more importantly, is the process that allows believers to hear from God. Mathis explains,

Prayer, for the Christian, is not merely talking to God, but responding to the One who has initiated toward us. Therefore, it enables believers to participate in meaningful fellowship with God. Prayer is the glad response from the bride, in a joyfully submissive relationship with her Groom, responding to his sacrificial and life-giving initiatives⁵³

Although historically many believers simply pray when they want or need something, prayer is more about fellowshiping with God. More than anything in the world, maturing believers need to be in a position in which they can daily commune with the Lord. Hughes and Hughes explain, “Prayer is a vital weapon in the armor of the Christian soldier.”⁵⁴ Prayer, similar to Bible intake and Bible meditation, is a spiritual discipline that mature believers must practice. The following categories of prayer will provide understanding and guidance about the purpose of prayer, process of prayer, and benefits of prayer.

The Purpose of Prayer

The Scriptures are filled with instances in which prayer is commanded and exercised by Christ and his followers. Jesus prayed to the Father during his earthly ministry

⁵³ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 94-95.

⁵⁴ Hughes and Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Young Man*, 83.

for strength against Satan's attacks and forgiveness for those who persecuted him. The prophets, kings, and the apostles prayed because it was a way of speaking to God and hearing the voice of God. Scripture commands that the believer "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). Whitney explains, "Praying without ceasing means you never really stop conversing with God; you simply have frequent interruptions."⁵⁵

Scripture also commands that believers "pray one for another" (Jas 5:16). Prayer figuratively opens the ear of God up so that he will hear the petitions for grace, mercy, love, provision, and repentance. The Psalmist writes of the Lord, "Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live" (166:2). Maturing believers should also practice praying consistently in their daily lives. Prayer is discipline of daily action that ushers the believer into the presence of God. Keller explains, "The power of our prayers, then, lies not primarily in our effort and striving, or in any technique, but rather in our knowledge of God."⁵⁶ The goal of every maturing believer should be to practice prayer to become more knowledgeable of God with each passing day of life.

The end result of prayer is spiritual growth within the believer. The life of every believer will be plagued with difficulties and uncertainties; however, prayer is the spiritual discipline that ensures the believer can succeed in the journey of life. Boa explains in his book *Handbook of Prayer*, "Just as the key to quality relationships with other people is time spent in communication, so the key to a growing relationship with the personal God of heaven and earth is time invested in speaking to him in prayer and listening to his voice in Scripture."⁵⁷ Historically, prayer has been a vital part of the early believer's life and must also be a priority for maturing Christians today.

⁵⁵ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 82.

⁵⁶ Keller, *Prayer*, 49.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Boa, *Handbook of Prayer: Praying Scripture Back to God* (Atlanta: Trinity House, 1993), 1.

The Process of Prayer

The process of prayer is the ongoing dialogue between believers who have been saved by the God of heaven. Prayer is an exercise that will spiritually strengthen the believer who engages in the practice regularly. The action of conversing with God should not be taken for granted because it gives the believer access to the character of God. Keller describes prayer as a conversation with God: “He started it when he implanted knowledge of himself in every human being, when he spoke through the prophets and in his written Word, and especially when he called us to himself through the Holy Spirit sent into our hearts.”⁵⁸ Ultimately, believers have the ability to pray because God, in his infinite wisdom, provided believers with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture is the roadmap that expresses how prayer is to be carried out in the life of maturing believers. In Matthew 6:5-15, Jesus explains that prayer is to be for the glory of God and not for the purpose of impressing men. Prayer is not to be a repetitive and insignificant gathering of words that have no meaning. Prayer is not designed to be a display of rhetorical jargon based upon duty or necessity. Rather, prayer should be a conversation directed to God that specifies who he is and expresses the desire for his will to be done in heaven and on earth.

Because there are so many techniques of prayer, some believers experience a challenge to pray. J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, authors of *Praying: Finding Our Way through Duty to Delight*, explain that prayer should be carried out similarly to the routine of brushing your teeth: “We don’t think about cleaning our teeth; we simply do it.”⁵⁹ Packer and Nystrom highlight routine prayer as a potential problem for those who use this practice because it could potentially give the believer a false sense of prayer fulfillment. While it is important for the believer to pray regularly, it is more important to

⁵⁸ Keller, *Prayer*, 83.

⁵⁹ J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 14.

pray in a manner that is pleasing to God.⁶⁰ Packer and Nystrom provide a threefold process to ensure that the believer is adequately addressing the expectations of God during their moments of prayer: “Clear realization of the reality of God, continual practice of the presence of God, and constant endeavor to please God every day of our lives.”⁶¹ Knowing the identity of God, recognizing his presence, and seeking to satisfy him should be at the forefront of every encounter of the praying experience.

While praying is generally an engagement in which the believer talks to God, it is important that there is room left during the prayer for God’s voice to be heard. The best way for the believer to recognize the voice of the Lord is to regularly engage in the Word of God. The Word provides details about the character of God that cannot otherwise be known. Keller expresses, “We know who we are praying to only if we first learn it in the Bible. And we know how we should be praying only by getting our vocabulary from the Bible.”⁶² Ultimately, the prayers of mature Christians should be based upon the saturation and impression that Scripture has had on their lives. As Keller has revealed, the Scriptures will train the believer to speak and understand God’s vernacular. Mathis states, “We must see his listening to us in prayer in relation to our listening to him in his word.”⁶³ The Word of God is similar to a magnetic force to the believer that draws them into closer communion with God.

The Practice of Prayer

While many other methods of prayer could be introduced, the recommended method of prayer is what Packer and Nystrom call the *authentic path of prayer*. The *authentic path of prayer* includes instructions from Scripture, expresses a God-taught

⁶⁰ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 17.

⁶¹ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 18.

⁶² Keller, *Prayer*, 54-55.

⁶³ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 93.

commitment to a way of life, and requires purity of heart as we pray.⁶⁴ Psalm 27:11 states, “Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.” The maturing believer does not automatically know what to pray for and how to pray.

Therefore, the believer must engage in the information of how to pray and what to pray, which is found in Scripture. The Bible is not limited on information that can arm the believer with the power to pray effectively. Packer and Nystrom stress, “His path for us in prayer, as in the rest of our living, is not one we know by instinct but is a learned way, one he teaches.”⁶⁵ The Old and New Testament provide examples of the prophets, psalmists, Jesus, and his apostles praying. These examples must become a part of the natural fiber of the maturing believer’s process of praying.

Next, the authentic path of prayer expresses a God-taught commitment to a way of life. This step in the prayer process refers to the necessity of maturing Christians being willing to practice a way of life that aligns with what they have learned to do as a result of being exposed to God’s commands. Obedience, or the lack thereof, will determine whether the believer will experience personal communion with God. Davis asserts, “We are seeking communion and friendship with God for its own sake and for the sake of our souls.”⁶⁶ Authentic prayer will not happen in the life of the believer until that believer begins to live the life that is expected and designated in Scripture.

The final step of the authentic path of prayer requires purity of heart as the believer prays. The *heart* in this context is not the organ that processes blood in the human body but rather it is the mind of human beings that processes the emotions, actions, and inactions of man. Packer and Nystrom state, “The heart is nothing less than the taproot of the self, the deep source of our character and purposes, of our attitudes and responses, of our self-image and self-projection, in short, of the total human being that

⁶⁴ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 37-38.

⁶⁵ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 37.

