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EQUIPPING COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SCRIPTURE
MEDITATION AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
IN DOUGLAS, GEORGIA

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EQUIPPING COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SCRIPTURE
MEDITATION AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
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For the glory of God

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	3
Purpose	5
Goals	5
Research Methodology	5
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	6
Conclusion	7
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR SCRIPTURE MEDITATION	8
A Description of Scripture Meditation: An Exposition of Psalm 1:1-3	9
A Prescription for Scripture Meditation: An Exposition of Joshua 1:6-8	16
A New Testament Prescription for Scripture Meditation: An Exposition of Philippians 4:8-9	23
Scripture Meditation Practiced: An Exposition of Selected Verses from Psalm 119	27
Conclusion	33

Chapter	Page
3. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS, SUGGESTED PROCESSES, AND POSSIBLE OBSTACLES TO SCRIPTURE MEDITATION	35
Practical Benefits to Scripture Meditation	37
Suggested Processes for Scripture Meditation	43
Obstacles and Difficulties to Scripture Meditation	55
Conclusion	59
4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT	61
Background of the Ministry Project	61
Preparation of the Ministry Project	62
Promoting the Ministry Project	68
Implementing the Ministry Project	68
Conclusion	70
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	71
Evaluation of the Project's Purpose	71
Evaluation of the Project's Goals	72
Project Strengths	80
Project Weaknesses	81
Project Improvements	82
Theological Reflections	83
Personal Reflections	84
Conclusion	85
 Appendix	
1. PERSONAL BIBLICAL DEVOTIONAL INVENTORY	86
2. CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC	90
3. INTRODUCTORY TRAINING SEMINAR	92
4. SCRIPTURE MEDITATION JOURNAL SAMPLE	99
BIBLIOGRAPHY	124

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Pre-survey perceptions related to spiritual disciplines	73
2. Pre-survey frequency of spiritual disciplines	74
3. Pre-survey perceptions of Scripture meditation	74
4. Pre-survey meditation practices	76
5. Expert assessment of Scripture journal and training session	77
6. Post-survey perceptions related to spiritual disciplines and Scripture meditation	79
7. Post-survey practice of Scripture meditation	80

PREFACE

It is one of the greatest privileges of my life to serve the students of First Baptist Church Douglas, Georgia. Words cannot describe the honor of having a front row seat to how God works in the lives of these students. I am thankful for the students and families who have trusted me to provide spiritual leadership, and I am grateful to the members of FBC who have supported and encouraged me in the process.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary along with many of the professors I have encountered in my focus on biblical spirituality have greatly shaped my personal devotional life as well as my ministry practice. I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. John D. Morrison, for his investment in my project and ministry as well. It is my prayer that their instruction will pass through me and find a home in the hearts of these college students.

Lastly, I am thankful for my family. They have been incredibly supportive of this endeavor despite their own personal sacrifices. I am grateful for their love and encouragement that has strengthened me each step of the way.

Jonathan McDuffie

Douglas, Georgia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does” (Jas 1:25).¹ Bible reading is an essential practice of any growing believer. However, reading alone does not produce transformation or lead to blessing. “I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, even to the end” (Ps 119:111-112). Blessing is only experienced once Scripture affects the heart in a way that leads to obedience. Scripture meditation is a process and posture intended to place the reader in a position to be transformed by the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit so that believers may encounter Scripture in such a way that they will respond with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Given the tremendous privilege and possibilities involved in Scripture meditation, it is essential to instruct the college students of First Baptist in Scripture meditation.

Context

This ministry project took place at First Baptist Church in Douglas, Georgia (FBC). FBC has existed within the community for 125 years, but the previous two years have seen notable transition with the hiring of two senior leaders and a recasting of the church’s mission, vision, and strategy. A primary component of this strategy is worship, both public and private. Multiple options are provided for corporate worship at various times across all age groups. Each of the worship services has also seen significant growth

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible version, unless otherwise noted.

over the course of the past twelve months. Sunday services are primarily devoted to worship by families, which combines all age groups, and Wednesday nights serve as opportunities for each age group to worship within its own context. Environments are provided for preschool, elementary, middle school, high school, and adults.

The one demographic that has not connected well to Wednesday night worship opportunities is the college age group. Some college students have elected to serve within the children, middle school, or high school ministries; however, none have joined the adult gathering, leaving the majority unconnected on Wednesday nights. College age participation is slightly better during the Sunday morning gathering, but there is a significant drop in attendance when compared to students' participation while still in high school. In a similar way, many college students who have grown up at First Baptist and are living in different communities also struggle to find opportunities to gather for worship within their new context.

Ample opportunities are provided at First Baptist for public worship; however, few resources or trainings have been offered to equip church members in private worship. Postcards of the current church vision and strategy have been distributed among the membership including the following goals: "I read God's Word daily. I pray daily. I obey God's Word faithfully." The church has also provided a 2020 reading plan to assist members in reading the Scriptures consistently. Beyond the postcard and plan, the curriculum utilized among the majority of the Sunday School classes is Lifeway's *Explore the Bible*, which provides biblical instruction one book at a time. Scripture reading is also emphasized from the pulpit and throughout the age graded ministries.

Church members have been encouraged to read God's Word and provided a plan to do so, but no instruction has been instituted on the connection between Scripture reading and prayer or obedience. Reading has been emphasized, but other components, such as memorization, application, and meditation have been neglected. This has limited the fruitfulness of members' Bible reading and has led some to neglect the practice.

Overall, the church body is open and excited about new opportunities. While the previous two years have involved changes in senior staff and church vision, they have also resulted in a season of growth and involvement. This openness is especially evident among the college students. Since ministry focusing on this specific demographic has been limited in recent years, many are quick to seize upon any opportunity for growth and spiritual direction aimed specifically at their age group. When provided specific opportunities and invitations to serve, college students have consistently stepped in to lead; however, there appears to be a general lack of initiative in connecting to corporate worship and continuing in consistent personal worship. A specific invitation to participate in the practice of Scripture meditation would certainly stimulate the latter, if not the former as well.

Rationale

The new vision and strategy of FBC has breathed fresh life into the congregation and produced a growth in corporate worship, yet it is essential to seize upon this time and equip church members to worship personally as well. Though there are many elements to personal worship, including reading, prayer, and singing, Scripture plays an essential role in each. Meditation is a key practice that enhances a believer's intake of Scripture. Meditation on Scripture aids the memory after reading, provides direction and focus for prayer, and stirs the heart for worship. Therefore, any effort at training in personal worship should begin with a focus on interacting with the scriptural text, specifically Scripture meditation.

Scripture meditation is a theme that runs throughout the Bible. One primary example from Joshua 1:8 involves God's instruction to Israel's new leader: "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." This verse demonstrates the connection between Scripture meditation and obedience that ultimately leads to blessing.

Obedience to God’s Word is at the heart of discipleship, and Scripture meditation is the path from reading to heart transformation and action.

Beyond biblical examples, one also finds examples of Scripture meditation in church history. Nineteenth century evangelist and man of prayer, George Mueller, writes, “The most important thing I had to do was to read the Word of God and to meditate on it. Thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprovved, and instructed.”² Other spiritual giants, such as Richard Baxter, William Bridge, and Charles Spurgeon similarly emphasize the value of Scripture meditation.³ If meditation is mandated by Scripture and played a pivotal role in the lives of remarkable men of Christian history, it is essential that this same practice be encouraged and taught within the local church today.

The introduction to Barna’s *State of the Bible 2020* ends with the following words: “Our research tells us clearly that an individual’s relationship with the Bible is the single greatest influence on her or his overall spiritual health. Period. Nothing else comes close.”⁴ In the same study, 14 percent of respondents in 2019 claimed to read the Bible daily, a statistic that has remained steady since 2011. However, 2020 saw an unprecedented drop to 9 percent of respondents noting daily Bible reading.⁵ Given the decline in Bible reading both empirically and anecdotally, along with the scriptural injunction to meditate on Scripture, it is essential to instruct FBC college students in the practice of Scripture meditation for their spiritual health and sanctification.

² George Mueller, *The Autobiography of George Mueller* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1984), 139.

³ Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter: Select Treatises* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 90; William Bridge, *The Works for the Reverend William Bridge* (1845; repr., Beaver Falls, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 3:126; Charles Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning; or Daily Readings for the Family Closet* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1867), 286.

⁴ Jeffery Fulks and John Farquhar Plake, *State of the Bible 2020* (Ventura, CA: Barna, 2020), 16.

⁵ Fulks and Plake, *State of the Bible 2020*, 36.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip college students of First Baptist Church in the practice of Scripture meditation.

Goals

The following three goals were utilized to determine the success of this project. The first and third goal related to the initial assessment and final evaluation of college students' Bible reading practices. The second goal related to the Scripture journal that was used to equip students in Scripture meditation.

1. The first goal was to create and administer a pre-test survey to ascertain the current Bible reading and meditation practices and perceptions of fifteen college students.
2. The second goal was to develop and implement an eight-week interactive Scripture journal that illustrates the various methods of Scripture meditation.
3. The third goal was to measure the impact of the journal on students' perceptions and practice of Scripture meditation.

A specific research methodology was created that measures the successful completion of these three goals. This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these three goals. The first goal was to create and administer a pre-test survey to ascertain the current Bible reading and meditation practices and perceptions of fifteen college students. This goal was measured by administering the Personal Biblical Devotion Inventory (PBDI).⁶ This inventory included objective measurements of time spent in daily devotional practices as well as subjective measurements of enjoyment and transformation. This goal was considered successfully met when fifteen college students completed the PBDI and

⁶ See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in this ministry project.

the inventory had been analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the current discipleship practices among FBC college students.

The second goal was to develop and implement an eight-week interactive Scripture journal that illustrated the various methods of Scripture meditation. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁷ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to measure the impact of the journal on students' perceptions and practice of Scripture meditation. This goal was evaluated by re-administering the PBDI, which measured the change in students' practice and confidence in interacting with Scripture. This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definition is used in the ministry project:

Scripture meditation. While the term *meditation* encompasses a wide range of practices and worldviews, *Scripture meditation* has a narrow scope, focusing exclusively on the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Don Whitney, professor of Biblical Spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, defines Christian meditation as “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”⁸ This definition will be adopted as the guiding definition for the project.

⁷ See appendix 2.

⁸ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 48.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, this project was limited to fifteen college-aged students aged 18-23. My position within FBC includes ministry to middle school, high school, and college students. A focus on college students kept the project within the realm of my responsibilities and allowed the curriculum to be customized to a specific age group. Second, the implementation of the project through use of the Scripture journal was limited to a period of eight weeks. This time period provided enough time for teaching the material as well as allowed time for habit formation. This time was also short enough to fit within a college semester system and to encourage consistency in participation.

Conclusion

First Baptist Church of Douglas, Georgia desires to produce disciples who worship God in spirit and in truth. This worship would only occur through an experience of God through the text of Scripture. Meditation on Scripture is a primary means to spur understating, passion, and transformation in the lives of college students. This project aimed to equip college students to engage in this practice for eight weeks with the goal of producing life-long worshippers of Christ.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Scripture occupies a unique status that is unparalleled by any other written word. While other words can capture the emotions, educate the mind, and move men and women to action, Scripture alone holds the power to transform an individual from the inside out. The author of Hebrews writes, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (4:12). Rather than dead words on a page, Scripture actively searches and exposes what lies within a person’s heart, but the work of the Word does not end there. Paul instructs Timothy in the power of God’s Word, saying, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Scripture is the God-breathed words of the Creator, which continually work to reveal the corruption of creation but also possess the power to sanctify the spirits of those who submit to its authority. Paul speaks to this transformation in Romans 12: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (v. 2). God promises in Isaiah 55 that “it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (v. 22). Scripture meditation is an essential component in this process by which the believer gains a better understanding of God and how to follow Him more faithfully. Biblical scholar Federico Villanueva states, “Psalm 1 teaches us that happiness is an outflow of one’s relationship

with God. Happiness is not the main goal. Rather, it is doing God’s will. Happiness only comes as a result of delighting in God and living according to his word.”¹

The following Scriptures provide a foundation for a proper understanding of Scripture meditation. An examination of Psalm 1 will serve as a description of the practice of Scripture meditation along with its results in the life of a believer. Next, attention will be directed towards Joshua 1:8, which presents an Old Testament prescription for Scripture meditation. While Psalm 1 offers a general description of meditation, Joshua provides a tangible expression of this practice in a specific individual’s life. The third passage to be considered is Philippians 4:8-9, which contributes a corresponding New Testament prescription for Scripture meditation. In this passage, Paul directs his readers to meditate, promising it will produce peace. Finally, selected passages from Psalm 119 will be examined that serve as an example of Scripture meditation being practiced within the text of the Bible itself. Texts from various genres, time periods, and authors will all bear witness to the essential and enjoyable practice of connecting to God through meditation on Scripture and point to the resultant fruits produced in the lives of those who actively participate in this process. Throughout this chapter various Old and New Testament scholars will be quoted to provide a wider understanding of the Scriptures studied.

A Description of Scripture Meditation: An Exposition of Psalm 1:1-3

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. (Ps 1:1-3)

Psalm 1 provides an introductory view of Scripture meditation by describing the process as well as the benefits it produces. Fourth century theologian Jerome describes

¹ Federico G. Villanueva, *Psalms 1-72*, Asia Bible Commentary Series (Carlisle, UK: Langham Creative Projects, 2016), Psalm 1, “1:6 The Blessedness of the Righteous and the Pitiable End of the Wicked,” para. 4, Kindle.

the first Psalm as “the main entrance to the mansion of the Psalter.”² While the majority of the psalms in the Psalter are classified as poetry, Psalm 1 is more accurately described as a wisdom psalm. This opening psalm provides a description of Scripture meditation by connecting the blessing of God with meditation on His Word, and at the same time describes the life and end of those who stray from the Scriptures. Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, Rolf Jacobson, and Beth Tanner comment, “The Hebrew Psalter opens with an instructional psalm that maps the future as a choice between one of two different paths. These two paths are not characterized by their terrain or geography but by the character of the people who tread them.”³ The path of those regarded as blessed results in prosperity and fruitfulness but begins with continual delighting and meditating on Scripture.

Psalm 1 opens with the word, אֲשֶׁר־יְיָ. Although translated in the New American Standard Bible as “blessed,” the word may more clearly be translated as “happy” or “fortunate.” Blessed also carries the idea of action. “To be ‘blessed,’ man has to do something. Usually this is something positive. A ‘blessed’ man, for example, is one who trusts in God without equivocation . . . who comes under the authority of God’s revelation: his Torah.”⁴ James Montgomery Boice notes the unforeseen nature of the words that follow. “At first glance it might seem surprising that the idea of the blessed or the happy man is immediately followed by a description of the wicked man.”⁵ While it may seem unnatural for the words following “blessed” to describe those who are wicked, this approach does make clear two important concepts. First, there are two paths, two parties, and two destinations. One group receives blessing and the other faces destruction.

² Saint Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome*, vol. 1, *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Marie Liguori Ewald (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 3.

³ Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, Rolf A Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 50.

⁴ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody 1980), 183.

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1-41* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 15.

Second, the gospel teaches that every person is naturally sinful and wicked; therefore, it is the grace of God that allows someone to experience the blessing of delighting in and dutifully following God's Word.

Psalm 1 continues to describe the happy as those who do not "walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers" (v. 1). John Goldingay points to the progression that occurs in this verse. Walking, standing, and sitting paint a picture of intensification. Where walking indicates participating in sinful acts, standing illustrates the idea of standing firm in those sinful acts to the degree that they become a habit. Sitting moves beyond participating in sin to actively planning its performance.⁶ In a similar way, twelfth century Jewish commentator Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra identifies the intensification of the company that is to be avoided: "Chata'im (sinners) are worse than resha'im (wicked). It is because of this that Scripture speaks of the way of sinners. It does so because sinners are in the habit of walking in an evil way."⁷ Similarly, mockers are not only wicked, but also take pride in their wickedness. A third and final form of intensification is found in the words "counsel, path and seat." Goldingay declares, "The final parallel sequence (plans, path, home) again turns the screw tighter and tighter. Listening to people formulating plans is one thing. Acting on them is another. Spending one's life in the company of such schemers is to walk into a marsh from which one is unlikely to emerge."⁸

A final note worth mentioning concerning the company identified in verse 1 involves the number of persons present. Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner add that the distinction between the wicked and the blessed is not simply in action but in number. The

⁶ John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 82.