⁶⁶ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 24.

each of us is.”⁶⁷ Matthew 22:37 provides clarity of what is meant by having a pure heart: “Jesus said unto them, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” Everything within the believer’s make-up should be directed at pleasing God through obedience to his Word. The believer’s life does not belong to him since he has been bought with the blood of Jesus. This valuable insight should be remembered every time prayer is carried out. Packer and Nystrom clarify, “We must never forget that our God will not allow us to let the good become the enemy of the best, or the comfortable obstruct the profitable, or what captivates the head insulate us against what activates the heart, or what gives ease get in the way of what brings growth.”⁶⁸ The heart of maturing believers must be grounded in the promises found in Scripture.

Conclusion

Bible Intake, meditation, and prayer are collectively needed in the lives of maturing Christians to become more effective disciples of Christ. God reveals Himself through the Scripture; therefore, it is important for maturing Christians to have a foundation in the truth of the gospel. Understanding the gospel shapes the maturing Christian’s scope of how to read the Bible, how to meditate, and how to properly pray. Collectively, these practices place the believer in the best position to become faithful and fruitful disciples for the glory of God.

Everything in this world was created by God according to Genesis 1:1. Everything in this world belongs to God. Psalms 24:1 states, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” These passages of Scripture present evidence that maturing believers must recognize that they are simply temporary stewards of all of God’s creation, which includes His inspired Word. Therefore, the Word

⁶⁷ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 38.

⁶⁸ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 289.

must be intentionally engaged through rigorous reading, serious contemplation, and persistent prayer. This requires the maturing believer to engage in biblical spiritual disciplines that will shape their lives. A life that surrenders to Christ and His Word will be evidenced by a private and public display of devotion to God. Whitney states, “One of the clearest indications that people have truly believed the gospel of Jesus is that a new, Christlike desire to serve begins to overcome their selfish desire to be served.”⁶⁹ It is sensible that maturing Christians be adequately trained so that they can begin to work on leading others to Christ!

⁶⁹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 158.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the project implementation by providing a detailed account of the four goals and their results. The purpose of this project was to train the young adult members of the Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church in Barton, Alabama, to become maturing disciples of Jesus Christ. The project had four goals: (1) to assess current discipleship practices among the young adult members of Z1MBC, (2) to recruit a group of young adults to participate in intentional biblical spirituality, (3) to refine a discipleship training program for young adult members, and (4) to increase the knowledge and modify practices of young adult members of the Z1MBC related to biblical spirituality. Implementation of the project began on March 11, 2021, and continued through July 18, 2021.

Project Promotion

Promotion and recruitment for this project started on March 11, 2021. The young adult members of the Z1MBC participated in the discipleship training program through a GroupMe App message. After recruitment for biblical spirituality training, twenty young adults completed a written request of participation. I also communicated the details of the discipleship training program to young adult members during a normal Thursday night Zoom Bible study. For young adult members of Z1MBC who were not present during the normal Bible study, I called to invite them to participate in the training. All participants completed and signed a commitment card documenting their willingness to participate in biblical spirituality training.¹ The return of a minimum of fifteen

¹ See appendix 2.

commitment cards was required for successful participation and determined the success of this goal. In conjunction with the commitment cards, an interview questionnaire was completed during the recruitment process which provided additional insight into the spiritual maturity of the participants. The young adult participants returned fifteen commitment cards to meet the goal on March 15, 2021, the second week of the project.

Summary of Project Goals

This ministry project had four goals. The first goal was to assess current discipleship practices among the young adult members of the Z1MBC. This goal was partially met because I only received 18 of the 20 surveys distributed to potential participants. The original goal of 20 completed surveys was established prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19. Considering the COVID-19 restrictions, the goal of 20 commitment cards was altered to 15 commitment cards.

The second goal of this project was to recruit a group of young adults to participate in biblical spirituality training. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of fifteen commitment cards were returned by the participants. In conjunction with the commitment cards, an interview and questionnaire completed during the recruitment process provided additional insight into the spiritual maturity of the participants.

The third goal of this project was to refine a discipleship training program for the young adult members of the Z1MBC. The third goal was also accomplished by developing a nine-session training curriculum for the participants. This goal was considered successfully met when the collective rating of a three-member expert panel earned at least an “effective” rating.

The fourth goal of this project was to increase the knowledge and modify practices of young adult members of the Z1MBC related to biblical spirituality. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test showed a positive, significant increase in participants’ knowledge and change in their practice of biblical spirituality.

Goal 1 Results

The first goal of this project was to assess current discipleship practices among the young adult members of the Z1MBC. This goal was accomplished during weeks 1 and 2 by distributing a pre-test questionnaire that gathered data about current discipleship practices.² In conjunction with this pre-test survey was a written request to participate in the form of a commitment card which detailed the requirements of the young adults' commitment to the ministry project. The findings of the pre-test survey were used to develop a nine-session discipleship training course designed to improve the biblical spirituality of the young adult members of the Z1MBC.

The primary emphasis of the discipleship training was the need to improve the practice of Bible intake, prayer, and meditation in the young adult members of Z1MBC. The pre-test survey revealed that 94 percent (17/18) of the young adult participants at least agreed that the Bible was a reliable source for achieving spiritual growth. This response was important because it established the foundation for one of the areas of spiritual discipline used for the project. While many participants believed strongly in the Bible's reliability, only 50 percent (9/18) at least agreed somewhat that they followed a structured plan of reading the Bible (see table 1). These figures reveal that for the young adults who participated in the survey, belief in the reliability in the Bible had not moved at least half of them to follow a regular Bible reading plan.

Table 1. Z1MBC Bible practices

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q4. I believe the Bible is a reliable guide for spiritual growth	0	0	0	1	11	6
Q5. I follow a regular plan for reading the Bible.	1	2	6	4	4	1

² See appendix 1 for the results of the survey.

Another area in the surveys that was encouraging was that 16 of 18 participants at least agreed that the spiritual discipline of meditation was a practice addressed in Scripture. Furthermore, 4 of 18 participants believed that meditation is primarily about relaxing. This data provided the opportunity to train those individuals, and to clarify some of the misinformation surrounding meditation (see table 2).

Table 2. Z1MBC Meditation Practices

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q7. "Meditation" is a practice the Bible does not address.	5	7	4	0	2	0
Q8. Meditation is primarily about relaxing.	4	6	4	3	1	0

The final area of the survey that was concerning was that several individuals (11/18) felt like they were easily distracted when they prayed. While some felt distracted, 14 of 18 participants at least agreed somewhat that they felt closer to God when they prayed (see table 3). This survey data guided me to spend more time emphasizing the lesson content about prayer.

Table 3. Z1MBC Prayer Practices

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q10. I feel closer to God when I pray.	0	2	2	6	7	1
Q11. I am often distracted when I pray.	1	1	5	5	6	0

The spiritual disciplines of prayer, studying, and meditation were presented from a biblical perspective with a goal of the trainees making application in their lives. Enhancing these practices and identifying the weaknesses in the participants was the focus of this ministry project.

Goal 2 Results

The second goal of this project was to recruit a group of young adults to participate in intentional biblical spirituality. I recruited young adult members during weeks 4 and 5 by providing a written request of participation to twenty young adults for biblical spirituality training (see appendix 3).

All participants completed and signed a commitment card documenting their willingness to participate in biblical spirituality training.³ On April 24, 2021, the minimum of fifteen commitment cards were received to fulfill the goal. In conjunction with the commitment cards, the young adult participants completed an interview questionnaire, which provided additional insight into the spiritual maturity of the participants.

To systematically gather information from participants in this research project, I used a mixed-methods approach of personal interviews and a survey with Likert-scale items. The overall goal of utilizing a mixed-methods approach of combining and comparing the research components was to strengthen and expand the content of the ministry research project. Six interview questions, in conjunction with fourteen items, assessed participants' understanding and practices of personal spiritual disciplines. The interview questions ensured that participants understood why they were being interviewed, provided clarity about the intent of the research, and to gained needed information to adequately implement the research project.

I implemented these interview questions by using the semi-structured interview process. Semi-structured interviews aid in the process of qualitative analysis by targeting specific themes of consideration.⁴ Bible intake, prayer, and meditation were the specific themes that the interview questions covered. Because I was using the semi-structured interview process, each participant had the questions presented to them in the exact same way during each individual interview.

³ See appendix 2.

⁴ Annabel Kajornboon, "Using Interviews as Research Instruments," *e-Journal for Researching Teachers* 2, no. 1 (December 2005), <http://www.culi.chula.ac.th/e-Journal/index.htm>.

I used self-administered questionnaires to perform these interviews with the participants on April 24, 2021, to implement the teaching of the research project. I provided participants with the option to be interviewed either through a Zoom virtual conference or through telephone communication. I contacted each participant, and an interview appointment was established for the interviews. The interviews lasted thirty-minutes or less and I recorded all responses (see appendix 2).

Goal 3 Results

The third goal of the project was to refine a discipleship training program for the young adult members of the Z1MBC. On April 16, 2021, the potential lesson plans, along with the Big Idea of the training project, were completed and approved. The training curriculum included nine sessions that covered the areas of Bible intake, prayer, and meditation. Each session lasted for 90 minutes. On May 6, 2021, a three-person team consisting of two pastors possessing doctoral degrees, and one master's level female panelist reviewed the curriculum and used a rubric to assess the viability of the lesson plans.

The rubric covered three specific areas designed to ensure the project would be successful: biblical accuracy, scope and sequence, and lesson plan goals. A minimum score of "3" on a four-point scale was required for each part of the curriculum and every lesson plan. If any lessons did not meet this minimum score, then the curriculum was revised and resubmitted for review until it attained the level of "3." All three expert panel members found that the lessons plans were "exemplary" in every category by scoring them with a "4" (see table 4).

Table 4. Curriculum effectiveness rubric

Criteria	1=Ineffective	2=Needs Improvement	3=Effective	4=Exemplary
Biblical Accuracy				
Biblical text is appropriate for each lesson's focus	0	0	0	3
Biblical text is handled accurately.	0	0	0	3
Theological implications of text are presented clearly.	0	0	0	3
Scope and Sequence				
Lessons are sequenced logically.	0	0	0	3
Lessons are focused on practice to deepen discipleship.	0	0	0	3
Lessons can be delivered in the allotted time frame.	0	0	0	3
Lesson Plans				
Each lesson has at least one clear learning goal for participants	0	0	0	3
Each lesson has at least one clear action goal for participants.	0	0	0	3
Lessons give attention to a variety of teaching methods.	0	0	0	3

Goal 4 Results

The fourth goal of the project was to increase the knowledge and modify practices of young adult members of the Z1MBC related to biblical spirituality. This goal measurement required each member to complete a nine-week spiritual formation class. Participants had to attend at least seven of the nine sessions. The nine-session training started on June 2, 2021.

In training session 1, June 2, 2021, young adult participants were introduced to “Spirituality: Devotion, Sacrifice, Conformity, and Transformation,” through a thirty-minute lecture according to Romans 12:2b. Following the lecture, the young adults engaged in a warm-up discussion of the big idea of the lesson. The big idea was that spirituality begins with understanding God’s command to seek a renewed mind. Each participant was given the opportunity to describe a moment when they intentionally

thought about their spiritual lives and how it impacted them. I provided participants with a working definition of spirituality, which is an intentional discipline or practice of devotion, sacrifice, conformity, and transformation in and through the Lord. After discussing the definition of spirituality, participants were challenged to consider their personally level of spirituality and how it could be improved through a renewed mind. The session concluded with a question and answer moment designed to ensure that they understood the lesson content. Participants expressed their appreciation for the training session and were excited about future training sessions.

In training session 2, on June 6, 2021, I introduced the young adult participants to “Spirituality: Prayer, Bible intake, and Meditation,” through a thirty-minute lecture. Following the lecture, the young adults engaged in a warm-up discussion about the big idea of the lesson. The big idea of the lesson was that prayer, Bible intake, and meditation will increase personal spirituality. I challenged the participants to explain why they did not spend enough time praying each day. After this discussion, the training curriculum revealed that prayer is important because Jesus Christ expects believers to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17). Prayer is the practice that extends the grace and mercy of God in the believer’s life (Heb 4:16). The training curriculum explained the importance of Bible intake by citing *Spiritual Disciplines* author, Donald Whitney. Whitney states, “No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God’s Word.”⁵ This statement provided participants with a thought-provoking motivation to read Scripture more. The training session concluded with a discussion about how participants could transition from Bible reading to meditating on what they have read. Meditation ushers the mind of believers into the wealth of insights found in the Word of God. A time of question and answer concluded this session.

⁵ Adapted from Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life: Study Guide* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 84.

Training session 3, on June 10, 2021, provided participants with a lecture which covered the topic of “Biblical Foundation of Prayer,” according to 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17. Following the lecture, a warm-up discussion centered around whether participants believed that they prayed enough to remain connected to God. After this discussion, the training curriculum revealed that God expects his followers to pray through the difficulties of life and to recognize the fulfillment of joy in their lives even in these moments. This curriculum also provided participants with modeled practices of prayer that would help to ensure a consistent prayer life. This session concluded with a question and answer time that centered on how to pray with confidence that God hears our petitions.

In training session 4, on June 13, 2021, participants engaged in a thirty-minute lecture that covered “Giving Thanks to God Through Prayer.” This lecture covered 1 Thessalonians 5:18 by providing participants with an exegetical analysis of the passage. I presented the big idea that prayer is an avenue to express gratefulness and seek God’s guidance. The warm-up discussion engaged participants by examining their practice of gracious prayer and reflection. The training curriculum explained that when believers are obedient to the command of God concerning being thankful always, the will of God in Christ Jesus will be fulfilled their lives. Furthermore, the curriculum revealed that prayer is the method of communication that God has provided to achieve a joyful fellowship with him. This session concluded with a questions and answer time that centered around the importance of seeking God’s guidance in the young adults daily affairs.

In training session 5, on June 17, 2021, the young adult participants were introduced to “Bible Intake: Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Interpretation,” through a thirty-minute lecture based upon 2 Timothy 3:16. Following the lecture, a warm-up discussion focused on the big idea that the Bible is the primary source of the gospel message, which saves souls. Each participant had the opportunity to express their current Bible intake practices and to explain the impact it had on their lives. After the discussion, the training curriculum provided a definition of inspiration, inerrancy, and interpretation. God is the

originator of the Bible, the Bible is true in every sense, and believers must engage Scripture through the lens that is biblically accurate. The training session concluded with question and answer time about how believers can ensure that their practice of Bible intake can be properly achieved in their lives.

Training session 6, on June 21, 2021, was a thirty-minute lecture on “The Practice of Bible Intake: Hearing and Reading.” The lecture covered Romans 10:17 and 2 Timothy 3:16. Following the lecture, a warm-up discussion addressed the big idea of this lesson: Bible intake occurs through hearing and reading the Word of God. Participants had the opportunity to explain whether they had developed any consistent patterns of Bible intake in their daily living. The training curriculum explained that Bible intake will increase faith and cultivate the hearts of those who hear the Word. The session content concluded by providing some Bible intake practices such as highlighting the Bible and using a Bible reading plan. A question and answer time revealed that many participants expressed a desire to become more committed to Bible intake.