⁷ Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra and H. Norman Strickman, *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the First Book of Psalms: Chapter 1-41*, The Reference Library of Jewish Intellectual History (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies, 2009), 19.

⁸ Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 83.

“blessed” is described as a man, a single individual, while the wicked are described as a group. “The contrast evokes the idea that the way of the righteous is the road less traveled; it is not an easy or popular choice to make. One who walks in the way of the righteous must struggle against the traffic. . . . Yet in spite of this, it is still the way of happiness.”⁹

Verse 1 roots happiness for the believer in the avoidance of evildoers and evil actions. David Thompson agrees, writing, “Who has profound joy, according to this song? Persons known by their significant separation from the ungodly in Israel and also by their consuming appreciation for and continuing reflection on knowing and doing the will of God.”¹⁰ While avoidance of evil is certainly a component of experiencing God’s blessing, Peter Craigie offers an explanation of the manner in which the blessing is experienced: “The state of blessedness or happiness is not a reward; rather, it is the result of a particular type of life.”¹¹ Avoiding the influence of evildoers naturally produces blessing in the life of a believer. However, experiencing the blessing of God involves more than the simple avoidance of evil—there is also an active, positive pursuit. This positive aspect is addressed in verse 2.

After describing the wicked in terms of their associations, it is expected that the psalmist will continue in the same pattern by describing the company of the godly.¹² Instead, the psalmist describes the “blessed” as those who “delight in the law of the Lord.” *יִצְחָק* carries the idea of taking pleasure in a person or thing. Where the sinful take pleasure in the words and ways of the wicked, the blessed find their pleasure and delight in God’s

⁹ Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 51.

¹⁰ David L. Thompson, *Psalms 1-72: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene, 2015), 69.

¹¹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 61.

¹² Boice, *Psalms 1-41*, 16.

Words and his ways. J. H. Eaton vividly portrays this delight: “This way of torah-study and devotion is prized as a way of meeting and knowing the Lord, a way of living from the breath of his lips, in the light of his face. The longing, the fainting for God’s ordinances.”¹³ Delighting in God’s Word moves beyond obligated obedience, for it promises a relational connection where love itself is the motivation and is multiplied in the process. Blessing is experienced by believers when they choose the company of Christ and his Words over the carnal conversation of those heading for condemnation.

While Eaton affirms delighting in the Torah, it is not necessary to restrict the subject of meditation to first five books of the Old Testament. Goldingay confirms, “This Torah importantly embraces the story of Yhwh’s dealings with Israel as well as the collected instructions of Yhwh. The story shapes people into a community that walks in Yhwh’s way as decisively as do the commands.”¹⁴ While Genesis through Deuteronomy should certainly be subject to Scripture meditation, the entire biblical canon is prime fuel for the fire of meditation: law, narrative, poetry, wisdom, and prophecy. Again, Goldingay argues for the importance of delighting in Scripture even when it seems irrelevant or contrary to our own expectations: “That is the moment when studying Scripture becomes interesting, significant, and important. We then delight in it. The way that delight expresses itself is by talking about it day and night—in other words, ceaselessly.”¹⁵

As referenced by Goldingay, delighting in God’s Word specifically expresses itself through the practice of meditation. While meditation is often viewed as a strictly mental exercise, the Hebrew understanding involved vocalization. Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner submit, “It properly denotes a verbalized rumination, because the ancients did not read silently but out loud. The verb is used to describe the cooing of the pigeon (Isa.

¹³ J. H. Eaton, *Psalms*, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM, 1968), 38.

¹⁴ Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 81.

¹⁵ Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 84.

38:14), the growling of the lion (Isa. 31:4), and the voice of the human (Ps. 35:28).”¹⁶ Other biblical examples include “the moaning over the judgment upon Moab (Isa 16:7: Jer 48:31) or the whispering of the enemy after the collapse of Jerusalem (Lam 3:62).”¹⁷ Meditation is not simply a mental exercise but one that can involve the mouth as well and is intended to be practiced ceaselessly.

In verse 3, the psalmist turns attention from the practice of meditation to the fruit it produces in the life of a believer using the simile of a fruitful tree. The first description of the tree is that it is firmly planted. Villanueva describes the connection between a firmly planted tree and a firmly planted believer: “The righteous man stands still—indeed, his righteousness may depend on his ability to stand still and reflect upon true things. . . . We realize, as we look back through our lives, how God had been there long before we entered the scene. It is he who ‘planted’ us.”¹⁸ While the wicked are characterized by movement—walking, standing, sitting—the righteous are those who plant their thoughts and actions firmly in the ground of God’s Word. However, the significance of the tree is not simply in its firm foundation but also in its location.

The tree described in Psalm 1 is planted firmly by streams of water. Thompson points out that a tree having continual access to water would have been a strange occurrence in the Middle East, and yet that is the situation encountered in this scenario.¹⁹ Boice offers a helpful explanation on the interpretation of this simile: “It describes the man who delights in the law of God and draws his spiritual nourishment from it as a tree that draws its nourishment from an abundantly flowing stream.”²⁰ Craigie confirms this

¹⁶ Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 51.

¹⁷ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 467.

¹⁸ Villanueva, *Psalms 1-72*, Psalm 1, “1:2-3 What the Happy Person Does: The Importance of Meditation on God’s Word,” para. 1.

¹⁹ Thompson, *Psalms 1-72*, 70.

²⁰ Boice, *Psalms 1-41*, 17.

interpretation: “Just as a tree with a constant water supply naturally flourishes, so too the person who avoids evil and delights in Torah naturally prospers, for such a person is living within the guidelines set down by the Creator.”²¹ Using the imagery of a tree with a fertile foundation, the psalmist explains how a believer finds his own nourishment for growth and fruitfulness from the rich soil of Scripture.

The result of the tree’s firm and fertile foundation is fruitfulness and protection from withering. In the same way, the person who delights in God’s Word will find prosperity as well. Sixteenth century theologian Martin Luther portrays the process as such: “The saints increase and grow continually by the Spirit and word; so are they rendered more and more firm and constant, and invincible against every evil; so do they daily become more fortified against all the calamities of life.”²² Derek Kidner also offers a vivid description of this process: “The phrase *its fruit in its season* emphasizes both the distinctiveness and the quiet growth of the product; for the tree is no mere channel, piping the water unchanged from one place to another, but a living organism which absorbs it, to produce in due course something new and delightful, proper to its kind and to its time”²³

Overall, Psalm 1 demonstrates both the responsibility to and the results of Scripture meditation. Delighting in and meditating on God’s Word and walking in His ways, as opposed to the norms of culture, leads to a firm faith that produces the fruit of godliness and stands strong against the storms of life. Fourth century theologian Augustine adds that while this description of a blessed man can certainly describe those who seek to faithfully follow the Lord, ultimately it can be applied to Christ: “He was born as sinners are; but He did not stand still, for He was never captivated by the world’s allurements. . . .

²¹ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 61.

²² Martin Luther, *A Manual of the Book of Psalms, Or, The Subject-Contents of All the Psalm* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1837), 18.

²³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2014), 65.

He spurned the earthly throne and the pride of it.”²⁴ Scripture meditation offers rich rewards of connection to Christ and conformation to His image, but it also must be practiced with consistency. Villanueva beautifully illustrates, “But how do we develop depth? The image of the tree ‘planted by streams of water’ reminds us it takes time to develop depth. And that is why the psalmist says he spends ‘day and night’ meditating on ‘his law.’”²⁵

A Prescription for Scripture Meditation: An Exposition of Joshua 1:6-8

Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. (Josh 1:6-8)

Psalm 1 offers a general call to Scripture meditation. In the book of Joshua, the command becomes more precise as God directs Joshua to practice Scripture meditation and promises blessing in the process. The book of Joshua and the historical events it describes introduce a new season in the story of God’s people. Joshua serves as the leader of the nation of Israel as they leave their wilderness wanderings to claim the land promised to Abraham and his descendants generations ago. However, Joshua is not only following in the footsteps of the patriarch, Abraham, he is also the immediate successor to the nation’s most important leader, Moses. Joshua is charged by Moses and God with leading His people from the wilderness to conquer and claim the promised land. Surprisingly, the initial instructions to Joshua revolve not around politics or military prowess but around the written Word of God.

²⁴ St. Augustine, *Psalms 1-29*, ed. and trans. Felicitas Corrigan (London: Newman, 1960), 21.

²⁵ Villanueva, *Psalms 1-72*, Psalm 1, “1:2-3 What the Happy Person Does,” para. 8.

While the text of Joshua 1:6-9 is the focus of study, it is necessary to note several important insights in the preceding verses. While verse 1 serves to name Joshua as the successor to Moses, it also references the communication that existed between God and Joshua. Marten Woudstra contends that, like His communication with Moses, there was a direct connection between Joshua and the Lord.²⁶ Joshua took his orders from God himself. Although the exact manner of this communication has not been defined, it is clear that God communicated directly with Joshua.

Similarly, verse 5 makes a statement further connecting Joshua with his successor Moses in that God promises to be present with Joshua just as he was with Moses. Thomas Dozeman suggests that these opening lines contain two separate commissions for Joshua. In verse 3-6, God commissions Joshua to lead His people to the promised land and provides His presence as the seal of that promise.²⁷ Second, God commissions Joshua to study the Torah. Whereas the first commission and promise is unconditional, the second is conditional based on Joshua's obedience in regard to God's Law. It is this second commission that will be the focus of the remaining material.

Verse 7 opens with two words that occur repeatedly in this chapter: "strong" and "courageous." While "strong" is a common word in the Old Testament, occurring nearly 300 times, the word for "courageous" is used much more sparingly.²⁸ צָרָף, translated as "courageous" in the NASB carries the idea of strength but also involves alertness and persistence.²⁹ David Howard submits that "strength" may be bear a strong connection in verses 6 and 9, which focus on situations of conflict, and the second

²⁶ Marten Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 48.

²⁷ Thomas B. Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol 6b (London: Yale University Press, 2015), 187.

²⁸ James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 1995), s.v. "צָרָף."

²⁹ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 636.

descriptor, “persistence” or “resoluteness,” may bear a stronger connection with Joshua’s focus on meditating and obeying the Law.³⁰ If this interpretation is correct, then Joshua was not only to be strong in war but persistent in personal worship; namely, in his meditation on God’s Word.

After stressing the importance of strength and courage, the author immediately turns his attention to the necessity of Joshua’s obedience to the Law of Moses. Boice discusses the interaction Joshua was to have with this Law: “These verses detail the special relationship Joshua was to have to the written law of Moses. But basic to that is the fact that there was a written law of Moses and that it was this, rather than some natural intuition or esoteric experience, that was to be Joshua’s guide and source of blessing.”³¹ While the opening verses speak of God’s communication to Joshua in a direct way, by verse 7 the conversation had begun to change. While God communicated with Moses directly, and had done so with Joshua in the past, this would no longer be the norm. With Moses completing the Torah, this written Word was to be the new pattern for obtaining wisdom and guidance. Francis and Middlemann indicate the high value Joshua placed on the Law that had been passed down from Moses:

Joshua knew Moses, the writer of the Pentateuch, personally. Joshua knew his strengths and weaknesses as a man; he knew that Moses was a sinner, that Moses made mistakes, that Moses was just a man. Nonetheless, immediately after Moses’s death Joshua accepted the Pentateuch as more than the writing of Moses. He accepted it as the writing of God. Two or three hundred years were not required for the book to become sacred. As far as Joshua was concerned the Pentateuch was the canon, and the canon was the Word of God.³²

During Joshua’s initiation as the new leader of Israel, God’s Word and obedience to it was the issue of greatest importance. Arthur Pink further emphasizes this point: “He was

³⁰ David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, The New American Commentary, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 32.

³¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Joshua: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 14.

³² Francis A. Schaeffer and Udo W. Middlemann, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), chap. 2, “The Growth and Acceptance of the Canon,” para. 1, Kindle.

not to be regulated by his own inclinations nor lean unto his own understanding, he was not to be governed by the principle of expediency nor be seeking to please those under him; instead, he must be actuated in all things by a ‘thus saith the Lord.’”³³

In the following phrase, the writer defines obedience by “not turn(ing) from it to the right or to the left.” N. Scott Amos expounds upon this phrase, noting that turning to the right could indicate adding to the Word of God while turning to the left would mean leaving out words from the Law.³⁴ This interpretation certainly finds similarities in other passages, such as John’s warning at the end of Revelation: “If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (22:18-19). While this interpretation is helpful and certainly correct, it is not necessary to limit turning to the left or right to proper transmission of the text, as it most certainly speaks to obedience as well, bearing a strong connection to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5: “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (v. 19).

Verse 7 closes by describing the promised result to Joshua if he persists in obedience to the Law: “That you may have success wherever you go.” Howard explains, “The keys to Joshua’s success were the same as those for a king: being rooted in God’s word rather than depending on military might.”³⁵ Success is found in Joshua not simply through the presence of God but also in persistence in obeying His commands. While it is

³³ Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua* (Chicago: Moody, 1964), 36.

³⁴ N. Scott Amos, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 14.

³⁵ Howard, *Joshua*, 84.

important to gain a proper understanding of success, it is a theme that will recur within the passage and will be addressed at a later point.

After stressing obedience to the Law in verse 7, the author provides a description of this process with the words, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth” (Josh 1:8). Sixteenth century theologian Jean Calvin admits the surprising commandment of demanding the Word of God not departing from your mouth as opposed to not departing from one’s eyes.³⁶ Since the Word would have been written, a focus on the eyes would be the expected focus. There are, however, several explanations offered for the use of this phrase, focusing on the mouth. John Hamlin extends an internal explanation: “The mouth is for eating. God’s teaching is to be ‘chewed,’ ‘swallowed,’ and ‘digested’ so that it becomes part of the person’s very self in thought and action.”³⁷

In addition to the personal focus of using the mouth to meditate on God’s Word, Boice defends an additional external explanation: “Clearly, Joshua was to be conversing about the Bible in his normal day-by-day contacts with family, soldiers, friends, and others who were part of the nation.”³⁸ This explanation bears a striking similarity to words found in Deuteronomy 6:7: “You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.” Finally, Hamlin adds that those who have received instruction from the Law have the responsibility to share and teach it to others.³⁹ Therefore, Joshua not allowing the Word of God to depart from his mouth would have

³⁶ Jean Calvin, *Joshua*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1854), 33.

³⁷ John E. Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land: A Commentary on the Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 6.

³⁸ Boice, *Joshua*, 16.

³⁹ Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land*, 6.

implications for his personal devotions and his relational conversations, as well as his role in national education.

From this phrase, the writer immediately turns attention to meditation. Howard is quick to distinguish the meditation described here from a form of meditation that has become popular in modern-day culture: “The idea of meditating here is not the one commonly familiar in the late twentieth century, namely, of emptying the mind and concentrating on nothing or on self or on visualizations of various types; much of this type of meditation is indebted to Eastern mystic religions.”⁴⁰ Instead of emptying one’s mind, Boice identifies meditation as “reasoning about the Word and deducing things from it. Meditation has application as its goal.”⁴¹ This explanation of meditation certainly fits the text at hand as the focus has clearly centered on both God’s Word as well as obedience. Calvin relays a vivid description of how humans are prone to fall from obedience when they fail to practice meditation: “Assiduous meditation on the Law is also commanded; because, whenever it is intermitted, even for a short time, many errors readily creep in, and the memory becomes rusted, so that many, after ceasing from the continuous study of it, engage in practical business, as if they were mere ignorant tyros.”⁴²

Meditation is the vehicle that moves the reader from a cursory understanding of the text to a lifestyle of obedience leading to blessing. Paul offers a New Testament statement of the importance of obedience in Romans 2:13, writing, “For it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.” Joshua was instructed not only to meditate but to do so frequently. Pink affirms: “Meditation was not to be an occasional luxury, but the regular discharge of a constant

⁴⁰ Howard, *Joshua*, 84.

⁴¹ Boice, *Joshua*, 17.