Training session 7, on June 24, 2021, was presented to participants through a thirty-minute lecture that covered “Foundations of Bible Meditation according to Psalm 1:1-2.” The big idea of this lesson was that biblical meditation fosters godliness—the manifestation of a renewed mind. Following the lecture, a warm-up discussion engaged participants about their meditation practices and the impact it had on their lives. Psalm 1:1-2 provides a foundation of biblical meditation by expressing the importance of focusing and reflecting upon the Word continuously. The training curriculum explained that the goal of every believer should be to live life in communion with God by daily becoming transformed by his Word. According to Psalm 1, “the law of the Lord” empowers believers to achieve this fellowship with God. Furthermore, believers must listen to the Word, read the Word, study the Word, and memorize the Word to improve their meditative ability. The training concluded with a question and answer time that

revealed that the content of this lesson sparked the participants' interest to improve their efforts in biblical meditation.

In training session 8, on June 28, 2021, participants were introduced to “Meditation: Drawing God’s Blessings,” through a thirty-minute lecture. The big idea of this training session was that consistent Godly meditation results in perpetual blessings. Following the lecture, a warm-up session engaged the young adults by allowing them to express their personal experiences and practices of meditation. The discussion revealed that some participants recognized that they had been blessed through Godly meditation. The training highlighted *Conformed to His Image* author Kenneth Boa, who states, “To meditate on the Word is to take the time to ponder a verse or passage from Scripture so that its truth can sink in deeply into our being.”⁶ The lesson also provided insight into the illumination of God. Adele Calhoun states, “Illumination finds evidence of God in pain and sorrow as well as joy and peace.”⁷ God’s blessings are available to those who engage in the spiritual discipline of meditation. The training concluded with a question and answer time in which the participants collectively discussed the lesson.

Training session 9, on July 1, 2021, was the final lesson and was designed to review and conclude the collection of training sessions. In a thirty-minute lecture, I covered “Spirituality: Prayer, Bible intake, and Meditation Integration and Practice.” The big idea of this session answered the question, what does the believer’s daily spiritual walk look like? The Bible contains the revelation of God, thus providing believers with information about the entirety of life. The process of spiritually digesting the Word requires more effort than simply deciding to meditate on the Word. Christians must be trained to accurately engage the Word. Finally, believers must intentionally seek practical ways to faithfully engage the Word of God. This training session concluded similarly to the others by

⁶ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 84.

⁷ Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 328.

allowing participants to express their thoughts and ideas through a time of question and answer.

Following the final session, students completed a post-test questionnaire to evaluate the trainings' impact. Results from the pre- and post-tests were measured using a *t*-test for dependent samples. This goal was considered successful when a *t*-test showed a positive, significant increase in participants' knowledge and change in their practice.⁸ During the implementation period, the measurement for this goal included a pre-test and post-test survey of the training. The goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test training survey scores: ($t(17) = -7.9309, p < .0001$ (see table 5).

Table 5. *t*-test pre-test and post-test results

	<i>PRE-TEST</i>	<i>POST-TEST-</i>
	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
Mean	59.55555556	71.88888889
Variance	79.90849673	26.81045752
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.682600532	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	17	
t Stat	- 7.930952024	
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.05317E-07	
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.10635E-07	
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	

The mean score in the post-test increased from 59.55 to 71.88. The *t*-stat value of -7.9309, was larger than the *t*-critical one-tail value of 2.1098. I used the one-tail value because I came into this project believing that the teaching would make a difference.

⁸ Neil Salkind, *Statistics for People who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016), 93.

Finally, the p -value 2.05317E-07 was significantly less than the required 0.05. This means that I had at least a 95 percent confidence interval in the test. These criteria allowed me to conclude that this t -test shows a significant change of improvement between the pre-test and post-test results. Significant areas of growth are worth mentioning. Every question in the survey increased in the post-test results apart from item 3: “I sometimes feel stuck at the same place in my spiritual life.” The improvement in thirteen areas of the survey is encouraging because it suggests that the structure of the ministry project was effective in improving previous positions in discipleship practices. While one item failed to improve, it is very possible that the lack of a positive change in this item in the survey may not have been the best choice of statements to assess the spiritual life practices of the young adult participants. Furthermore, the lack in change in this item provides insight that the young adult participants might need some more detailed training to help address their failure to improve in this area. The average response to this question remained “3” (agree somewhat), in the pre-test and the post-test.

Conclusion

The implementation of this ministry project trained the young adult members of Z1MBC to become a formidable force for the Lord. The commitment to grow as disciples for the glory of Christ is evidenced by the increase that the post-survey of discipleship practices provided. The goals of this ministry project were met and exceeded the expectations established.

The previous discipleship practices of the young adults were clearly displayed through the pre-test surveys. The commitment cards and written request to participate in the ministry project were effective in the recruitment process. The evaluation rubric used by the expert panel was effective in ensuring that the lesson plans were adequate to improve the spiritual practices of the young adult members of the Z1MBC. The final goal used a t -test that compared the pre-test, and the post-test survey results of the young adults

of the Z1MBC. The goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically difference between pre-test and post-test training survey scores.

CHAPTER 5

MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

Many churches today appear to be somewhat void of meaningful discipleship practices that will help to fulfill the discipleship mandate. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” The gospel of Jesus is the only viable means available to sinners to transform their lives and give them access to the fellowship of God. Unfortunately, many churches have the opinion that the church exists solely for the well-being of its members and therefore little to no effort is generated to help in the process of training the membership in discipleship practices. Many churches are filled with legitimate Christians; however, being a Christian does not automatically equate to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Many Christians are guilty of not fulfilling their requirement to help lead others to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church, Barton, Alabama, had fallen into a rut in which little or no effort was being placed toward discipleship training. While every member could have benefited from discipleship training, this ministry project was directed toward young adults, ages 21 to 50 years old. I believed that this demographic group was the most disconnected concerning discipleship. This project was designed to address the spiritual weakness in the young adult members of the Z1MBC.

This chapter seeks to evaluate the efficacy of this project, its purposes, and to reflect upon the goals established at the beginning. I also present the strengths and weaknesses of this project, which provide insight into what I would do differently in

future work. Finally, I provide theological reflections as well as personal thoughts about the project with a concluding summary.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the young adult members of the Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church in Barton, Alabama, to become maturing disciples of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the project was birthed from a ministry context that revealed the biblical and spiritual immaturity among members 21 to 50 years old at Z1MBC. This lack of maturity, coupled with the understanding that certain spiritual disciplines can improve Christian maturity, influenced my choice to develop this project on discipleship.

The purpose of this project aligned with the exegesis of Romans 12:1-2, where Paul states, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Paul reveals that the timeless message of love that comes from God is the extension of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. This is his plea for devotion, conformity, and transformation in the lives of believers. This passage reveals that transformation in the life of believers is accomplished through their minds being renewed. Renewed minds are one of the expected outcomes for those who practice spiritual disciplines.

Second, the exegesis of 2 Peter 1:3-9 reveals that believers must diligently pursue spiritual and moral transformation as they grow in maturity. Peter states in 2 Peter 1:3-4,

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

This passage of Scripture explains that Christians can experience life altering spiritual renewal when they recognize that they need to be renewed and that a specific methodology must be practiced. God has availed himself to believers and his power is able to overshadow all the incumbrances that potentially compete to keep believers in darkness. God promises believers who seek to institute godly virtues in their lives that he will allow them to participate in the understanding of his divine power.

Third, the exegesis of Psalm 1:1-3 reveals the practice of meditation and how it impacts the believer's spiritual formation. Psalm 1:2 states, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." The believer's access to the blessings of God comes through the willingness to refrain from ungodly counsel by meditating upon the oracles of God. Meditation is achieved by daily rehearsing the Word of God.

Finally, the exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 reveals the need for believers in Christ to pray always and about everything in life. Paul states, "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Prayer is an important spiritual discipline and one of the ways believers are afforded to communicate with God. Prayer helps align the hearts of believers with the expectations God has for their lives. The will of God is for the believer to give thanks to him for all things, which will improve spiritual growth in the believer.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

The alignment of the project purpose and goals ensured that the young adult members of Z1MBC were effectively trained to become disciples of Jesus Christ. The project included four goals: (1) assess current discipleship practices among the young adult members of Z1MBC, (2) recruit a group of young adults to participate in intentional biblical spirituality, (3) refine a discipleship training program for young adult members,

and (4) increase the knowledge and modify practices of young adult members of the Z1MBC related to biblical spirituality.

Goal 1: Current Young Adult Practices

The first goal of this project was to assess current discipleship practices among the young adult members of the Z1MBC. This goal was measured by a pre-test questionnaire that gathered data about current discipleship practices.¹ The return of a minimum of twenty surveys was originally required for a success of this goal. The goal was partially met because I only received 18 of the 20 surveys distributed to potential participants. The original goal of 20 completed surveys was established prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19. The restrictions and protocols for safety could have been a contributing factor as to why the surveys were not completed and returned. While the desire was to receive 20 young adult participants, 18 young adults participated in the survey.

The first area of assessment in the pre-test survey was designed to understand how participants felt about their personal spiritual lives. I was impressed that 18 of the 18 young adult participants at least “agreed somewhat” with item 1: “I think about my spiritual life as a follower of Jesus often.” This item was important in establishing whether the young adult members would take the discipleship training seriously and allow it to develop them into maturing disciples. Fifteen of 18 participants at least “agreed somewhat” with item 13: I have an older Christian who encourages me in my spiritual life. This item helped me understand whether the participants were historically being influenced to become more spiritually active prior to the ministry training.

Having been the pastor of the Z1MBC for the past eleven years, I was not surprised that 17 of 18 participants at least “agreed somewhat” with item 4: “I believe the Bible is a reliable guide for spiritual growth,” as most of the young adults have been

¹ See appendix 1.

exposed to Bible teaching most of their lives. While the previous teachings were not as detailed as the content in the project, the young adult participants had previously been exposed to teaching about discipleship and Bible study. Because the young adult members of Z1MBC had previously attended Bible Study, I was extremely surprised at the number of young adults who did not follow a regular plan for reading the Bible (9/18). This data is evidence that a ministry project on discipleship was needed to help to improve the practices of the young adults of the Z1MBC.

Another area in the surveys that was surprising to me was that several individuals (7/18) felt like they were easily distracted when they pray. This survey data helped guide me in spending more time emphasizing the lesson content about prayer. I informed them during the lecture that prayer is like a telephone communication between the believer and God. During this conversation, God will empower the believer to experience joy, peace, and stability in their daily living. Prayer is the mode of communication that allows the believer to remain in constant fellowship with God.

The final area of the survey that was not surprising to me was that 16 of 18 participants at least “agreed” that the spiritual discipline of meditation was a practice addressed in Scripture. Most young adult members of Z1MBC were part of a Bible study series that covered Psalm 1 two years prior to the implantation of this ministry project. During this time, they were exposed to some of the principles of biblical meditation. However, 4 of the 18 participants during the pre-test at least “agreed somewhat” with item 8: Meditation is primarily about relaxing. This information was useful in helping me spend some concentrated time in the lecture discussions that covered meditation.

Goal 2: Recruit Discipleship Participants

The second goal of this project was to recruit a group of young adults to participate in intentional biblical spirituality. The recruitment of young adult members was accomplished by providing a written request of participation to twenty young adults for biblical spirituality training.

All participants completed and signed a commitment card documenting their willingness to participate in biblical spirituality training.² The return of a minimum of fifteen commitment cards was required for successful participation and determined the success of this goal. In conjunction with the commitment cards, an interview questionnaire was completed during the recruitment process which provided additional insight into the spiritual maturity of the participants.

The interview questionnaire contained seven open-ended questions designed to help assess the current discipleship practices of the young adult members of the Z1MBC.³ The first two questions, (“What has been the most helpful thing for your spiritual growth?”) and (“What is the biggest barrier you face in growing spiritually?”) provided clarity about the current development of the participants.

Question 3, (“How do you experience growth when reading the Bible?”) surprisingly, presented numerous answers from the young adult participants that aligned with the training lesson “The Practice of Bible Intake: Hearing and Reading.” I explained to them that Bible intake goes beyond simply having knowledge about God’s Word. Reading the Bible exposes the believer to the revelation of God and provides them with teachings that speak to the issues of life.

The interview questionnaire assessed the current Bible reading practices in question 4: (“What are some ways reading the Bible changes the way you live day to day?”). I learned from this question that there was a shortfall in the young adult participants understanding about how Bible reading should impact their daily living. I used this information to stress the importance of committing to a structured routine of reading the Bible.

Question 5, (“What are your biggest struggles in prayer?”) revealed the majority of the participants struggled with knowing what to pray and how to pray. This question

² See appendix 2.

³ See appendix 2.

also confirmed that many participants were uncertain about how often and how long they should pray. This information was helpful in guiding the discussion moment during training session 3: “Biblical Foundation of Prayer”

Question 6, (“How does prayer affect the way you live day to day?”) provided an opportunity to connect the discipline of prayer with the discipline of Bible intake and meditation. I was able to train the young adult members of ZIMBC about the importance of collectively engaging these disciplines for the maximum benefit of growing more in Christ.

The final question of the interview questionnaire, (“What, if any practice do you have for meditation?”) was revealing. This question provided me with the insight that the young adult participants experienced uncertainty about how meditation was manifested or carried out in daily living. Furthermore, the young adult participants equated meditation as some mystical occurrence practiced by people who primarily were not Christians. Similar to the other interview questions, this information allowed me to engage in a more concentrated effort during training session 7: “Foundations of Meditation.”

Goal 3: Discipleship Training Program

The third goal of the project was to refine a discipleship training program for the young adult members of ZIMBC. A three-person team consisting of two doctoral level pastors, and one master’s level female panelist reviewed the curriculum and used a rubric to assess the viability of the lesson plans.

The rubric covered three specific areas designed to ensure the project would be successful: biblical accuracy, scope and sequence, and lesson plan goals. A minimum score of “3” on a four-point scale was required for each part of the curriculum and every lesson plan. If any lessons did not meet this minimum score, then the curriculum was revised and resubmitted for review until it attained the level of “3.” All three expert panel members found that the lessons plans were exemplary in every category.

Goal 4: Increased Knowledge and Practice

The fourth goal of the project was to increase the knowledge and modify practices of young adult members of Z1MBC related to biblical spirituality. This goal measurement required each member to complete a nine-week spiritual formation class. Participants had to attend at least seven of the nine sessions. Following the final session, students completed a post-test questionnaire to evaluate the training's impact. Results from the pre- and post-tests were measured using a *t*-test for dependent samples. This goal was considered successful when a *t*-test showed a positive, significant increase in participants' knowledge and change in their practice.⁴

During the implementation period, the measurement for this goal included a pre-test and post-test survey of the training. The goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically difference between pre-test and post-test training survey scores: ($t(17)=-7.9309, p<.0001$).