⁴² Calvin, *Joshua*, 32.

duty—day and night, and this in order to a prompter, fuller and more acceptable obedience.”⁴³

Pink also defends the unique role that Scripture played in Joshua’s life: “Joshua was to be guided and governed wholly by the written Word, which was something unprecedented, unique, no man before Joshua had received orders from God to regulate his conduct by the words of a Book.”⁴⁴ While Joshua may have been the first to be guided and governed by the written Word of God, this would indeed become the standard for all who would come after him. And, as verse 8 comes to a close, it returns once again to the success that accompanies obedience: “For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”

While this passage mentions prosperity on several occasions, it is necessary to define the term. Many movements place “prosperity” above all of God’s blessings and view obedience and faith as a direct connection to health and wealth. However, this is not the promise made to Joshua. Howard contends, “The two words we find here in our passage speaking of prosperity and success are almost never used in the Old Testament to speak of financial success. Rather, they speak of succeeding in life’s proper endeavors . . . the focus of people’s endeavors is not to be prosperity and success but rather holiness and obedience.”⁴⁵

Verse 9 closes with a repetition of several key previously mentioned themes: the importance of being “strong and courageous” as well as the promised presence of the Lord. Richard Hess offers a helpful commentary explaining how the presence of God connects with Joshua’s obedience to his Word:

the text affirms that Joshua will not be alone in striving for obedience to the law. Rather, the obedience and the success will be enjoyed in the presence of the LORD

⁴³ Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua*, 41.

⁴⁴ Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua*, 38.

⁴⁵ Howard, *Joshua*, 86.

God who gave both the law and the promises. Joshua will not succeed because he obeys God's instruction; he will succeed because God is with him to enable him to obey his instruction.⁴⁶

Just as God promises to be present in Israel's conquering of the land, He also promises to be present with Joshua as he meditates, converses, teaches, and ultimately obeys the Word of God.

While Joshua 1 is distinctly different from Psalm 1 in terms of its genre, dating, authorship, and focus, it is still important to note the striking similarities in terms of viewing God's Word. Both passages speak of the essential practice of meditation, each focusing on its continual nature "both day and night." Both passages connect meditation with obedience and obedience with success. And, both passages recognize the Law as coming from God. Wouldstra argues, "By not departing from the law *to the right or to the left* Joshua will be the prototype of the happy man described in Ps. 1."⁴⁷ In the historical context of Joshua, Scripture is immediately accepted as God's Word, seen as the subject of meditation, calls for obedience, and promises blessings and prosperity. In this text, Joshua is prescribed the same practice that is illustrated in Psalm 1, and because Joshua is a historical work, it is possible to see the blessing and prosperity that followed his obedience.

A New Testament Prescription for Scripture Meditation: An Exposition of Philippians 4:8-9

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:8-9)

Philippians 4 provides the New Testament counterpart to the command to Joshua in which God once again commands his people to direct their thoughts to His words

⁴⁶ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 80.

⁴⁷ Wouldstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 50.

with the promise of blessing to follow. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, the theme of Christian thinking is repeatedly addressed. Beginning in chapter 1, Paul writes, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment" (v. 9). As the letter progresses, Paul calls for unity of mindset in 1:27, 2:2, and 3:15. In Philippians 2:5, Paul instructs the believers to have the attitude of Christ Jesus. Finally, in Philippians 4:8-9, Paul once again calls attention to Christian thought. Grant Osborne summarizes Paul's approach in this way, "The point is that right thinking (4:8) will lead to right doing (v. 9)."⁴⁸ In a similar process to the previous passages, believers are instructed to focus the direction of their thoughts because those thoughts will affect actions and ultimately contribute to blessing and success.

Paul opens verse 8 with six adjectives and two nouns. Scholars are divided concerning the original source of what has been described as a virtue list. Francis Beare accepts this verse as an example of pagan morality, going so far as to state, "It is almost as if he had taken a current list from a textbook of ethical instruction, and made it his own."⁴⁹ Gordon Fee affirms that the terms used in this text are common in the Greco-Roman world but also adds that they are common in Jewish wisdom literature.⁵⁰ Ralph Martin further contends that every term in this list, with the exception of the word translated as "admirable," also occurs in the Septuagint (LXX).⁵¹ Peter O'Brien proposes, "On balance, then it is best to conclude that the apostle has taken over terms that were current coin in popular moral philosophy, especially in Stoicism. He wants his Philippian

⁴⁸ Grant R. Osborne, *Philippians Verse by Verse, Osborne New Testament Commentaries* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 61.

⁴⁹ Francis Wright Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (New York: Harper, 1959), 148.

⁵⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 415.

⁵¹ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 174.

friends to develop those qualities which are good in themselves and beneficial to others.”⁵² While these words may find their roots in the world of the Stoics, they are certainly themes that are well represented in the Jewish Scriptures, as well as the New Testament as a whole, and Paul will clarify his meaning and provide a unique Christian perspective in the following verse.

After providing the subject of meditation, Paul offers the command to “think about such things.” λογίζομαι carries more meaning than the English translation, “think.” It involves “keep(ing) a mental record of events for the sake of some future action.”⁵³ In commenting on the specific use of λογίζομαι in Philippians 4:8, Louw and Nida reports, “It is not the custom of Paul to summon his congregations to reflection, at least at the end of his epistles. The community is to consider how it is to do good.”⁵⁴ Richard Melick provides a similar interpretation of this verse: “The word means far more than simple thought. The church was to count on these things and to chart its course according to them.”⁵⁵ For Paul, thinking or meditating on “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable” was not a purely mental exercise but one that must move the believer to action, as he will clearly state in verse 9.

While the text of verse 8 could have originated in a Stoic philosophical writing, Walter Hansen indicates that Paul, through verse 9, redefines “these virtues in terms of

⁵² Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Authentic Media, 1991), 502.

⁵³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), s.v. “λογίζομαι.”

⁵⁴ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, “λογίζομαι.”

⁵⁵ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 150.

his teaching and example.”⁵⁶ As Roji George points out, rather than embracing cultural moralism, this passage “limits all praiseworthy and excellent things to those virtues exemplified in Paul’s teachings and personal living.”⁵⁷ While it is clear that Paul’s culture, as well as current culture, would have a definition of what was true and honorable and right, that definition would not suffice for the believer. A culture’s understanding of truth and goodness changes from generation to generation, while the truth and goodness of God’s Word and the gospel remain firm and foundational forever. Certainly, admirable and excellent things exist in culture, and the believer must recognize and celebrate those things. However, what has been learned and received from the text of Scripture is what defines the goodness seen in culture.

Andreas J. Köstenberger, Robert W. Yarbrough, and Joseph H. Hellerman add, “Paul inherit[s] the idea of transmitting and safeguarding a tradition from rabbinic Judaism . . . portray[ing] himself as ‘a link in the chain of tradition’ and implicitly charges the Philippians with the task of guarding and carefully passing on the tradition to others.”⁵⁸ When seen in this light, Philippians 4:8 takes on a specific understanding. Rather than an all-expansive, general meditation on goodness, Paul instructs believers to dwell on those things exemplified in his life and teaching. Paul’s life and teaching are preserved in what is called the Bible, which becomes the modern-day believer’s source for understanding all that is true, honorable, right, and pure.

As mentioned previously in this section and in each preceding section, meditation must mature into motivated action. Paul offers a three-word command in this section: “Practice these things.” As Meleck declares, “For him, knowledge always led to

⁵⁶ Walter G. Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 297.

⁵⁷ Roji Thomas George, *Philippians: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary*, Asia Bible Commentary (Carlisle, UK: Langham Creative Projects, 2019), 151.

⁵⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger, Robert W. Yarbrough, and Joseph H. Hellerman, *Philippians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 250.

responsible Christian living.”⁵⁹ After dwelling on those things that are excellent and worthy of praise, and considering how those things have been played out through the life and teaching of Paul, he simply instructs believers to take action. In many ways, this section mirrors Paul’s description of Christ in chapter 2—it was Christ’s mindset that motivated Him to action. After accepting the mindset of a servant, Christ acted by suffering and dying at the hands of sinners. In a similar way, believers who have the correct mindset by meditating on Scripture will practice these things by sacrificing and serving others. Meditation moves the believer to obedience.

Paul concludes this section with the following words: “And the God of peace will be with you.” Meditation moves to obedience, but obedience results in blessing, specifically the presence of God. Just as God promised to be present with Joshua and the psalmist speaks of the righteous participating in the assembly of the righteous, so too Paul recognizes that obedience resulting from meditation will have a tangible result. An experience with God and the peace He alone provides is the expectation of those who think and act on the things of God.

Scripture Meditation Practiced: An Exposition of Selected Verses from Psalm 119

While the previous passages served to provide both a description of and a prescription for Scripture meditation, Psalm 119 is unique in that it captures the psalmist’s active practice of meditation, specifically his meditation on the Word of God and describes its benefits and blessings more specifically. Kidner vividly describes this text: “This giant among the Psalms shows the full flowering delight . . . in the law of the Lord.”⁶⁰ In a like manner, Leslie Allen identifies Psalm 119 as an “elaborate acrostic (that) is a literary

⁵⁹ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 150.

⁶⁰ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 416.

monument raised in honor of Yahweh's revelation of himself to Israel."⁶¹ Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem with eight lines being devoted to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. With the exception of four lines, all 176 lines include a reference to God's Law or Scripture.⁶² Kidner confirms, "Like a ring of eight bells, eight synonyms for Scripture dominate the psalm."⁶³

Although neglected by many scholars because of its repetitious nature, Luther defends its importance: "It is however given forth with a deep and blessed intent: namely, that by this repetition and fulness, it may invite and exult us to hear and diligently to treasure up the word of God."⁶⁴ The psalmist's meditations are almost entirely directed toward God Himself and take the form of both praise and prayer.⁶⁵ While the structure of this psalm centers upon its acrostic pattern as opposed to a logical argument, certain themes are found to be repeated. Attention will be given to the theme of meditation in particular.

An Exposition of Psalm 119:15

"I will meditate on Your precepts And regard Your ways" (Ps 119:15).

Meditation is initially introduced in Psalm 119:15, although it comes as a response to a question issued in verse 9. "How can a man keep his way pure?" The psalmist's answer is simple: "By keeping it according to your Word." In verse 15, the psalmist offers meditation as a key element of keeping God's Word. Allen Ross describes meditation as "a thoughtful concentration on God's word," which could also include "musing, talking,

⁶¹ Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21, rev ed. (Nashville: Zondervan, 2018), 141.

⁶² John Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 377.

⁶³ Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 417.

⁶⁴ Luther, *A Manual of the Book of Psalms*, 325.

⁶⁵ Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 142.

or even singing to oneself.”⁶⁶ In his commentary of this verse, Luther argues, “We are aware that the majority of mankind are so much involved in the cares of the world, as to leave no time or leisure for meditating upon the doctrine of God. To meet this callous indifference, he very seasonably commends diligence and attention.”⁶⁷ Although not emphasized in this epithet as clearly as verses 1-8, obedience to God’s Word is clearly assumed. Seventeenth century Puritan Thomas Manton adds, “We do not meditate that we may rest in contemplation, but in order to obedience.”⁶⁸ For the psalmist, meditation on God’s Word is the key method of ensuring that they will live in obedience to that Word.

An Exposition of Psalm 119:23

“Even though princes sit and talk against me, Your servant meditates on Your statutes” (Ps 119:23). While Psalm 119:15 approaches meditation as an avenue for obedience to the Law, Psalm 119:23 looks toward meditation as an aid in the midst of adversity. Even though the psalmist has adversaries who speak against Him, he chooses to focus his attention on the Word of God. Daniel Akin affirms, “Powerful people of authority and influence were plotting against the Lord’s servant. They were in their seats of power plotting against God’s man. Echoes of our Lord’s betrayal reverberate in the distance.”⁶⁹ Indeed, Jesus himself seems to take the same stature as He is suffering on the cross. As He is enduring both shame and suffering on the cross, Jesus quotes from Psalm 22 instead of responding to the calls of the mockers. Psalm 119:23 demonstrates that Scripture meditation is not simply valuable in one’s devotional quiet time but is a weapon to wield amid murderous threats and onslaughts.

⁶⁶ Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: 90-150* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 479.

⁶⁷ Luther, *A Manual of the Book of Psalms*, 411.

⁶⁸ Thomas Manton, *An Exposition of Psalm 119* (Auckland, New Zealand: Titus, 2013), 222.

⁶⁹ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalm 119*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 2021), 33.

An Exposition of Psalm 119:48

“And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes” (Ps 119:48). Although the previous psalms focused on meditation in terms of the mind, both in seeking purity and fighting persecution, Psalm 119:48 demonstrates how meditation affects the heart and hands as well as the head. Similar to previous verses, the psalmist speaks of meditating on God’s Law, but in this verse he adds the extra element of “lifting up my hands to your commandment which I love.” Akin explains the two-fold expression of meditation in this passage:

He also loves the Word—something he declares twice. As tangible evidence of this, he will do two things, one outward and one inward. First, he will lift his hands toward the commands he loves. He will visibly testify for all to see his love for God and his Word. Second, he will meditate on God’s Word, here referred to as God’s “statutes.” Whatever goes deepest into the heart goes out widest to the world. Boldness in witnessing flows from a deeply ingrained (i.e., through meditation) love and delight in God and his Word. Truth moves from the head to the heart; then it moves out to the mouth and even to the hands.⁷⁰

Meditation in this case involves both the internal act and the outward expression. Goldingay adds another element to the outstretched hands by seeing in this expression a request of God.⁷¹ Likewise, Luther makes the following contribution: “It is a sure sign we eagerly desire a thing when we stretch out our hands to grasp and enjoy it.”⁷² As seen from this verse, meditation is not simply a means to an end. While meditation is beneficial for pursuing holiness and dealing with persecution, meditation is also an expression of worship. God’s Word is meditated upon not simply for what it provides and produces but because of the person who formed those words. As such, meditation can be seen both as a work for God but also worship of God.

⁷⁰ Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalm 119*, 51.

⁷¹ Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, 402.

⁷² Luther, *A Manual of the Book of Psalms*, 435.

An Exposition of Psalm 119:78

“May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; But I shall meditate on Your precepts” (Ps 119:78). Psalm 119:78 once again brings to mind adversaries; perhaps the same princes and rulers introduced in verse 23. The psalmist describes both the internal character of these men as well as their external actions. They are arrogant inside, which produces an outcome of lying. These men bear remarkable similarity to the wicked, the sinners, and the scoffers described in Psalm 1. While the psalmist is faced with falsities from the arrogant, he chooses to focus on the facts of Scripture. Akin submits, “He will stay true to the Lord, he says. He will not crawl into the world of spiritual sewer rats who live and swim in rumors, gossip, half-truths, and outright lies. He will meditate on the word of truth and live in that world. God’s Word will remain his guide no matter what.”⁷³ Again the psalmist reminds the reader of the value of Scripture meditation in worldly matters in addition to worship settings.

An Exposition of Psalm 119:97-99

“O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation” (Ps 119:97-99). Psalm 119:97 continues the emphasis begun by Psalm 119:48 with its focus on loving God’s Law. Meditation upon Scripture is to be seen not simply as a necessary duty but a satisfying delight. Luther declares, “If any person boasts that he loves the Divine Law, and yet neglects the study of it, and applies the mind to other things, he betrays the grossest hypocrisy; for the love of the law . . . always produces continual meditation upon it.”⁷⁴ The expression “day and night” indeed points back to the beginning of the Psalter in Psalm 1:2. The psalmist demonstrates that he delights in the Law by continually returning to it.

⁷³ Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalm 119*, 76.

⁷⁴ Luther, *A Manual of the Book of Psalms*, 474.

As the psalmist moves into verse 98, he addresses the issue of wisdom. What follows is not altogether surprising. After speaking of the arrogant and the slanderers earlier in the passage, it is fitting for the psalmist to claim he is wiser than his enemies. Akin notes the following concerning the psalmist's enemies: "And yet all their efforts have failed because God's Word enabled the psalmist to outsmart them again and again. God's Word gave him victory over his enemies."⁷⁵ Although not outright stated, Manton identifies the hints of meditation expressed in the words, "for they are ever mine," "that is, often thought of by me, for my comfort and direction."⁷⁶

While the direction of Psalm 119:98 is expected, Psalm 119:99 comes as a surprise. There is no doubt that meditation on Scripture would produce a wisdom that far exceeded the wicked, but the psalmist states in verse 99 that meditation has made him wiser than his own instructors. This is an incredible statement, for even Jesus himself said, "It is enough for the disciple that he may become like his teacher" (Matt 10:25). Goldingay explains, "Mere knowledge does not make for insight, but this commitment does. Even the enemies would know Yhwh's commands, if they were Israelites, but their actions indicate they did not obey them. They never had knowledge converted into wisdom."⁷⁷ Paul offers a similar thought in Romans 2:13: "Or it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified." In like manner, true wisdom is not displayed through mere murmuring on the law but through a meditation that reveals itself in obedience.

Concluding Thoughts on Psalm 119:

While the focus of the previous exposition centered on the issue of meditation, two other matters must be mentioned. Like the previous passages studied, Psalm 119 does

⁷⁵ Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalm 119*, 96.

⁷⁶ Manton, *An Exposition of Psalm 119*, 1549.

⁷⁷ Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, 419.

not simply promote meditation but also practical obedience. The opening lines of the Psalm point not to meditation, but action. “How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the Lord” (v. 1). Goldingay summarizes the connection between meditation and movement.

Life is a walk along a way, path, or track. What counts is not (for instance) the development of our thinking, our self-understanding, our prayer life, or our profession, but our walk. But the whole person is involved in this walk, heart or spirit and mouth or lips, as well as feet. That is so because heart, mouth, and feet are parts of the one person, and it is the whole person who is so to walk. It is not enough if the heart enthuses for Yhwh but the mouth does not laud Yhwh’s ways or the feet do not walk in them; it is not enough if the feet walk Yhwh’s way and the mouth professes allegiance to it but in secret the person worships other deities. The heart needs to treasure and delight in Yhwh’s word for that word to influence the way the feet walk and for the mouth to honor that word.⁷⁸

Finally, Psalm 119 does not simply advocate meditation and its resulting actions, but also addresses the blessing that follow. These include, but are not limited to, wisdom, comfort, peace, and stability. Overall, Psalm 119 presents a case study of the blessed man of Psalm 1 and provides a model for any seeking to follow in his footsteps.

Conclusion

Hebrews 1:1-2a says, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.” God has spoken. He spoke the world into existence. He spoke to Moses and the prophets who recorded His words. He spoke through his Son, Jesus Christ. Yet, even the Word becoming flesh did not do away with the Word of Scripture. Jesus himself stated, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-18).

God has spoken and his people must listen and obey. Meditation is a process described, prescribed, and practiced in Scripture that moves the believer from hearing to

⁷⁸ Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, 443.

obedience to blessing. Psalm 1 describes the blessed man who delights in God's Word and experiences stability and success as a result. Joshua 1:8 provides a historical account where a specific person was charged with living out the Psalm 1 principle of delighting in God's Word and determining to follow it. In a similar manner, Paul instructs the church at Philippi to fill their thoughts with what is true, honorable, and pure, and to practice obedience in the things they had been instructed in and were witnesses to. Finally, Psalm 119 demonstrates the practice of Scripture meditation along with the fruits it produces in the life of a believer. The commandment and example of the Bible requires the modern-day believer to engage in Scripture meditation for the purpose of worship and walking the narrow path to God's blessing.

CHAPTER 3
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS,
SUGGESTED PROCESSES, AND POSSIBLE
OBSTACLES TO SCRIPTURE
MEDITATION

While the Word of God provides ample support for the practice of Scripture meditation, historical and modern-day testimony from pastors and leaders also provide a witness to the worthwhile process of meditation. This testimony takes the form of recorded personal meditations as well as practical instruction intended for the believer. An examination of the subject of Scripture meditation will begin with a discussion of the benefits achieved through its practice. After unpacking the blessings of meditation, attention will be directed to the various processes that have been promoted in practicing meditation. These practices include focused meditation, occasional meditation, and group meditation. After an explanation of the various approaches and benefits, this section will conclude with a discussion of the obstacles to practicing meditation along with suggested courses of action to persist in the process.

While various forms of meditation have been popularized in modern culture, including transcendental meditation and meditation apps, Scripture meditation is a completely unique and separate discipline. Pastor and theologian Edmund Clowney, in his book on meditation, provides a threefold definition of biblical meditation that highlights several of these distinctions. The first distinguishing characteristic of biblical meditation is its reliance on revealed truth: “Because the God of the Bible is a personal God who speaks in words of revelation, all Christian meditation must respond to this

revelation of the Lord.”¹ Clowney’s description resonates with many words of Scripture, specifically those in John’s Gospel. “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13). John’s recorded words of Christ highlight the importance of truth as revealed through the Holy Spirit, a process understood to happen today through interaction with God’s Word. A second distinctive Clowney identifies is the element of love: “The personal relationship of love that marks Christian communion is heightened in Christian meditation.”² For the believer, meditation is not simply an exercise or experience, but an act of love directed toward his Creator and Savior. Although closely connected, this element of love leads directly to the final distinguishing mark of Christian meditation, the act of praise: “Its supreme glory is not in being lifted up ecstatically, but in lifting up the name of God in the adoration of spiritual worship.”³ Overall, Clowney highlights the importance of biblical truth in the process of meditation as well as the relational component that should lead to an expression of praise. Pastor and author John Piper further clarifies, “It is not an attempt to empty the mind of thought with a view to divine filling. Rather it is an intentional directing of the mind to think God’s thoughts after him, with earnest prayer that he would grant all the spiritual effects that such a sacred communion can offer.”⁴

While the concept of meditation has an endless stream of interpretations, from Eastern transcendental forms to mystic and experiential types, the focus of this chapter will remain on meditation centered on the Word of God. David Saxton, pastor and author

¹ Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1979), 12.

² Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 13.

³ Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 13.

⁴ John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 129.

of *God's Battle Plan for the Mind*, offers a helpful definition worth examining: "What does it mean to meditate? It means to think personally, practically, seriously, and earnestly on how the truth of God's Word should look in life."⁵ Meditation focuses on the Word of God and must lead toward an active obedience. Scripture meditation is not simply an experience but an exercise of the mind that moves the heart to stimulate the will to active obedience. Meditation begins with God's Word and culminates in a life of worship and obedience.

Practical Benefits to Scripture Meditation

The act of Scripture meditation provides a plethora of benefits to those who practice it. It is, however, the relational aspect of meditation that serves as the primary and most significant benefit. Since the Christian life is a relationship instead of a duty-bound responsibility, it is important to recognize the relational element of meditation. Meditation is not only an act of obedience, but an occasion for savoring the presence of God Himself. John Davis, professor of Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, writes, "We graze and ruminate on the text in a very leisurely and contemplative manner, having no real agenda other than to be in Christ's presence and to enjoy being in Christ's presence."⁶ As "Jesus would often slip away to the wilderness and pray" (Luke 5:16), meditation, along with prayer, serves to promote a believer's relationship with his heavenly Father. In many ways, this relational connection stimulates the other practical benefits that follow.

On multiple occasions in the book of Deuteronomy, God warns his people not to forget. Deuteronomy 8:11 says, "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am

⁵ David W. Saxton, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015), 2.

⁶ John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 127.

commanding you today.” As can be seen throughout the history of Israel, God’s people are prone to forget His words and His works. Scripture meditation is a significant solution to the dilemma of forgetfulness. The psalmist writes, “I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word” (119:16). Davis offers a similar view as he writes,

Since we live today in a media-saturated, overstimulated and information-overloaded environment, it is a good spiritual and cognitive practice to take such a simple step of remembrance and recollection. This simple step can help our brains to transfer the meditative insight from our short-term to our long-term memories, and so make it part of our deeper personal identity.⁷

While the casual reading of a text might enlighten the mind for a moment, meditation produces a more lasting effect as the truth of Scripture is able to marinate in the mind. Even when not combined with specific memorization practices, meditation is likely to stimulate the memory and create a longer lasting impression more than mere reading alone.

While meditation will certainly aid the memory, its usefulness does not end with an increased ability to recall information. The goal of Scripture meditation is not only to transmit information but to produce transformation. Because God’s Word is living and active, it not only enters the mind but transforms it. As Romans 12:2 states, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Puritan preacher Thomas Watson offers a helpful illustration to demonstrate this process: “A Christian enters into meditation as a man enters into the hospital, that he may be healed. Meditation heals the soul of its deadness and earthliness.”⁸ He goes on to

⁷ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 128.

⁸ Thomas Watson, *The Christian on the Mount: A Treatise on Meditation*, ed. Don Kistler (1657; repr., Orlando: Northampton Press, 2009), 26-27.

add a similar sentiment on the power of meditation: “Meditation has a transforming power in it. The hearing of the Word may affect us, but the meditating upon it transforms us.”⁹

While meditation has a relational and transformative component, its power continues forward from the mind to the emotions and will. It is evident from Scripture that God desires heartfelt obedience as opposed to legalistic law-keeping, as the Shema perfectly illustrates: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:5). Meditation serves as the bridge that carries the truth of the Scripture beyond the brain to the heart of a believer. J. Stephen Yuille, associate professor of biblical spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, presents a helpful illustration to demonstrate this effect through the eyes of George Swinnock, a seventeenth century English writer: “Water is naturally cold, but fire makes it hot, causing it to boil. Likewise, our hearts are naturally cold, but meditation makes them hot, causing them to ‘boil with love’ for God and his Word. For Swinnock, therefore, Scripture meditation is the means by which what is known in the head seeps down into the heart.”¹⁰ God desires for worshipers to love Him with their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Meditation is the vehicle that moves material from the mind makes into the heart. Watson writes, “As a hammer drives a nail to the head, so meditation drives a truth to the heart.”¹¹

While a change of mind along with a change of heart are impressive benefits to meditation, the goal of Scripture meditation is not only an inward shift in affection but an outward adjustment in direction. As Thomas Manton writes, “The fruit of study is to hoard

⁹ Thomas Watson, *The Christian Soldier: Or, Heaven Taken by Storm, Shewing the Holy Violence a Christian is to Put Forth in the Pursuit After Glory. To which is Added: The Happiness of Drawing Near to God, and The Saint’s Desire to be with Christ* (New York: R. Moore, 1816), 53.

¹⁰ J. Stephen Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word: Scripture Meditation in the Piety of George Swinnock,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 37.

¹¹ Thomas Watson, *The Saint’s Spiritual Delight, and a Christian on the Mount. With an Appendix, a Christian on Earth Still in Heaven* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1830), 76.

up truth, but the fruit of meditation is to practice it.”¹² As addressed previously, the blessings experienced because of meditation do not occur as a result of the act of meditation but as a result of acting upon the meditation in accordance with God’s will. Saxton writes, “If we want our practice and behavior to change in a lasting way, then there is no better way for this to happen than to begin to meditate on God’s Truth.”¹³ In many ways, the benefits described thus far are part of the process of transformation. As one meditates on Scripture, they are more likely to remember God’s Word and have their minds changed by God’s Word, and as the mind is affected, so are the emotions and desire. Once a changed mind combines with a changed heart, a person begins to experience a change of behavior. Anglican Theologian Peter Toon offers a helpful analysis of this process: “The considerations serve to take basic Christian teaching from the head to the heart and from the heart through the will into daily life as the foundation of holy living.”¹⁴

An additional, often-repeated, benefit to meditation is its ability to aid and focus prayer. In his work *A Little Book on Prayer*, Luther offers this advice to his barber concerning the topic of prayer: “Now, when your heart has been warmed by such recitation to yourself [of the Ten Commandments, the words of Christ, etc.] and is intent upon the matter, kneel or stand with your hands folded and your eyes are directed toward heaven and speak out loud or think as briefly as you can.”¹⁵ For Luther, prayer began with and was guided by the Scripture. Meditation on Scripture primed the heart for prayer and provided the substance to his prayer.

¹² Thomas Manton, “Sermons Upon Genesis 24:53,” in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.: With a Memoir of the Author* (London: James Nisbet, 1874), 17:269.

¹³ Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 32.

¹⁴ Peter Toon, *Meditating as a Christian* (London: Collins, 1991), 115.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *The Annotated Luther Series*, vol. 4, *Pastoral Writings*, ed. Mary Jane Haemig and Eric Lund (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 258.

Author and historian Roger Steer highlights a similar process adopted by George Müller and recorded in his journal:

It often astonishes me that I did not see the importance of meditation upon Scripture earlier in my Christian life. As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time unless he eats, so it is with the inner man. What is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God -not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe. No, we must consider what we read, ponder over it, and apply it to our hearts.¹⁶

After years of struggling to meet with God first thing in the morning through prayer, Müller found freedom and joy in meditating on God's Word before turning to prayer. While meditation will certainly lead to prayer, it is not necessarily a linear process. Toon notes, "The dividing line between genuine meditation and sincere prayer is impossible to draw."¹⁷ Often meditation on a verse will lead to prayer, which will be followed by additional meditation.

While the previous examples have demonstrated the importance of meditation as a stimulant to prayer during fixed times of devotion, meditation's usefulness to prayer is not limited to morning or evening devotions. God's calling for believers is not just to approach Him at specific times for prayer but to maintain an attitude of prayer and devotion. "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess 5:16-18). If this type of prayerful attitude is to exist within the believer, then meditation upon Scripture is a necessity. Toon writes, "If it is the Lord's will that we should pray unceasingly and live in a spirit of prayer, then this must require fixed and occasional meditation."¹⁸ Scripture meditation serves to strengthen a believer's prayer life both in times of fixed devotions but also throughout the

¹⁶ Roger Steer, *Spiritual Secrets of George Müller* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1985), 61.

¹⁷ Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 18.

¹⁸ Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 75.

course of the day and night as thoughts of Scripture turn toward prayers of praise and petition.

As meditation prepares the believer to pray, it also can provide the believer with a sense and source of peace. Nineteenth century preacher Charles Spurgeon writes, “Another happy result of such meditation is the steady peace, the grateful calm it gives to the soul.”¹⁹ Paul references this same phenomenon in the book of Philippians.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (4:8-9)

In a day where anxiety appears to run rampant, meditation offers a benefit that many desperately need. Meditation on Scripture, as well as the obedience that follows, can lead to a supernatural peace that the world cannot provide. Ultimately, the profit to meditation and the summary of the previous benefits is that of blessing. Both Psalm 1 and Joshua 1:8, two key passages concerning Scripture meditation, promise blessing upon those who practice it. Meditation produces not just an inward and outward change in the individual, but also somehow a change in their situations or circumstances. Donald Whitney offers the following explanation:

True success is promised to those who meditate on God’s Word, who think deeply on Scripture, not just at one time each day, but at moments throughout the day and night. They meditate so much that Scripture saturates their conversation. The fruit of their meditation is action. They do what they find written in God’s Word, and as a result God prospers their way and grants success to them.²⁰

While this success will not necessarily be financial or health-related, God’s Word does promise that blessing will follow those who meditate on and actively obey the words of Scripture. Scripture promises a blessing to those who meditate and obey God’s Word.

¹⁹ Charles Spurgeon, *Essential Works of Charles Spurgeon*, ed. Daniel Partner (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 2009), 165.

²⁰ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016), 48.

Some of those blessings have been illuminated, including a relational connection with God, a transforming of the mind, a molding of the will, an assistance with obedience and a power to pray. All these benefits certainly overflow into a life of blessing for those who practice Scripture meditation. While the process of Scripture meditation differs depending on the theological background, there is consistency concerning the benefits and blessings of obeying God through meditation.

Suggested Processes for Scripture Meditation

Scripture meditation is clearly prescribed in the Bible. Believers are commanded to meditate on the Word of God. Scripture meditation is also described through example. However, much is left unsaid within the pages of the Bible. This has led to many different approaches to meditation, several of which will be addressed in the following section. Only those approaches that most closely resemble the meditations described in Scripture will be addressed. While there are additional forms of meditation, the scope of this project must be limited to forms which spring forth from Scripture and bear a strong connection to evangelicalism. Toon offers a helpful distinction at this point: “Meditation always has a content—it is fixing of the powers of the mind on God as he is revealed to us. Its natural consequence is therefore prayer and active obedience.”²¹ The processes to be studied are those which use Scripture as the “content” of their meditations. In examining these processes, it will be helpful to organize them into overarching categories. These include fixed meditation, occasional meditation, and group meditation.