Significant areas of growth are worth mentioning in this ministry project. Every question in the survey increased in the post-test results apart from one item 3: (“I sometimes feel stuck at the same place in my spiritual life”). The average response to this question remained “3” (agree somewhat) in the pre-test and the post-test. I am not certain why this particular item did not achieve increase in the post-test survey. I think that growth in the spiritual lives of the young adult participants has improved because item 2: (“I feel like I am growing in my spiritual life”) increased in the post-test survey. The lack of change may reveal that there could have been a better way of framing the words in this item. Furthermore, this information might suggest that the project could have presented a more detailed lesson of study about why people may feel stuck or idle in their spiritual lives.

⁴ Neil Salkind, *Statistics for People who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016), 93.

Table 6 is a comparative analysis of the pre-test survey results and the post-test survey results of discipleship practices.

Table 6. Pre-test and post-test survey change

Survey Questions	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Change
Q1. I think about my spiritual life as a follower of Christ	5	5.7	+.7
Q2. I feel like I am growing in my spiritual life.	4.4	5.7	+1.3
Q3. I sometimes feel stuck at the same place in my spiritual life.	3.3	3.1	-.2
Q4. I believe the Bible is a reliable guide for spiritual growth	5.3	5.9	+.6
Q5. I follow a regular plan for reading the Bible.	3.6	4.8	+.9
Q6. I read the Bible when I feel like it but do not follow a regular reading plan.	3.6	4.5	+.9
Q7. Meditation is a practice the Bible does not address	4.7	5.5	+.8
Q8. Meditation is primarily about relaxing.	4.5	5.5	+1.0
Q9. I have regular time of prayer (apart from mealtime) every day.	4.4	5.1	+.7
Q10. I feel closer to God when I pray.	4.2	5.6	+1.4
Q11. I am often distracted when I pray.	3.8	4.9	+1.1
Q12. Prayer often feels like a struggle for me.	3.9	4.9	+1.0
Q13. I have older Christians who encourages me in my spiritual life.	4.7	5.4	+.7
Q14. I feel like I could help younger Christians grow spiritually.	4.2	5.2	+1.0

Strengths of the Project

Spiritual maturity in Christ involves the practice of certain disciplines, including Bible intake, meditation, and prayer. Biblical spirituality is a study that encompasses the collection of disciplines to which believers must commit for the benefit of glorifying God. An exegesis of Romans 12:1-2 reveals that renewed minds are one outcome of the practice of spiritual disciplines. An exegesis of 2 Peter 1:3-1 reveals that believers must diligently pursue spiritual and moral transformation as they grow in maturity. Psalm 1:1-3 reveals the practice of meditation in the believer's spiritual formation. Finally, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 reveals the need for believers in Christ to pray always and about everything in life. These passages of Scripture are reflective of the strengths displayed in this project.

Several strengths in this ministry project are worthy of highlighting. First, this ministry project developed a new paradigm for the participants in discipleship. The post-test results revealed an improved position of thoughtfulness concerning spirituality individually and collectively. The practice of Bible intake, prayer, and meditation has been increased in 18 of the 18 participants. Furthermore, the average in the post-test results of item 2: I feel like I am growing in my spiritual life, improved from an average of 4.4 to 5.7, with 6 being the highest possible score. This spiritual maturity can be attributed to the training of the disciplines of Bible intake, meditation, and prayer.

The next strength of the project was the detailed analysis of Scripture used in the training curriculum. I understood during the establishment of this project that certain passages of Scripture would be profitable to the young adults. Many young adults at Z1MBC fell into the category that the apostle Paul describes as “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5). The inclusion of Scripture promoted spiritual maturity through teaching the timeless truths of the Word of God. The author of Hebrews makes this situation clear: in the absence of a diet that progresses from milk to “strong meat,” it is inevitable that the believer will struggle to grow into the expected maturity in the Lord (Heb 5:14).

The scriptural basis for implementing this project was Romans 12:1-2, which was a clarion call for devotion, sacrifice, and conformity in the lives of the young adult participants. Second Peter 1:3-9 required participants to consider the promises of God and to respond to the obligations God has empowered them to fulfill in their daily living. Psalm 1:1-3 provided the participants with a foundation on how to meditatively forsake evil, commit to engaging the Word, and receive the blessings that flow from God. First Thessalonians 5:16-18 informed the young adult participants of the importance of rejoicing in the Lord in all things and to consistently pray with a disposition of thankfulness. As a result of this project, the discipleship practices of the young adults have begun to alter the slothful habits that many possessed prior to the training.

Another strength of this ministry project was the new practice of structured Bible study developed individually and collectively among the young adult members of Z1MBC. One of the areas that the participants struggled with was consistently reading the Bible and tracking their progress of reading through the Bible. During the training class on Bible intake, most participants believed that marking the Bible while reading was a practice they found useful because it helped them recall and highlight biblical ideas. Furthermore, the young adult participants acknowledged that the easiest way to find more time to read the Bible was by exchanging some of their none-essential activities of watching television and scrolling through social media outlets with structured Bible reading. The pre-test survey revealed that an average of 60 percent (11/18) participated in regular planned Bible intake (item 5: “I follow a regular plan for reading the Bible”). The post-test survey revealed an improvement of regular planned Bible intake, which increased to 83 percent (15/18). Without this ministry project, the statistical improvement of Bible intake would not have occurred in this young adult group.

The final strength of this ministry project was the positive change recorded in the post test results related to prayer. The post-test survey of item 10: I feel closer to God when I pray, revealed that participants increased their view from an average of 4.17 to an average of 5.61. These numbers represent the fact that 17 of the 18 young adult participants feel like they are closer to God when they pray. The post-survey of item 11: “I am often distracted when I pray” also shows an improvement from an average of 3.78 to 4.89. The numbers on this item represent the fact that 17 of 18 training participants believed that they no longer were distracted when they prayed. Therefore, the belief that the young adults of the Z1MBC are no longer distracted when they pray can be attributed to the training performed in this ministry project.

Weaknesses of the Project

Some notable weaknesses of this ministry project are also worthy of highlighting. The first weakness was the length of the discipleship training curriculum.

After teaching the eight-week training program, I felt that the program would have been more beneficial if it had been a sixteen-week program. The three areas of discipleship covered in this project were Bible intake, prayer, and meditation. It became obvious that the nine lessons needed to be extended to ensure more growth in spirituality. The post-results of item 3: “I sometimes feel stuck at the same place in my life” only had an improved average of 3.3 from a 3.1. average. These figures reveal that 13 of 18 participants at least “somewhat agreed” that they feel stuck in their spiritual lives. The ministry project could have done a better job of addressing this item so that a more favorable outcome would have been achieved. Furthermore, this item may not have used the most effective language of communication to assess the intended purpose of spiritual growth. The post-test result of item 2: “I feel like I’m growing in my spiritual life” revealed that 18 of 18 participants at least “somewhat agree” that they are growing spiritually. The content of item 2 reveals that there must have been some misunderstanding about the content of item 3 because they both state very similar points. The participants achieved some spiritual growth through the training program; however, those who may use this project in the future might need more time to achieve the most spiritual growth.

Another weakness of this ministry project was the unfortunate deviation of implementation from in-person interaction due to COVID-19. Originally, I planned to schedule individual meetings with all participants to gather their information on current discipleship practice. COVID-19 forced me to do the interviews through the virtual communication venues of Zoom and GoToMeeting. The lack of in person communication hindered my ability to adequately grasp the level of understanding that the young adult participants initially possessed prior to starting the discipleship training program. The training lessons appeared to be more effective halfway through the process, as we were able to collectively gather in the church for lessons 5–9. While I am grateful that we were able to communicate through ZOOM and GoToMeeting, the effectiveness of the process was hindered by the limitations of these venues of communication. There was a lack of

in-person communication in the initial process of the project, but I am thankful that I was able to engage the young adults of the ZIMBC in-person during the training sessions of the ministry project.