Suggested Processes for Fixed Meditation

In addressing the process of meditation, Toon makes the following assessment: “There are no absolute rules on how to meditate. . . . But most people need to start with one method or another in order to find out what method, simple or complex, suits them

²¹ Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 62.

best.”²² It is true that Scripture provides no firm rules for meditation and that meditation practices vary from individual to individual; however, several commonalities appear in many suggested practices. These commonalities will be explored and discussed.

Fixed meditation is perhaps the most recognizable form of meditation for believers in that it often resembles what would commonly be defined as a “quiet time” or “personal devotion.” It is arguably, also, the most important. Theologians Joel Beeke and Mark Jones state, “The most important kind of meditation is daily, deliberate meditation, engaged in at set times.”²³ Fixed meditation is a time set apart for the specific purpose of meditation on Scripture. While Scripture is to be the center of meditation, many do not recommend starting with Scripture. Saxton, along with others, recommends a time of prayer before engaging in meditation: “One thing is certain—to properly prepare the heart, the believer must humbly seek the Lord’s assistance through prayer.”²⁴ Since meditation is not only a human endeavor but also requires divine assistance, it is recommended to seek the help of the Almighty early in the act of meditation.

After an initial prayer, it is suggested to begin meditation by reading a larger section of Scripture. Toon explains,

Formal, sustained daily meditation best followed the careful and thoughtful reading of a passage of Scripture and was in turn best followed by fervent and sustained prayer. To read the Bible and not to meditate was seen as an unfruitful exercise: better to read one chapter and meditate afterward than to read several chapters and not to meditate.²⁵

While it is common practice to participate in a daily Bible reading plan, meditation is often the missing step following Bible reading, which limits the reading’s effectiveness. After reading a larger section of Scripture, it is then recommended to select

²² Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 43.

²³ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 1135, Kindle.

²⁴ Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 61.

²⁵ Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 93.

a single verse, word, or theme from the reading as the focus for meditation. As

writes, “Read big, meditate small.”²⁶ Lutheran pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes a similar suggestion; however, he suggests remaining in a text for a week at a time: “It has proven helpful to meditate on a text of approximately ten to fifteen verses for a period of a week. It is not good to meditate on a different text each day, since we are not always equally receptive, and the texts for the most part are much too long for that.”²⁷ In either case, meditation is often birthed out of a daily or weekly practice of systematic Bible reading. It is the daily devotion that provides the primary fuel for fixed meditation.

While the preceding steps of prayer and Bible reading, which can be viewed as steps of preparation, are common, the actual act of meditation has various approaches. The first approach to be examined will demonstrate meditation in its most general form, as described by Beeke and Jones in their compilation of the Puritan practice of meditation. Following Beeke and Jones’s general approach, additional, more nuanced approaches will be described from a variety of authors. As with the previous steps, Puritans advised believers to prepare with prayer and select a specific portion of Scripture to serve as the focus for meditation. After selecting a verse, the Puritans would pursue the discipline of memorization: “Now, memorize the selected verse(s), or some aspect of the subject, to stimulate meditation, to strengthen faith, and to serve as a means of divine guidance.”²⁸ After memorizing the selected verse, the Christian was then encouraged to “use your memory to focus on all that Scripture has to say about your subject. Consider past sermons and other edifying books.”²⁹

²⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 55.

²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Peter Frick, *Meditation and Prayer* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2010), 34.

²⁸ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 1140.

²⁹ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 1140.

After engaging with the text mentally, the person meditating was encouraged to connect with the Scripture emotionally: “Next, stir up affections, such as love, desire, hope, courage, gratitude, zeal, and joy, to glorify God.”³⁰ Mere understanding of the words was not the goal of meditation, but to connect with God’s Word at a heart level. After examining the Scripture, it then became necessary to examine their own souls. Having understood and connected with the Word of God, the next step was to consider how those words were apparent in the life of the believer:

Examine yourself for your own growth in grace. Reflect on the past and ask, “What have I done?” Look to the future, asking, “What am I resolved to do, by God’s grace?” Do not ask such questions legalistically but out of holy excitement and opportunity to grow in Spirit-worked grace. Remember, “Legal work is our work; meditation work is sweet work.”³¹

Once the believer has taken note of the state of their attitudes and actions considering God’s Word, the next appropriate response is to make resolutions for future obedience. What is the appropriate response to God’s Word and God’s leading? Toon emphasizes this point when he writes, “As a result of making acts of the will, experience teaches it is wise to include a practical resolution.”³² He later adds, “in fact, there is little value in making general acts of the will unless they are actually converted into specific resolutions and practical acts.”³³ While study and self-examination are essential acts of the meditation process, it would be a mistake to leave meditation without considering how to make a tangible response to the Word of God. Spurgeon makes a strong statement to this effect: “Meditation, unattended with active service in the spreading of the gospel

³⁰ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 1141.

³¹ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 1141.

³² Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 128.

³³ Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 140.

among men, well deserves the rebuke of the angel, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?”³⁴

After specific resolutions were made, the Puritans recommended ending the time of meditation just as it had begun, through prayer: “Thank the Lord for assistance in meditation, or else, Richard Greenham (c. 1542–1594) warned, we shall be buffeted in our next meditation.”³⁵ Puritan Thomas Gouge offers a helpful reminder about this point concerning slowly leaving the act of meditation: “Beware of quenching that spiritual heat, which was there kindled in you, by a sudden falling into worldly conferences, and fruitless discourses. But labour to keep alive that sacred fire which you found then kindled in your hearts, by prayer, meditation and holy conferences.”³⁶ Just as preparation went into the beginning of meditation and was entered into slowly, so should the process of moving from meditation into normal life take place at a gentle pace.

While Beeke’s process represents a general form of meditation, there are additional approaches to the act of contemplation. Many may begin with prayer and Scripture reading and end with prayer; however, the middle part of meditation may vary from believer to believer. In his work *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Whitney offers seventeen suggestions for Scripture meditation, some of which have been adapted from original sources and others which are unique to the author. Whitney’s first method involves emphasizing different words in the text of Scripture.³⁷ Instead of rushing through the reading of Scripture, each individual word becomes a point of focus and contemplation. A second method of meditation involves rewriting the text in one’s own words. This method of meditation forces the individual to process the text at a deeper level than mere

³⁴ Spurgeon, *Essential Works*, 497.

³⁵ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 1142.

³⁶ Thomas Gouge, *Christian Directions: Showing How to Walk with God All the Day Long* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1831), 161.

³⁷ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 56.

reading.³⁸ A third suggested approach is to find a connection between each chapter or paragraph read.³⁹ Depending on the specific reading plan, this approach could promote meditation on multiples genres of Scriptures, if for example the reading plan contained daily Scriptures from the Old Testament and the New Testament, as well as the Psalms.

Andrew Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church of Durham North Carolina, offers memorization as a form of meditation: “There is no more useful discipline to this careful process of verse by verse meditation than memorization.”⁴⁰ While it is possible to meditate without memorizing, the act of memorizing will promote meditation.

Memorization also offers the added benefit that once a passage has been planted in the mind it is possible to recall it at any time or place for the purpose of meditation. Davis adds, “How better can you obey Colossians 3:16 than by Scripture memorization? The ‘word of Christ’ will indeed ‘dwell in you richly’ as you memorize it, and then work it over in your mind through meditation.”⁴¹

A secondary form of fixed meditation should be mentioned at this point. While many of the previously mentioned forms of meditation begin with the examination of a particular Scripture passage, a similar but unique form of meditation chooses to focus on a specific topic. This type of meditation resembles systematic theology as opposed to the exegesis of a specific passage. These topics could include the character of God, the evil of sin, the gift of grace, or the promise of heaven. John Calvin writes, “Therefore, the goal of believers—when they assess this mortal life and realize it’s nothing in and of

³⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 57.

³⁹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 66.

⁴⁰ Andrew M. Davis, *An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2014), 9.

⁴¹ Davis, *An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture*, 10.

itself but misery—should be to direct themselves wholly, briskly, and freely toward contemplation of that future and eternal life.”⁴²

Puritan Richard Baxter takes a similar approach when he advises believers to meditate on heaven:

This meditation is upon thy everlasting rest. I would not have you cast off your other meditations; but surely, as heaven hath the preeminence in perfection, it should have it also in our meditation. That which will make us most happy when we possess it, will make us most joyful when we meditate upon it. Other meditations are as numerous as there are lines in the Scripture, or creatures in the universe, or particular providences in the government of this world. But this is a walk to Mount Sion; from the kingdoms of this world to the kingdom of saints; from earth to heaven; from time to eternity: it is walking upon the sun, moon and stars, in the garden and paradise of God.⁴³

Meditating on heaven could give a believer a greater desire for God, comfort in present suffering, a stimulus to worship, a spurring on to share the gospel, or a reminder to hold loosely to the things of this world. Seventeenth Century puritan theologian Henry Scougal states, “If our heavenly country be much in our thoughts, it will make us, as strangers and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul, and keep ourselves unspotted from this world, that we may be fit for the enjoyments and felicities of the other.”⁴⁴ Thematic meditation remains focused on the Scriptures but maintains a certain direction over the course of the meditation that may or may not be predetermined.

Seventeenth century minister John Flavel notes the importance on meditating upon the attributes of God: “There is a sweet and sensible communion betwixt God and his people, in the contemplation of the Divine attributes, and the impressions God makes by them upon our souls, whilst we meditate on them.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Beeke and Jones note

⁴² John Calvin, *A Little Book on the Christian Life*, ed. Aaron C. Denlinger and Burk Parsons (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2017), 98.

⁴³ Richard Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest* (New York: H. Dayton, 1858), 393.

⁴⁴ Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (London: Nichols and Noyes, 1868), 117.

⁴⁵ John Flavel, *The Whole Works of John Flavel: Late Minister of the Gospel at Dartmouth, Devon* (London: W. Baynes, 1820), 437.

some of the most popular themes for Puritan meditation, including the sinfulness of sin, the passion and death of Christ, and the promises of God.⁴⁶ Overall, whether by theme or by text, fixed meditation takes the words of Scripture and applies it to the mind, heart, and life of the believer.

Suggested Process for Occasional Meditation

Fixed meditation is a process recommended and rehearsed by many throughout church history. Occasional meditation, while distinct from the previous practices, also promises similar benefits. Whitney offers a helpful contrast to these twin practices: “So one form of biblical meditation starts with Scripture and then applies it to life. The other starts with life—something in your heart, family, garden, church, job, country, or world—and then takes it to the light of Scripture.”⁴⁷ Occasional meditation, therefore, starts in the life of the individual and then carries the topic or theme to the Scriptures.

Saxton describes occasional meditation in the following manner: “God’s people can practice occasional meditation at any time, in any place, or in any situation. It makes use of each daily experience by comparing or contrasting it to the greater truths of God’s Word.”⁴⁸ While fixed meditation is generally conducted in a fixed location for a focused period where the only subject of consideration is the Scriptures, occasional meditation can spring forth from any normal human activity or task whether at work, home, or driving in the car. These meditations can be spontaneous as thoughts are turned toward God, or they can be a determined focus that is carried throughout the day.

Gouge offers suggestions for occasional meditation during several periods of a believer’s day: “Let thy rising out of thy bed mind thee as of a resurrection from the death

⁴⁶ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 1143.

⁴⁷ Donald Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life: Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 2014), 143.

⁴⁸ Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 33.

of sin unto the life of grace here . . . let the light of the day mind thee of Jesus Christ, who is often in Scripture termed Light, yea, the true Light.”⁴⁹ Likewise, Gouge encourages the following meditations during mealtimes: “Oh! How sweet and good is God, who hath put such sweetness into his creatures. . . . If bread be so savoury to a hungry body, oh! How sweet is Jesus Christ, the Bread of life, to a hungry soul!”⁵⁰ For Gouge, each moment of the day provided material for occasional meditation.

While Gouge describes these forms of occasional meditation in a predetermined fashion, occasional meditation is also a process that can and should occur spontaneously. Saxton writes, “Occasional meditation is spontaneously using any occasion of life to lift one’s thoughts Godward to consider His greatness, glory and truth.”⁵¹ In a similar way, seventeenth century minister Nathaniel Ranew writes, “Occasional meditation is a holy spark that flies up out of the heavenly fire, burning suddenly in the heart.”⁵² Joseph Hall, a seventeenth century Anglican bishop, identifies light, darkness, waves, the washing of hands, and the ringing of a bell all as an invitation to enter into occasional meditation.⁵³

While the two process are distinct, there are areas of overlap. Occasional meditation may take the form of fixed mediation when designated times or occasions promote premeditated meditation. At the same time, it is likely that fixed devotions will be stimulated at some point later in the day and lead to occasional mediation. It is probable that fixed mediation will prime the heart for occasional mediation and occasional meditation will allow the heart and mind to move more quickly into seasons of fixed

⁴⁹ Gouge, *Christian Directions*, 9.

⁵⁰ Gouge, *Christian Directions*, 62.

⁵¹ Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 35.

⁵² Nathaniel Ranew, *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation; or, A Treatise Proving The Duty, And Demonstrating The . . . Requisites Of Divine Meditation* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1839), 27.

⁵³ Joseph Hall, *The Works of the Joseph Hall* (Oxford: University Press, 1863), 6:513.

meditation. In either case, Scripture is the absolute focus. Fixed meditation takes Scripture and brings it to bear on daily life. Occasional mediation begins in daily life and makes a beeline back to the Bible.

An Approach to Group Meditation

In his book *Hearing God's Words*, Peter Adam, vicar emeritus at St. Jude's Carlton, makes the following assessment: "Most of the Bible is addressed to churches . . . a 'spirituality of the Word' will primarily be a corporate or group spirituality, and the question we should ask as we hear the Bible read and preached is 'what is God saying to us?'"⁵⁴ Adam notes that Scripture, in biblical times, was primarily encountered in an auditory and communal environment. While this can be the case in modern day spirituality through the public preaching of the Word and small group studies, when it comes to a devotional approach to Scripture the primary approach seems to be an individualistic one. Group Scripture meditation does hold a place in Christian history, mainly in the monastic movement and involving repetition of Psalms. However, there is much more guided meditation material for individuals than for groups.

In an article for the Gospel Coalition, pastor Jeremy Linneman, pastor of Trinity Community Church in Columbia, Missouri, offers a practical approach to group Scripture meditation.⁵⁵ Linneman, along with others, suggests the Psalms as a starting point for Scripture meditation: "It's important to remember that the psalms were written for congregational use; they were penned to be read aloud, sung aloud, and prayed aloud with others."⁵⁶ His approach involves three separate readings and approaches to the

⁵⁴ Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 175.

⁵⁵ Jeremy Linneman, "Three Steps for Meditating on Scripture in Small Groups," The Gospel Coalition, September 28, 2015, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/3-steps-for-meditating-on-scripture-in-small-groups/>.

⁵⁶ Linneman, "Three Steps for Meditating on Scripture."

Psalms. The first reading provides the content to the meeting. The psalm is read out loud and then the group participates in discussion to understand the content of the psalm. The second reading leans into meditation as the text is read more slowly and the hearers are encouraged to absorb the psalm personally. A second phase of discussion revolves around personal application.

In the third approach to the text, the small group closes their time together in prayer, using the important phrases from the Psalms to guide the focus of their prayers. Linneman closes with these words: “In our groups, we have found new life in this historic pattern. Slow, meditative reading of Scripture, heart-level discussion and application, and deep personal prayer draws us closer to God and to one another.”⁵⁷ While this approach to meditation is similar to many individualistic patterns, it does offer several distinct benefits. First, it could serve as a training ground for those seeking to practice Scripture meditation. Second, it provides fellowship and encouragement that is unavailable apart from a group setting.

Beyond the act of small group Bible study, meditation can also take part in a congregational context. Spurgeon illustrates the process of group meditation while describing the text of Acts 1:

This morning, in our meditation, we will start from the Ascension, and if I had sufficient imagination, I would like to picture our Lord and the eleven walking up the side of Olivet, communing as they went, a happy company with a solemn awe upon them, but with an intense joy in having fellowship with each other! Each disciple was glad to think that his dear Lord and Master who had been crucified was now among them, not only alive but surrounded with a mysterious safety and glory that none could disturb.⁵⁸

While this example does not fit perfectly into the previous examples of meditation, it is certainly more than mere reading and not simply sermonizing either. In this sermon, Spurgeon both provides an example of meditation and brings his congregation along on

⁵⁷ Linneman, “Three Steps for Meditating on Scripture.”

⁵⁸ Spurgeon, *Essential Works*, 487.

the journey. Although Spurgeon's words specifically guide the minds of his hearers, he is doing so by appealing to their senses and emotions. His vivid language encourages the use of imagination and paints a picture of what meditation can be in the life of an individual. In a similar way, pastors can guide their congregations to meditate by providing their own meditations in a way that stimulates others to engage in the process of meditation.

Finally, there is a form of group meditation that could combine both the sermon and the small group. While believers can meditate on Scripture from their personal devotions, they can do the same with the preached Word of God. Beeke and Jones describe a woman from one of their congregations: "Every Sabbath evening she spent an hour on her knees with notes from the sermons of the day, praying and meditating her way through them. She often said that was the best part of her Sabbath."⁵⁹ While this example leans toward an individual act of meditation, the fact that the congregation all heard the same message from the same text means that the entire congregation has the opportunity to collectively meditate on a sermon whether or not they are in the same location. To take it a step further, the meditation could be improved upon by discussion in small groups or families about the fruit of meditation on the sermons. Beeke and Jones offer a helpful thought: "When people stop meditating on sermons, they stop benefiting from them."⁶⁰

Overall, whether starting with Scripture through fixed meditation or moving from life to the Word through occasional meditation, the main components are always the same: a focus on God's revealed Word and a response of faith. The same can be said whether the meditation is conducted in an individual or a corporate setting. Benefits are available for both. However, even though Scripture meditation has been taught and practiced throughout church history and promises significant benefits, it is not a process

⁵⁹ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 1145.

⁶⁰ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 1145.

that can be practiced without difficulties and complications. The obstacles along with the appropriate strategies to overcome them will be the subject of the final section.

Obstacles and Difficulties to Scripture Meditation

The first obstacle that must be overcome is the word *meditation* itself. Many within the church have little experience with the concept of meditation, and those who do have a familiarity with the word, often picture the Eastern Transcendental form of meditation, perhaps connecting it with the practice of yoga. For this reason, it is likely that some within the church would be hesitant to interact with meditation out of fear of participating in another faith. Still others have no connection to meditation at all, leading them to not be opposed to the practice but also have no interest in it either. Meditation, as described in the Scripture, is not commonly taught or practiced. Therefore, the first obstacle that must be addressed is normalizing the concept of Scripture meditation.

Davis writes, “Everyone meditates on something, whether it is right, wrong, or neutral. Some meditate on problems in life or offenses committed by others. Some consider how to make more money or how to complete home projects. Others meditate on some truth of the Bible. Universally, though, meditation is practiced by all.”⁶¹ When seen in this light, meditation simply becomes the focus of one’s thoughts and attention. Everyone thinks, dreams, and plans, and then responds in action toward those plans. As believers come to see the normalcy of meditation, they are more likely to intentionally engage in the practice. Manton adds a similar sentiment: ““The mind of man is always working and if it be not fed and supplied with good matter, it works upon that which is evil and vain.”⁶² While meditation as a term is likely unfamiliar, the practice can be easily understood. Meditation is simply directing one’s thoughts. Everyone meditates whether in God-honoring or God-offending directions. Therefore, the primary directive to overcome this

⁶¹ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 15.

⁶² Thomas Manton, “Sermons Upon Psalm 119,” in *The Complete Works*, 8:165.

obstacle is simply to explain meditation in normal vocabulary that will be easily understood by those who wish to engage in meditation.

While the term of *meditation* itself is an obstacle to many, the difficulties do not end there. A second hurdle to overcome involves the busyness that permeates personal lives. Davis offers the following assessment: “Another factor that can interfere with the calm and relaxed disposition that we need for our times of meditation is the feeling of being rushed and stressed out by our busy, overschedule lives.”⁶³ This busyness is a barrier to meditation on at least two levels. First, the actual rapid pace of one’s life can provide little time to set aside and make meditation a priority. Second, even when time is set aside, it often becomes difficult for believers to slow the pace of their mind to focus on the Word without their thoughts racing to the later responsibilities of the day.

The difficulty of busyness is closely related to another difficulty: distraction. Seventeenth century preacher Richard Steele notes, “O how hard it is to spend a quarter of an hour in meditation without distraction! If there be anything in the fancy, if there be anything in the room, if there be anything in the world, thou wilt have it, to withdraw thy heart from God.”⁶⁴ It is not simply the busy mind that is a hindrance to meditation, but it is the wandering mind as well. It seems distraction is a greater difficulty than ever with the constant evolution of dinging and buzzing devices that are attached to hands, wrists, and ears. An effective approach to meditation will have to address the battle against busyness and distraction.

While distraction may seem like a modern struggle, Bonhoeffer offers the following advice, decades before the advent of distracting devices: “So the first rule is not to become impatient with yourself. Do not become confused and upset because of

⁶³ Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God*, 132.

⁶⁴ Richard Steele, *A Remedy for Wandering Thoughts in the Worship of God* (New York: D. Appleton, 1835), 245.

your distractedness.”⁶⁵ It is important to recognize distraction as a common difficulty to be expected. However, while busyness and distraction are almost universal struggles, there are strategies to curtail their strength. Beeke and Jones’s words are especially helpful at this point: “If your mind wanders, rein it in, offer a short prayer for forgiveness, ask for strength to stay focused, read a few appropriate Scriptures again, and press on.

Remember, reading Scripture, meditation, and prayer belong together. As one discipline wanes, turn to another. Persevere; don’t surrender to Satan by abandoning your task.”⁶⁶

Busyness and distraction are hindrances to all humans in whatever work they seek to accomplish, but there are also difficulties unique to the Christian in reference to meditation. One of these hindrances is a lack of biblical knowledge. Toon speaks to the importance of this knowledge when he writes, “The richer is the store of memory the richer will be our meditation, by the grace of God.”⁶⁷ It is true that the greater one’s knowledge of spiritual truth and the more verses one has stored in memory, the greater the fruit of meditation, for there is more raw material available. However, the converse is equally as true. If a believer is unfamiliar with the storyline of Scripture and has a weak biblical worldview, then he has fewer resources at his disposal. Biblical literacy is an important component to Scripture meditation and is also a large problem in the world today.

For this reason, Scripture meditation will be most effective when combined with other forms of Scripture engagement, including daily Bible reading, small group Bible studies, church attendance, audio sermons, and Christian reading. Meditation as a discipline only develops out of a holistic approach to the Holy Scriptures, but meditation also has the possibility of enriching prior experiences as well. The key in this area is not

⁶⁵ Bonhoeffer and Frick, *Meditation and Prayer*, 35.

⁶⁶ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 1141.

⁶⁷ Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 141.

only a greater exposure to the Word of God but also a determination to persevere in the process, for growth will only occur with a continued commitment to the practice.

While the previous difficulty pointed to the lack in biblical knowledge as a hindrance to Scripture meditation, another difficulty occurs when biblical knowledge is available apart from personal mental processing and application. Biblical illiteracy may be a hindrance to some, but others have been so spoon-fed Scripture through studies and devotionals that they have not developed the skills to study and meditate personally. Toon speaks to this issue: “One real problem with the use of such notes is that the user can so easily never learn the discipline of meditation.”⁶⁸ While it can be dangerous to only approach Scripture from an individualistic perspective without the help of outside voices, it is perhaps equally dangerous to rely so heavily on the insights of others that believers never experience the intimacy of Scripture meditation for themselves.

Although the previous examples serve as initial obstacles to the practice of Scripture meditation, there are still hindrances to meditation once the believer has committed to the practice. While somewhat related to the issue of busyness, an additional obstacle is that of impatience. Toon states, “First, I believe that many who begin the art of meditating on Scripture do not first of all learn to slow down and learn to read the Bible slowly and then formatively.”⁶⁹ The current culture is one that expects instant results and high-speed success. Meditation, however, cannot be rushed. It is essential to slow down long enough to consider and apply God’s Word. Manton offers the following suggestion as a corrective to this impatience: “Come not off from holy thoughts till you find profit by them, either sweet tastes and relishes of the love of God or . . . strong resolutions begotten in yourselves.”⁷⁰ Again, perseverance is the key to overcoming the obstacles of

⁶⁸ Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 78.

⁶⁹ Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 85.

⁷⁰ Thomas Manton, “Sermons upon Genesis 24:63,” in *The Complete Works*, 17:280.

Scripture meditation. While meditation may not appear to be immediately effective, it is worth the time and effort to persist.

A final obstacle that must be considered is that of discouragement. While Scripture and the testimony of others attribute great blessings to those who practice Scripture meditation, these blessings are not immediately received or recognized. Significant time may be spent in meditation with no noticeable change in thought, feeling, or behavior. Those who meditate may begin to believe that the time spent is wasted effort since no tangible result can be seen. Toon offers encouragement: “It is a serious mistake to think that only when we have the most moving insights, illuminations, humblings and inspirations are we being spiritually renewed within. . . . The word does enter into our hearts even when we do not feel that this is so for that entry is not dependent upon our feelings but on the gracious spirit.”⁷¹ God’s Word works, even when that working is unrecognized. Believers must remember that God is working and persist in meditation despite visible proof of its productive nature.

Conclusion

Toon writes, “Meditating is in order to know the will of God and gain the desire and determination to obey it. It is a means to an end and the end is the glorifying of God.”⁷² Humans were created to glorify God, which is only possible when humanity responds in obedience to God’s will. Meditation is the means both to understand that will and gain the necessary drive to apply it. Meditation is the intentional human act to apply God’s Word to one’s life so that it can have the supernatural effect God intends. Meditation may take place at a fixed time and place in the believer’s life, but the fruit of that meditation, whether in the mind, heart, or actions, should continue after the time of meditation has ceased. As Bonhoeffer says, “In the same way that the word of a person who is dear to me follows

⁷¹ Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 62.

⁷² Toon, *Meditating as a Christian*, 42.

me throughout the day, so the Word of Scripture should resonate and work within me ceaselessly.”⁷³

Regardless of the strategy or approach, meditation promises significant benefits to those who consistently practice it. As in every godly exercise, meditation will be met with hindrances and obstacles. It is important to remember, however, that meditation is not simply a human attempt but a co-laboring with God Himself. Paul writes, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). Although it requires persistence, meditation is a divinely commanded and divinely powered act that produces transformation in the life of the believer who practices it.

⁷³ Bonhoeffer and Frick, *Meditation and Prayer*, 33.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the process of implementing the ministry project from preparation to completion. The purpose of this project was to equip college students of First Baptist Church in the practice of Scripture meditation. The project consisted of three aspects to arrive at this purpose. The first goal was to create and administer a pre-test survey to ascertain students' current Bible reading and meditation practices and perceptions. The second goal was to develop and utilize an eight-week Scripture meditation journal. The final goal was to administer a post-project survey to determine any change in Bible meditation views or practices based on participation in the project. This project began implementation on November 5, 2021, and concluded on June 7, 2022.

Background of the Ministry Project

Having served at First Baptist for five years, I have been able to observe the spiritual activity of most of the college students who participated in this project. While Bible reading has been consistently championed through both small groups and sermons, plans have been provided, and opportunities to participate in group plans have been encouraged, there appeared to be little interest or involvement in personal Bible reading. Conversations with students, provided further evidence for the lack of excitement concerning biblical intake. Some students grew bored while reading, others struggled with understanding, and those who did read often dealt with the problem of retention. Many felt that there was no real evidence that Bible reading was making a significant difference in their lives.

I was first exposed to the practice of Scripture meditation during my doctoral studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to studying concepts, class participants were also instructed to practice Scripture meditation in various forms over the course of the term. While I have consistently read the Bible for many years, this new way of approaching Scripture transformed my personal devotions. My mind was more engaged and able to remember what I had read. My emotions were affected as I considered the words of Scripture, and I was able to carry Scripture with me throughout the day. Scripture meditation was a practice that breathed fresh life into my personal devotions.

After experiencing this process for myself, I felt strongly that Scripture meditation would be the perfect tool to address many of the problems students had voiced concerning their own Bible reading. College students also seemed to be the ideal population. Not only was there significantly less ministry devoted to this age group at FBC, but this group also seemed to desire to connect with God's Word on a deeper level. In addition, college students have the mental maturity to fully engage in this process that younger students may not yet possess. Based on my own personal study and experience along with the need within the young adult population, I began to design a plan to instruct college students in Scripture meditation.

Preparation of the Ministry Project

I began the project by determining a tool to measure students' initial perception and practice of Scripture meditation. This tool would serve as the baseline for understanding current attitudes as well as provide data for considering the success of the project later in the process. In exploring similar projects, I found a survey created by Christopher Osterbrock's for his ministry project.¹ This survey measured many of the same components I was seeking to address, and I was given the freedom to adapt it for

¹ Christopher Ellis Osterbrock, "Teaching Biblical Meditation at Mount Washington Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 132.

my use. The survey contained three primary sections: (1) questions that addressed spiritual disciplines in general; (2) questions that addressed the specific issue of biblical meditation; and (3) questions that focused on the frequency of specific spiritual disciplines. Osterbrock's survey was a helpful resource in measuring students' pre-project involvement with meditation.

Development of the Scripture Journal

It was essential to design a program that would fit the unique population of college students. Nearly half of the students who agreed to participate did not currently reside in Douglas. While they were all connected to the church through past attendance, many had moved hours away to attend different universities. In addition, students who did live in Douglas had differing schedules which made meeting together on a regular basis difficult. For this reason, I decided to use a Scripture journal as the method to instruct students in Scripture meditation. This method offered several strengths. First, it afforded each student the opportunity to meditate on Scripture regardless of his or her physical location or time restraints. Second, the journal offered the chance to instruct students daily instead of only once per week. A time of eight weeks was chosen as the duration for the journal. This would be long enough to provide adequate time for habit formation as well as short enough to fit with a college student's semester.

While the overall goal of the Scripture journal was to instruct and encourage students in Scripture meditation, several smaller aspects were considered in its creation. First, it was important to introduce as many methods of Scripture meditation as possible. Each person learns differently, and I wanted students to experience the variety of approaches that could be taken to meditate on Scripture. For this reason, multiple methods of meditation were introduced throughout the scope of the journal. Ultimately, twenty-three separate methods of meditation were explained. At the conclusion of the journal there is also a section that provides a list and short description of each method of

meditation covered. The appendix of the journal served as a tool to aid them in this process and will hopefully be a resource to students in the future.

Second, in addition to covering multiple forms of meditation, it was important to expose students to different genres within the Bible. While certain forms of meditation work well in the Psalms, they may not translate well into the narrative sections of Scripture. Since the entirety of Scripture is inspired by God, it was important to demonstrate how certain methods of meditation could be used with different genres of the biblical text. Over the course of the journal, students were exposed to epistles, narratives, Gospels, Psalms, and wisdom literature.

Third, while it was important to instruct students in Scripture meditation, the goal was not simply for students to understand how to follow explanations for each passage but instead to grow in their ability to meditate on Scripture without outside influence. For this reason, I provided the students with a suggested form of meditation in the initial stages of the journal. However, toward the later weeks, students transitioned to choosing a method to engage the text on their own. Ultimately, students would finish the Scripture journal after eight weeks, but would hopefully be lifelong Bible readers. Ending the journal by leaving the method of meditation up to the reader seemed to be the best path of transitioning students from instructed meditators to independent meditators.

Each day of the journal followed a similar pattern. First, students were instructed to pray. Each day a prayer prompt was provided to encourage students to praise God, express thanks for God's activity in their lives, or to implore God's help in searching the Scriptures that day. After a time of prayer, students were directed to read a specific passage of Scripture. The third component of the journal was a focus on meditation. In this section students were provided a new form of meditation to practice or were instructed to use a method they had found valuable over the course of the journal. After a time of meditation, the final section was titled "Take It with You." The goal of this section was to provide

students with suggestions on carrying the insights of the devotion into the rest of the day to promote retention and encourage practical application and response.

Beyond the pattern of the daily journal, there was also a pattern to the weekly schedule. Each week contained five days of meditations. Days 1-5 were intended to be meditation days that coincided with the students' work or school week. Day 6, or Saturday, was intended to be a time where students would meditate upon the Scripture and events of the past week to create connections and discern any commonalities or repeated themes in their devotions. Day 7, or Sunday, simply provided a blank page and encouragement to meditate upon the sermon from whatever church they attended that day. Finally, each week concluded with discussion questions which could be utilized by a small group to share their experiences from the week.