The most significant weakness of this ministry project was not in the content or implementation but my personal failure to practice the meditation processes that I taught the young adults. While I consistently read Scripture and prayed, I found during this process that I had become so overwhelmed with meeting deadlines that I failed to reflect deeply upon the Word of God in my personal life. I could have been more effective in the implementation of the project if I had meditatively reflected upon the content of the training lessons longer. Furthermore, the content of this ministry project was guided by the Holy Spirit, however, I have since come to understand that I did not allow the Holy Spirit to fully indwell my mind throughout the process of implementation. Careless reading of the Word and the absence of meditation practices will not supply the believer with the substance available to those who engage the Word. While this lack of insight on my part is unfortunate, I am thankful that the Lord extended me grace and mercy, despite this temporary lack in judgement, to provide valuable spiritual training to the young adult participants.

What I Would Do Differently

If I undertake this project or another project on spiritual disciplines, I would incorporate some changes. These changes would be based upon the assessment of the weaknesses and the strengths of the ministry project. The strengths of the project are encouraging, however, the weaknesses would be a great place to begin implementing meaningful change in the project.

The first change would be to combine my introductory session on biblical spirituality. The project would have been more effective and impactful if I had more time to facilitate the introduction's lesson content. Second, I would do four introductory sessions that covers devotion, sacrifice, conformity, and transformation. I would also provide three

additional sessions on prayer, Bible intake, and meditation to ensure that participants thoroughly understood why these spiritual disciplines were chosen. Each of these areas of the training lessons could have benefited the young adult participants of Z1MBC. The success of the project would not be impaired due to these changes, but rather, the additional sessions would increase the effectiveness of the project.

This project was facilitated through lesson lectures and whole group discussion of the lesson questions. After the training implementation, I recognized that a gauge, such as a worksheet for each training session, would have been helpful to ensure that the participants' understanding aligned with the content in each lesson. A worksheet would serve as a learner-centered performance to help participants internalize the project content. The worksheet would also serve as a resource that the young adult participants could always reference to help remind them of the training lesson content.

Finally, the most significant thing that I would do differently in this ministry project, or any future discipleship project, would be to personally apply the project process to myself. Before implementation of the training sessions, I would ensure that ample time is set aside for me to personally engage and assess how the project affects my discipleship practices. This practice would provide the facilitator with a greater appreciation of how to administer the training sessions. While this is hindsight, God again proved to be faithful and merciful by blessing this project to positively impact the young adults of Z1MBC.

Theological Reflection

This ministry project has been a joy because it has exceeded my personal expectations in the lives of the young adult participants of Z1MBC. When I started the preparation for this project, it was from an understanding that a theology of biblical spirituality recognizes that God's desire is to bring humanity back into a relationship with himself. I believed that the study of God, His attributes, and His relationship to all things was important to share with the young adult members of Z1MBC. While the young adult members appear to be sincere in the quest of spirituality, it was apparent that sincerity

alone was not enough to shape their spirituality. Biblical spirituality is a discipline that needed to be introduced and practiced in the lives of the young adult members of ZIMBC. Much to their dismay, the young adult members were in desperate need of the fellowship with true and living God of heaven. I am grateful for the opportunity to be the vessel that God used to help improve the young adult members' practice of studying, praying, and meditation. To my surprise, I have already witnessed a positive change in the behavior of almost all the participants in the church. Furthermore, this project strengthened my own journey of spirituality and provided me with a boost to continue, at all costs, to be a part of discipling young adults in my local church.

Chapter 2 of this project provided me with a discipleship platform that can always be used to help me personally in my spiritual walk and others who I encounter with relevant spirituality tools for Christian growth. The apostle Paul said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom 12: 1-2). The urgency of this request is due to the blessings God has already so graciously afforded his people. Therefore, it is reasonable that man has an ethical obligation to adhere to the call of the Lord.

The exegetical work in chapter 2 was challenging at times and even overwhelming; however, the structure provided by the supervisor is a priceless lesson that I have gained. Never in my life have I engaged the same text of Scripture through so many different scholarly lenses. Furthermore, the exegetical process forced me to read deeply and thoughtfully meditate on the passages in a way that allowed me to understand the passage better. My ability to accurately interpret Scripture has been significantly enhanced due to the requirements of this project.

Finally, this discipleship project caused me to realize that this training should be a part of the curriculum for all ZIMBC members. While this project focused on the young adult members of ZIMBC, throughout the process of implementing this ministry project it became evident that the entire congregation needs to be engaged in a process of becoming more effective disciples of Jesus Christ. Many of the vicissitudes faced in the congregation are due to a lack of individuals who have become converted to biblical discipleship practices. Personal preferences and the presence of what Paul calls being “tossed to and fro, and carried by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14b) is a constant struggle that impedes the effectiveness of the truth. Therefore, I will intentionally try to introduce the content of this project in every area of ministry at ZIMBC because it can positively change the culture of the church.

Personal Reflections

Historically, I have strived to faithfully preach and teach the Word of God at ZIMBC. I have utilized the many theological and practical insights gleaned from seminary to help craft sermons and Bible study lessons that are biblically accurate and Holy Spirit filled. However, this discipleship project caused me to reassess my practices and focus equally on training disciples. Oftentimes, it is difficult to escape the traditions passed down from preachers and pastors who have come before us. One of these traditions is the belief that the pastor of a congregation is primarily and solely responsible for preaching and teaching. While I continue to think that there is a significant amount of truth in that statement, there is the potential for the church to continue to dissipate in the absence of teaching and preaching more centered upon discipleship. Therefore, churches around the world must begin the practice of developing discipleship training that will prepare the church to go out and disciple those who are lost in sin. Furthermore, every member of the local church must be interested and seeking to become better disciples for the glory of Jesus Christ. I must never believe that because I am the pastor of the congregation that I have arrived as a perfect disciple.

I must make time to engage with individuals who are willing to be disciplined into legitimate followers of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this project validated the presence and power of God to give adequate guidance. The presence of the Holy Spirit manifested himself throughout this process to help me research and implement this project. There were multiple moments during the training session that I was certain that the Lord was guiding me on how to better effectuate positive change in the lives of the young adults of Z1MBC. Second Peter 1:8-9 reveals that the believer is given the power to determine whether they will be empowered through the gospel of Jesus Christ or submit to the darkness of the world. This discipleship project re-energized me to do all in my power to help fulfill the mandate of making disciples in Matthew 28.

Finally, this ministry project and the totality of this doctoral program stretched and strengthened me in a way that I could have never imagined. Many times, I wanted to throw in the proverbial towel, other times I wondered why I was doing this to myself. I prayed that the will of God would be fulfilled in my life as his servant. I am certain that this ministry project has made me a better Christian, pastor, preacher, and person; therefore, I will be forever grateful for this phase of my journey. I thank God that I have been afforded the opportunity to play a more meaningful and guided role in the lives of the young adult participants of Z1MBC.

Conclusion

The purpose of this ministry project was to train the young adult members of the Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church in Barton, Alabama, to become maturing disciples of Jesus Christ. Through a rigorous process of research and prayer, I was able to develop and implement a biblical discipleship curriculum that proved to foster meaningful change in the lives of the young adults of Z1MBC. The statistical improvements among every participant of the project are a source of encouragement and fulfillment for me.