While there was a general pattern to the daily journal and the weekly rhythm, a progression occurred over the course of the work in terms of meditation practices and genres of Scripture. Week 1 of the journal focused on Psalm 23. The familiarity of the psalm, its brevity, and its ease of application all served to provide a good introduction into the practice. Each day focused on a specific verse within the psalm, and each day provided a unique form of meditation for the students to practice, including praying the Bible and rewriting the text.

Week 2 concluded the emphasis on Psalm 23 by introducing the practices of meditation mapping, thematic meditation, and meditations on Christ.² Later in the week, attention turned from Psalm 23 to reading through the book of Mark. I noted the uniqueness of Psalms and Mark and introduced the concept of catchphrase meditation. In this process, the goal was to take a single event or encounter from the chapter and condense it into a meaningful phrase that emphasized the main point of the Scripture.

² Meditation Mapping is a concept that applies the tool of mind-mapping to the processing of Scripture. For more information on this practice consult Tony Buzan and Barry Buzan, *The Mind Map Book* (London: BBC, 1993).

Crafting this catchphrase would encourage students to think deeply on the passage but would also enable them to have a greater retention of their reading.

Week 3 continued its emphasis on Mark by focusing on one chapter a day. Additional meditation methods were added, including using art to present the truth of the text and picking a number to determine a specific number of insights from the text. Week 4 continued to focus on Mark and introduced two important concepts. First, a process of meditating for application was introduced. This was significant because the primary goal of meditation is not knowledge but obedience. Second, on day 3, students were given the freedom to select their own method of meditation, moving them to a more independent approach to Scripture meditation.

Week 5 increased the amount of reading slightly as well as expanded the genres of Scripture covered. Mark was completed and Proverbs and Isaiah were introduced. Week 6 again focused on another genre of Scripture, this time centering on the book of Philippians. The practices of Bible-markup, sentence tracing, and the Joseph Hall questions were introduced over the course of this week.³ Week 7 began a structure that would continue for the remainder of the journal. Each day included a reading from Genesis and Matthew. The goal was to begin a reading plan that included both an Old Testament and New Testament passage that students could continue after the journal was completed. For the final two weeks I instructed students to choose their own meditation method as they spent time with the Scripture. To assist students in choosing a meditation method and hopefully provide a helpful resource post-project, I concluded the journal with an appendix that provided a list and short summary of each meditation practice that had been introduced in the journal.

³ Joseph Hall, *The Divine Art of Meditation* (United Kingdom: H.K., 1607). Joseph Hall offers ten questions to use in meditating on Scripture.

Development of the Training Material

While a Scripture journal seemed to be the optimal way to instruct and encourage students in Scripture meditation, it also became clear that some form of in-person training would be necessary to provide adequate explanation of this process. For this reason, a preliminary training session was also developed as an introduction to the Scripture journal. This training session served to motivate students toward meditation by explaining the benefits. The time also allowed for an explanation of the journal as well as several forms of meditation. Finally, the session served to provide a set of expectations for students entering this program. Students were to be trained together and then complete the journal individually over the course of eight weeks.

The training began by attempting to show students that something may be missing from their current Bible reading practice. Students studied the psalmist's experience with Scripture from Psalm 119 and compared it with their own experience. The goal of this initial exercise was to demonstrate that often the experience of God's Word falls short of what one reads in the Scriptures.

After addressing the common problems and shortcomings of a surface level reading of Scripture, the students explored Joshua 1:6-9 and were pointed to Scripture meditation as the missing link between the reading of Scripture and experiencing the blessings it describes. After introducing and briefly explaining the concept of meditation, I introduced students to three specific forms of meditation as examples. Two examples were modeled, while the final example was practiced by the participants during the training. The first form of meditation modeled was a slow approach to a single verse of Scripture, emphasizing one word at a time. The second approach centered on a method to move from understanding a passage to practical application. Finally, I directed students to Psalm 23, where I modeled praying the first verse and gave seven minutes for students to pray the remainder of the Psalm based on the method developed by Donald S. Whitney.⁴

⁴ Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 29.

At the conclusion of the time of prayer, students were given an opportunity to share with one another their experience. After a time of sharing, the journals were distributed and explained. Expectations were set, and there was a time for students to bring their questions. Both students in person and those on zoom responded positively to the training, and everyone left with a journal and committed to the process. Overall, the initial training had three goals. First, it was important for students to understand the possible benefits of meditation to motivate them to fully participate in the program. Second, it was necessary to set the stage for the journal by providing a brief explanation and demonstration of Scripture meditation. Third, I made sure to address some of the problems and difficulties students might encounter during the eight-week period. Understanding the potential of struggles and seeing them as normal was an important aspect in promoting persistence among those participating.

Promoting the Ministry Project

Due to the specific population of the project, individualized outreach was used instead of an open call to the church body. Individual students between the ages of 18-23 who were connected to FBC through their High School or College years were contacted personally through text message or phone call. Individuals were told that they would be participating in my doctoral project and that it would involve an eight-week commitment. This time would include a training session as well as participation in a Scripture meditation journal. I began contacting students on February 20, 2022, and by March 2, 2022, twenty students agreed to participate.

Implementing the Ministry Project

The project began on March 6, 2022, at 7 p.m. Twelve students attended the training in person and five connected over Zoom. After a brief meal and time of fellowship, students were distributed the PDBI to complete. Students who were present in person completed a paper copy, while those who had joined through Zoom submitted a digital

copy through Google Forms. Three additional students would complete the online PBDI in the week to come after watching a recording of the Zoom training, for a total of twenty student participants. The training lasted roughly an hour and a half and followed the teaching plan closely. At the conclusion of the meeting, books were distributed to those who were present. Students who participated via Zoom had received their copy in the mail.

Students began working through the Scripture journal on March 7. Since the journal was self-guided and many of the students were completing the journal at a distance, it was not always evident whether the students were actively participating. I contacted each student individually twice over the course of the project through text message to offer encouragement to continue but also to gauge their progress. May 1, eight weeks from the start, was to be the conclusion of the project; however, most of the students had fallen behind in the journal. Although they had not stopped completely, occasionally missing days had set them behind schedule. The conclusion of the project falling during college exams probably contributed to this issue.

While none had completed the project by May 1, by May 10 students were beginning to finish the journal. Since there was no in-person gathering at the conclusion of the project, participants were sent an electronic copy of the PBDI at the conclusion of their journal work. The first student completed the post survey on May 10, 2022, with the final survey being completed on June 6, 2022. Although twenty students initially committed to the project, only sixteen completed the journal in its entirety and were included in the results. Results of the post-survey were compared with the pre-survey data to determine the effectiveness of the project and whether it was successful in its approach. These results will be examined in detail in chapter 5.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this project was to instruct and encourage students in Scripture memory. The primary tool for accomplishing this was the creation and implementation of a self-guided Scripture meditation journal. In addition, an initial training session prepared students to engage with the Scripture journal and the practices it described. Finally, the Personal Biblical Devotional Inventory was utilized to measure students' pre-project and post-project perceptions and practices of Scripture meditation.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter serves as an evaluation for the project with sections addressing the project's purpose, goals and the project's strengths or weaknesses. Consideration will be given to suggested changes in future adaptations of the project as well as personal reflections. The chapter will close with a conclusion for these evaluations.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip college students of First Baptist Church in the practice of Scripture meditation. This project arose from several perceived needs within the congregation. This age group seemed to be the least engaged on a week-to-week basis within the church. In addition, it appeared from personal conversations that few individuals within this age group had a vibrant, enjoyable devotional life. Having spent many years engaged with these students throughout their middle and high school years, I felt a burden to see them not only fully engage in the life of their local churches but also demonstrate a dynamic devotional life.

The scriptures referenced in chapter 2 provide the basis for this project. Psalm 1:1-3 provides a description of the process of Scripture meditation along with the bountiful benefits it produces in the believer's life. Joshua 1:6-8 provides an Old Testament prescription to meditate followed by Philippians 4:8-9, which provides an accompanying New Testament prescription. Finally, Psalm 119 provides a demonstration of meditation in action. Based on the perceived need in this segment of the church body, along with the biblical testimony of the practice of Scripture meditation, this project sought to equip students in Scripture meditation to encourage their personal devotional lives.

While the Personal Biblical Devotional Inventory revealed a higher response than expected in terms of perception and practice of spiritual disciplines and Scripture meditation, it also revealed significant areas where students' spiritual life could be strengthened. The following results will demonstrate how both students' understanding and practice of Scripture meditation was positively impacted through participation in the project. Overall, the purpose of the project was a worthwhile pursuit and positive results point to the success of the project in accomplishing its goal.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

There were three goals for this project. For the first goal it was necessary to evaluate students' current understanding and practice of Scripture meditation. This was accomplished through the completion of the Personal Biblical Devotional Inventory (PBDI). Second, a Scripture meditation journal was developed along with an accompanying training seminar to instruct and encourage students in Scripture meditation. For the third goal, students' perceptions and practices of Scripture meditation were reassessed using the PBDI at the completion of the Scripture journal to determine any change because of students' participation in the project. Each goal will be addressed in the following sections.

Goal 1: Student Perception and Practice of Scripture Meditation

Goal 1 was accomplished during the initial training session as students completed the PBDI. Participation in the project was greater than expected. While I was hesitant to set fifteen students participating in the project as a goal, considering that the average attendance of the College Sunday school class is six students, I was pleased to find twenty students who agreed to participate in the project. While four students failed to finish the project, sixteen successfully completed the course, meeting my fifteen-person goal.

The first six questions of the survey addressed students’ general attitude and practices concerning spiritual disciplines in general. The final five questions focused on spiritual disciplines and dealt with frequency as opposed to perceptions. Of the students surveyed, 75 percent indicated that they make use of organized spiritual disciplines on a weekly basis, while 93 percent of students indicated that their personal spiritual practices positively impacted their experience of corporate worship. This finding was initially surprising based on anecdotal conversations with students concerning their struggle to maintain consistent Bible reading and prayer (see table 1).

Table 1. Pre-survey perceptions related to spiritual disciplines

Perceptions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I recognize and make use of organized spiritual disciplines on a weekly basis (Bible reading, prayer...)	1	3	0	3	5	4
My corporate worship is positively impacted by my personal spiritual practices.	0	0	1	5	6	4

Students were also surveyed on the frequency with which they currently practiced the spiritual disciplines, with 81 percent indicating that they prayed for three minutes or more at least three days a week. While not as strong a percentage, 56 percent of students indicated that they read the Bible three or more times per week. However, when asked if they make use of any writing tool, such as highlighting in their Bible or recording insights in a journal, only 18 percent responded that they interacted with the Word through writing three or more days a week. An initial assessment of the data revealed that students had a stronger participation and engagement with spiritual disciplines than previously assumed through individual conversations. However, when focus was placed on Scripture meditation, it became evident that there was room for students to grow in this area and the project was indeed needed (see table 2).

Table 2. Pre-survey frequency of spiritual disciplines

Practice	0 times per week	1 time per week	2 times per week	3 times per week	4 times per week	5+ times per week
I read the Bible.	0	3	4	4	2	3
I write (in my Bible, a journal, notebook, etc.) something related to my faith, my spiritual walk, or a topic of Christian doctrine	5	4	4	1	1	1
I pray for more than three minutes at a time.	1	0	2	2	5	6

While 100 percent of participants agreed that biblical meditation is an important and useful spiritual discipline for all Christians, only 50 percent felt that they would be able to explain biblical meditation to another Christian. In addition, when asked if they could explain to someone how to use the Bible in meditation, only 43 percent of respondents answered with a positive response. Finally, when asked about their own confidence in using multiple methods to meditate on Scripture, only 37 percent of respondents gave a positive response. The survey seems to indicate that while many students had a positive perception of Scripture meditation in general, most did not feel qualified to practice various methods of meditation or lead another believer in the process. Although students recorded high marks in spiritual disciplines, their perceptions specifically related to Scripture meditation indicated that a focus on instilling the practice of Scripture meditation would be a worthwhile pursuit.

Table 3. Pre-survey perceptions of Scripture meditation

Perceptions of Scripture Meditation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
Biblical meditation is an important and useful spiritual discipline for all Christians.	0	0	0	1	8	7
I could define and explain biblical meditation to another Christian.	0	5	3	5	2	1
I could explain to someone else how to use the Bible for meditation.	0	6	3	4	3	0
I am confident in my ability to use multiple methods for meditating on God's Word and God's Works.	0	7	3	5	0	1

A final series of questions addressed students' participation in the act of Scripture meditation. Like the students' responses to the spiritual discipline questions, the recorded answers were much more positive than expected. For example, 81 percent of students responded that they reflect on God's Word in their prayer life. Of the participants, 81 percent also reported that they were frequently convicted of sin and led to repentance through their personal intake of Scripture. Each of these questions suggest that students had been participating in Scripture meditation, even if they would not have labeled it as such. A further example of this trend is the 81 percent of students who answered that they often find themselves contemplating God's Word throughout the day.

While students seemed to demonstrate a positive perception of Scripture meditation and appeared to be practicing meditation in one form or another, the pre-survey also reveals areas of weakness, where meditation could serve to improve their devotional life. Of respondents, 75 percent indicated that they often struggle to concentrate while reading. This is a common struggle and one that Scripture meditation could address. In a similar manner, 56 percent noted that they had difficulty remembering what they had read in Scripture. This dilemma also points to the importance of Scripture meditation as a tool to aid in the retention of scriptural truth. Overall, the results of the survey revealed that students had a positive association with spiritual disciplines and Scripture meditation specifically, but that there was also room for students to grow in this area (see table 4). Goal 1 was successful in assessing students' perception and practice of Scripture meditation, revealing both a positive perception of the practice but also a perceived weakness in their own ability to practice or help others practice this form of meditation.

Table 4. Pre-survey meditation practices

Meditation Practices	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I reflect on God's Word in my prayer life.	0	0	3	6	6	1
I am frequently convicted of sin and led to repentance through my personal intake of Scripture.	0	0	3	5	7	1
I often find myself contemplating God's Word during my day.	0	2	1	8	5	0
I have a hard time keeping my concentration when reading Scripture.	0	3	1	4	6	2
I struggle to remember what I read in Scripture.	1	3	3	5	2	2

Goal 2: Crafting the Scripture Journal and Training Seminar

The second goal was to develop an eight-week interactive Scripture journal that illustrates the various methods of Scripture meditation. A period of eight weeks was selected to provide enough time to cover the multiple meditation methods as well as the different genres of biblical literature. This length also seemed beneficial toward not only instructing but also instilling the habit of Scripture meditation. Each day of the journal had a common rhythm. The devotion began with an opening prayer prompt, a Scripture reading, a suggested form of meditation, and a possible response to the Scripture. Once the journal had been developed, it became apparent that a training session was needed to set the stage for the journal and provide an adequate foundation to begin. Due to the transitory nature of college students, only one session was created as the onramp to the journal. This training session was conducted on a holiday weekend to reach the most possible college students.

Three individuals served on the expert panel. One is a senior pastor and has also served as a professor in the area of youth and collegiate ministry. The second individual is also a pastor but has a background in student ministry as well as a PhD in

Christian Education. The final expert currently serves as a discipleship pastor in a local church. This goal for this portion of the project was considered successful when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. Table 5 provides a record of those responses, which reported 100 percent sufficient or exemplary ratings.

Table 5. Expert assessment of Scripture journal and training session

Criteria	Insufficient	Requires Attention	Sufficient	Exemplary
Training is Scripture-based.	0	0	0	3
Training is theologically sound.	0	0	0	3
Training is understandable.	0	0	0	3
Training teaches the value of meditation.	0	0	1	2
Training equips participants to practice meditation.	0	0	0	3
Devotional is Scripture-based.	0	0	0	3
Devotional is theologically sound.	0	0	1	2
Devotional provides sufficient strategies for meditation.	0	0	0	3
Devotional is user friendly.	0	0	1	2
Devotional length is suited to the goal.	0	0	1	2

While the expert panel deemed the material satisfactory or exemplary in all areas, two points of critique bear mentioning. One individual commented that eight weeks may be too long of a timeframe and suggested shortening the journal to six weeks. I chose to keep the length of the journal because I did not want to cut any methods or genres of Scripture. A second comment centered on the idea of incorporating a small group dynamic to encourage accountability. A small step was taken in this direction with the development of small group questions at the end of each week. Goal 2 was considered successful with both the eight-week Scripture Journal as well as the initial training seminar receiving satisfactory or exemplary marks by the expert panel.