Before starting this project, the Z1MBC had a historical Wednesday night Bible study for seniors and a Thursday night Bible study for young adults. I am thankful that the

Thursday night Bible Study has been changed to Thursday night Discipleship Training Class that is open to all adult members of Z1MBC. Currently, the project participants attend the class alone with several new members who desire to enhance their discipleship practices. Ultimately, this project developed some spiritual relationships in the church that were not previously known, and for this reality I will forever be grateful to God. It is my sincere prayer that this project will continue to be profitable to the members of Z1MBC and anyone else who is privy to this content!

APPENDIX 1

DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES PRE-TRAINING SURVEY

The following instrument is the pre-test questionnaire. This test is composed of items using a six-point Likert scale. This instrument assessed each participant's level of understanding regarding current discipleship practices.

DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES PRE-TRAINING SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

You are being requested to participate in a study designed to reveal your understanding and practices of biblical discipleship. This research is being conducted by Karlos Felton for the purposes of doctoral project research. In this research, a person will complete a survey and an interview. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Date: _____

Name: _____

Directions: Please mark your agreement to the statements using the following scale:

SD = strongly disagree
D = disagree
DS = disagree somewhat
AS = agree somewhat
A = agree
SA = strongly agree

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I think about my spiritual life as a follower of Jesus often. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I feel like I am growing in my spiritual life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I sometimes feel stuck at the same place in my spiritual life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I believe the Bible is a reliable guide for spiritual growth. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I follow a regular plan for reading the Bible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I read the Bible when I feel like it but do not follow a regular reading plan. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. "Meditation" is a practice the Bible does not address. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. Meditation is primarily about relaxing. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I have regular time of prayer (apart from mealtime) every day. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

10. I feel closer to God when I pray.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. I am often distracted when I pray.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. Prayer often feels like a struggle for me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I have an older Christian who encourages me in my spiritual life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I feel like I could help younger Christians grow spiritually.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 2

DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To systematically gather information from participants in this research project, I used a mixed-methods approach of personal interviews and a survey with Likert-scale items. Six interview questions, in conjunction with fourteen items, were used to assess participants' understanding and practices of personal spiritual disciplines. The interview questions were designed to ensure that the participants understood why they were being interviewed, to provide clarity about the intent of the research, and to gain needed information to adequately implement the research project.

These interview questions were implemented by using the *semi-structured interview* process. Semi-structured interviews are designed to aid in the process of qualitative analysis by targeting specific themes of consideration.¹ Bible intake, prayer, and meditation were the specific themes that the interview questions covered. Because I was using the semi-structured interview process, each participant had the questions presented them in the exact same way during each individual interview.

I used self-administered questionnaires to perform these interviews with the participants at least two weeks prior to implementing the teaching of the research project. I provided participants with the option to be interviewed either through a Zoom virtual conference or through telephone communication. Each participant was contacted, and an interview appointment was established for the interviews. The interviews did not last longer than thirty-minutes per participant and the answers to the interview questions were documented by me the (interviewer).

¹ Annabel Kajornboon, "Using Interviews as Research Instruments," *e-Journal for Researching Teachers* 2, no. 1 (December 2005), <http://www.culi.chula.ac.th/e-Journal/index.htm>.

Agreement to Participate

You are being requested to participate in a study designed to reveal your understanding and practices of biblical discipleship. This research is being conducted by Karlos Felton for the purposes of doctoral project research. In this research, a person will complete an interview based upon the questions listed below. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time.* By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Date: _____

Name: _____

Please use the space provided to answer the following questions.

1. What has been the most helpful thing for your spiritual growth?

2. What is the biggest barrier you face in growing spiritually?

3. How do you experience growth when reading the Bible?

4. What are some ways reading the Bible changes the way you live day to day?

5. What are your biggest struggles in prayer?

6. How does prayer affect the way you live day to day?

7. What, if any, practices do you have for meditation?

APPENDIX 3

DISCIPLESHIP COMMITMENT CARD

The following instrument is the written request to participate. This request was used to determine that willing participants in this project. The instrument was presented on a Commitment Card which detailed the requirements of your commitment.

COMMITMENT CARD

Agreement to Participate

This commitment card will serve as an instrument that identifies those who are willing to participate in this research project. This information will be used to help construct a group of committed young adult members of the Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church training. Any information you provide will be used exclusively for this project. Participation in this research project is voluntary.

If you are willing to participate, please check the appropriate box and answer the questions below.

I agree to participate.

I do not agree to participate.

Name: _____

Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

Age: _____

How long have you been a Christian?

(Answer in years please) _____

How long have you been a member of Zion Number One?

(Answer in years please) _____

APPENDIX 4

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Direction: Place an **X** in the box that most accurately reflects your assessment of each of the presented criteria. Comment when needed.

CURRICULUM EFFECTIVENESS RUBRIC					
1 = Ineffective 2 = Needs Improvement 3 = Effective 4 = Exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Biblical text is appropriate for each lesson's focus.					
Biblical text is handled accurately.					
Theological implications of text are presented clearly.					
Scope and Sequence					
Lessons are sequenced logically.					
Lessons are focused on practices to deepen discipleship.					
Lessons can be delivered in the allotted time frame.					
Lesson Plans					
Each lesson has at least one clear learning goal for participants.					
Each lesson has at least one clear action goal for participants.					
Lessons give attention to a variety of teaching methods.					

APPENDIX 5
DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES POST-TRAINING
EVALUATION

The following instrument is the post-test questionnaire. This evaluation is composed of items using a six-point Likert scale that assessed each participant's level of understanding regarding current discipleship practices.

POST-DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

You are being requested to participate in a study designed to reveal your understanding and practices of biblical discipleship. This research is being conducted by Karlos Felton for the purposes of doctoral project research. In this research, a person will complete a survey and an interview. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Date: _____

Name: _____

Directions: Please mark your agreement to the statements using the following scale:

SD = strongly disagree
D = disagree
DS = disagree somewhat
AS = agree somewhat
A = agree
SA = strongly agree

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I think about my spiritual life as a follower of Jesus often. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I feel like I am growing in my spiritual life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I sometimes feel stuck at the same place in my spiritual life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I believe the Bible is a reliable guide for spiritual growth. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I follow a regular plan for reading the Bible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I read the Bible when I feel like it but do not follow a regular reading plan. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. "Meditation" is a practice the Bible does not address. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. Meditation is primarily about relaxing. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I have regular time of prayer (apart from mealtime) every day. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

10. I feel closer to God when I pray.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. I am often distracted when I pray.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. Prayer often feels like a struggle for me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I have an older Christian who encourages me in my spiritual life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I feel like I could help younger Christians grow spiritually.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING YOUNG ADULT MEMBERS OF THE ZION NUMBER ONE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH IN BARTON, ALABAMA TO BECOME COMMITTED DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST

Karlos Dierecko Felton, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Joseph C. Harrod

The purpose of this project was to train the young adult members of the Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church in Barton, Alabama, to become maturing disciples of Jesus Christ. Chapter 1 provides details of the context, rationale, and the goals of the research project. Chapter 2 explains the biblical and theological foundation to becoming committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Chapter 3 provides the theoretical and practical process of becoming committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Chapter 4 contains the discipleship training classes used to prepare the learners for discipleship. Chapter 5 is the analysis/evaluation of the discipleship training classes and a conclusion about the successfulness of the project.

VITA

Karlos Dierecko Felton

EDUCATION

BA, Andersonville Theological Seminary, 2013

MA, Luther Rice College and Seminary, 2018

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastor, Zion Number One Missionary Baptist Church, Barton, Alabama, 2010-

Moderator, Muscle Shoals District Missionary Baptist Association Inc,

Leighton, Alabama, 2014-2020