Goal 3: Equipping Students in Scripture Meditation

The third goal of the project was to equip students to meditate on Scripture through the Scripture meditation journal. A comparison of the results from the pre- and post-surveys demonstrated a statistically significant change in both the students' perception and practice of Scripture meditation. This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. There was a statistically significant difference ($t_{(15)}=-7.552$, $p=0.0001$) in the participants' pre- and post-survey results. Based on the statistical results, the third goal was a success. Several specific changes between pre- and post-survey scores will be explored in more detail in the following sections.

Perception of Scripture meditation. While the pre-survey results reported a positive perception of both spiritual disciplines and biblical meditation, the post-survey reported several areas of significant change. While 62 percent of students in the pre-survey responded that they struggle with their spiritual health because they have not been properly educated in spiritual disciplines, only 6 percent responded in the post-survey that a lack of education in spiritual disciplines hindered their spiritual growth. In a similar manner, 56 percent of pre-survey respondents indicated that they had been formally instructed in spiritual disciplines, while the percentage of post-survey respondents was 100 percent. These two statistics point to the project's success in instructing students in spiritual disciplines.

In addition to the area of spiritual disciplines, there were significant changes to note in meditation. While only 43 percent of participants were confident in their ability to explain to someone else how to use the Bible for meditation, at the conclusion of the project this number had risen to 100 percent. In addition, only 37 percent of respondents initially indicated that they were confident in their ability to use multiple methods to meditate on Scripture. By the end of the project, 93 percent of students felt confident in

using multiple methods to meditate. Overall, there was significant growth in students' perception of Scripture meditation.

Table 6. Post-survey perceptions related to spiritual disciplines and Scripture meditation

Perceptions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree	Strongly Agree
I struggle with my spiritual health because I am not properly educated in biblical spiritual disciplines.	2	9	4	1	0	0
I have been formally instructed in the personal spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.	0	0	0	4	4	8
I could define and explain biblical meditation to another Christian.	0	0	0	3	11	2
I could explain to someone else how to use the Bible for meditation.	0	0	0	3	11	2
I am confident in my ability to use multiple methods for meditating on God's Word and God's Works.	0	0	1	2	9	4

Practice of Scripture meditation. While there was a growth in students' knowledge and confidence of Scripture meditation, there was also an increase in their experience and practice of this discipline. Of respondents, 87 percent in the pre-survey indicated that they were often aware of the Holy Spirit's work in their life while they were reading or meditating. At the conclusion of the study, 100 percent agreed with this statement. Similarly, 81 percent of those who took the pre-survey indicated that they were frequently convicted of sin through their intake of Scripture. By the end of the project, this number had also risen to 100 percent. The area of prayer was also influenced, with a move from 81 percent to 93 percent of respondents indicating that they reflect on God's Word in their prayer life.

This project was successful in helping students grow in areas of meditation but was also beneficial in addressing several of the problems connected with Bible reading.

While 75 percent of pre-survey respondents indicated that they often had trouble concentrating when reading Scripture, this number dropped to 37 percent by the end of the project. In addition, 56 percent of the participants initially recorded that they struggled to remember what they had read in Scripture compared to only 12 percent at the conclusion of the Scripture journal. Overall, goal 3 was met by revealing a statistically significant difference between the initial and post-project PDBI.

Table 7. Post-survey practice of Scripture meditation

Practice	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am often aware of the Holy Spirit's work in me as I am reading or meditating on Scripture.	0	0	0	5	8	3
I am frequently convicted of sin and led to repentance through my personal intake of Scripture.	0	0	0	5	4	7
I reflect on God's Word in my prayer life.	0	0	1	5	5	5
I have a hard time keeping my concentration when reading Scripture.	0	4	6	3	3	0
I struggle to remember what I read in Scripture.	0	4	10	2	0	0

This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. There was a statistically significant difference ($t_{(15)}=-7.552$, $p=0.0001$) in the participants pre and post-survey results. Based on the statistical results, the third goal was a success.

Project Strengths

One of the main strengths of this project was its focus on the sufficiency of Scripture. While an endless stream of devotionals is available to the believer, and these

resources can be useful, it is important for believers to be able to connect with God through His Word without the need of a human mediator. This project did not seek to spoon feed believers' biblical truth but instead prepared them to process and connect with God's Word for themselves. Each day provided a method for meditation, but the meaning of each passage and the proper response to it was left to the reader.

A second strength of the project was the wide variety of methods employed in meditation. Just as there are many different types of learners, there will be many ways to meditate that will be meaningful to those who practice it. The project sought to provide as many tools as possible for students to continue in meditation in ways that are meaningful and impactful for them. A third strength, stemming from the previous, is the journal's usefulness beyond the eight-week period. While it is unlikely that participants will return to the book and work through it chronologically again. The appendix at the end is a helpful resource that could be returned to again and again to stimulate the memory and remind readers of possible methods to meditate on a specific text. If reprinted in the future, this section could be condensed into a perforated section that could be removed from the journal and inserted into a Bible for future use.

Project Weaknesses

While the project was successful in equipping students to meditate on Scripture, upon completion of the project, several areas of weakness would need to be addressed in future applications. The first weakness was the lack of a group dynamic within the project. Personally, I am an introvert. My natural inclination concerning biblical spirituality is solitude, study, reading, praying, and journaling. While all of these are necessary, they cannot be the sole focus of one's spiritual life. Everyone needs to grow in fellowship with others, even the introverted. And there are others whose natural inclination is toward communal spirituality. A shortcoming of this project was the sole focus on individual personal meditation to the exclusion of meditation and sharing as a group. The varied locations of college students made an individual approach the simplest; however, it may

not have been the strongest approach. Incorporating small groups could have served to encourage participants in the process as well as provide an added level of accountability. While the results of this project were positive, perhaps they would have been magnified by the incorporation of a focus on relationships within the project.

A second weakness also rose around relationships. While I was intentional to maintain contact with the college students before and during the project to encourage their involvement and perseverance, my investment in their lives fell short in follow up. Several students commented on how the process had been meaningful, but due to the business of ministry and finishing the writing element, these conversations to unpack the progress that had been made were delayed and sometimes dropped altogether. It is likely that students made progress in spiritual disciplines and Scripture meditation during the project; however, without encouragement to move forward or an example of next steps, it is possible that many returned to their pre-project practices of spiritual disciplines. A follow-up survey, six-months post-project, would be helpful to assess what long-term impact the project had. Overall, I am guilty of putting the project over the people involved. While I am confident that the project benefited their spiritual lives, I am also fearful that my failure to follow up could limit the spiritual fruit that will follow.

Project Improvements

After considering the success, strengths, and weaknesses of the project. I would make several adjustments if I were to conduct this or a similar project again. First, I would make the beginning of the project more intentional and intensive. Instead of a one-hour training session, which included mainly teaching, I would like to begin the project with a two-day retreat. Having a retreat would provide more time to teach the material, but even more beneficial, it would provide more time and space to practice it. Even if the teaching material stayed the same, providing an extended time to meditate on Scripture through praying the text or journaling would be extremely beneficial. Using a retreat to start the project would also provide time for students to ask questions, express frustrations, share

joys, and address issues before they went their individual ways. In addition, spending time together sharing about the results of meditation and sharing meals together could promote the relational fellowship that was missing from the project. If students were able to connect at a retreat, then they could be more easily be placed in small groups that could be maintained through technology over the course of the project.

A second adjustment, which was hinted at previously, would be to incorporate a group dynamic into the project. The past two years have revealed the wealth of technology at our disposal. Distance does not have to be a deterrent to meaningful connections between disciples. Any project in the future would be wise to take advantage of this technology to encourage students to connect as they continue in Scripture meditation.

A final adjustment relates to the conclusion of the project. Just as I would have begun the project differently, I would also like to be more intentional in ending it. Something more substantive than a post-survey should be employed to engage college students who have completed the project. A full post-project plan, including individual interviews, group sharing, and suggested next steps, would be helpful to not only measure the project's effectiveness but to promote future spiritual growth and fruitfulness in the lives of the participants. Overall, I would place a greater focus on people and relationships in any similar future project.

Theological Reflections

The author of Hebrews writes, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (4:12). This project proved the living nature and power of God's Word. Through the process of meditation, I experienced, and I believe the students also experienced, the active moving of God's Word as the Holy Spirit introduced new insights, convicted of sin, and brought forward practical steps of obedience. Many of the students had

connected with God's Word on a mental and intellectual level before, but this project exposed them to a greater spectrum of the speaking of Scripture.

In addition to the power of God's Word, this project revealed and reinforced the importance of being still and waiting on God. While many reading plans involve a checklist of reading a passage and checking a box, meditation does not happen so simply. It may be that the initial reading of the text is the first of many. Meditation cannot be rushed, and this project stressed the importance of creating uninterrupted time to abide with Christ. In the busy days in which we live, this is a needed reminder. In a similar manner, this project also emphasized the relational nature of Christianity. Again, as opposed to a checklist of obedience, meditation resembles more conversation. The scene described in Luke 10:38-42, where Mary sits at the feet of Jesus while Martha scurries from task to task, paints a vivid picture of what meditation should look like in a believer's life. Christians must create time and space to connect with Christ in relationship through the Scriptures.

Personal Reflections

My time in the Biblical Spirituality program has been overwhelming on many levels. As the program began, I was overwhelmed with the workload. Having taken a ten-year break from formal education, the amount of reading, processes, and writing was initially a high hurdle. As I participated in seminars, I was overwhelmed on another level. As I listened to professors and my classmates, I was overwhelmed with the breadth and depth of wisdom and knowledge, not just in the room but over the course of Christian history. I was challenged on what I thought I knew and was astounded on everything there was yet to learn. Every topic seemed to have unending avenues of interpretation and application. I was overwhelmed by the knowledge and wisdom available and yet uninvestigated.

As I entered the project phase, statistics were overwhelming. I am comfortable with words, but numbers not so much. Though, as I began to understand the numbers, I began to be overwhelmed on another level—I was overwhelmed that the material had

made a difference in the students' spiritual lives. Studying and practicing meditation had a tremendous impact on my own personal life but passing along that benefit to others seemed an impossible task. I am overwhelmed that God continues to use me despite my weakness and shortcomings. I am overwhelmed at God's goodness for allowing me to learn at this level from incredible professors alongside excellent peers. This entire process has been supremely rewarding and I know it will continue to bear fruit in my spiritual life and in the lives of those whom I serve.

Conclusion

This project was successful in its goal to equip students in biblical meditation as demonstrated through quantitative data and personal discussions. Learning and practicing biblical meditation have breathed fresh life into my own spiritual life, and it was exciting to see the process have a similar effect in the life of participants. I am grateful for the opportunity to be instructed in this practice as well as all the elements of biblical spiritual and I am humbled by the opportunity to instruct others as well. I look forward to seeing the fruit of this discipline in my own life and will continue to consider how to incorporate Scripture meditation in every level of my ministry.

APPENDIX 1

PERSONAL BIBLICAL DEVOTIONAL INVENTORY

The following survey was distributed to a select group of college students for the purpose of evaluating their practice of spiritual disciplines, specifically Scripture meditation prior to the training seminar introducing the scripture journal.¹ This survey was administered as a post-test at the conclusion of the project.

¹ This survey is adapted from Christopher Ellis Österbrock, “Teaching Biblical Meditation at Mount Washington Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio” (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 131.

PERSONAL BIBLICAL DEVOTIONAL INVENTORY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to gauge your current practice and understanding of Scripture meditation. This research is being conducted by Jonathan McDuffie for purposes of his doctoral project. In this research, you will evaluate your current understanding and practice of interacting with the Scriptures. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this inventory you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Name: _____.

Date: _____

Directions: Answer the descriptions below by circling or placing a mark on the appropriate option. The answer should align with your current practice and not with what you assume to be the ideal response. The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree,

D = Disagree,

DS = Disagree Somewhat,

AS = Agree Somewhat,

A = Agree,

SA = Strongly Agree.

Spiritual Disciplines Practices:

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 4. I have read the entire New Testament. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I recognize and make use of organized spiritual disciplines on a weekly basis (Bible reading, prayer...) | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I struggle with my spiritual health because I am not properly educated in biblical spiritual disciplines. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. Those close to me are aware that I practice some form of Christian devotional spirituality. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. My corporate worship is positively impacted by my personal spiritual practices. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

9. I regularly take time to memorize Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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Perception of Biblical Meditation:

10. I frequently consult God's Word in my decision-making.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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11. I have been formally instructed in the personal spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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12. I am often conscious of how God's Word changes my thinking.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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13. I reflect on God's Word in my prayer life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
--	----	---	----	----	---	----

14. I am frequently convicted of sin and led to repentance through my personal intake of Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
---	----	---	----	----	---	----

15. I often find myself contemplating God's Word during my day.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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16. I have a hard time keeping my concentration when reading Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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17. I could explain to someone else how to use the Bible for meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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18. I prefer to be spontaneous in my devotional practices and don't like a fixed method.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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19. Biblical meditation is an important and useful spiritual discipline for all Christians.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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20. I am often aware of the Holy Spirit's work in me as I am reading or meditating on Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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21. I could define and explain biblical meditation to another Christian.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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22. I am confident in my ability to use multiple methods for meditating on God's Word and God's Works.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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23. I struggle to remember what I read in Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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Frequency and Practice of Biblical Meditation:

Directions: Answer the following questions according to the frequency (amount of times) you practice each item by circling the appropriate number.

	Times per average week...					
24. I read the Bible.	0	1	2	3	4	5+
25. I meditate on Scripture.	0	1	2	3	4	5+
26. I share experiences of my spiritual life with others.	0	1	2	3	4	5+
27. I write (in my Bible, a journal, notebook, etc.) something related to my faith, my spiritual walk, or a topic of Christian doctrine	0	1	2	3	4	5+
28. I pray for more than three minutes at a time.	0	1	2	3	4	5+

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The curriculum evaluation rubric was distributed to a panel of professionals who assessed the Scripture meditation training session and the Scripture meditation journal. The rubric evaluated the following areas: biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy and practicality.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Training is Scripture-based.					
Training is theologically sound.					
Training is understandable.					
Training teaches the value of meditation.					
Training equips participants to practice meditation.					
Devotional is Scripture-based.					
Devotional is theologically sound.					
Devotional provides sufficient strategies for meditation					
Devotional is user friendly.					
Devotional length is suited to the goal.					

APPENDIX 3

INTRODUCTORY TRAINING SEMINAR

The following training material was used to introduce students to the concept of meditation and instruct them in some basic processes. This training prepared students to practice meditation through the Scripture journal.

Meditating on Scripture
Initial Training Plan
First Baptist Church Douglas, GA

Open the training with prayer. Pray through a section of Psalm 1 to start the training.

- What's a song you think you could sing all the way through without looking at the words?
- Why do you think you're able to remember every single lyric?

Music and songs make us happy, and because they make us happy, we tend to return to them and listen to them over and over. Even though we may know the words, we don't become bored. Instead, we sing along, participate, and find joy in the repetition.

The longest Psalm in the Bible is Psalm 119. It is essentially a long poem, and it covers one subject. It talks about Scripture. It talks about how the writer feels about God's Word. It talks about the promises of God's Word. It is a song devoted to how good God's Word is.

Each of you is going to be assigned eight verses of the Psalm. And I want you to think through these two questions and be ready to share your answers with the group.

- 1) What actions does the psalmist take with God's Word?
- 2) What effect do God's Words have in the psalmist's life?

Group Discussion

- Does your experience of reading God's Word match the psalmist's? Why or why not?
- What makes engaging with Scripture difficult?

Even though Scripture makes some incredible promises, for many of us, our experience doesn't match what we read. We get distracted, we get bored, and we get discouraged. We often read and struggle to remember. Many times, we don't experience the blessings that Scripture promises. We fail to see the connection between God's Word and our lives.

We have two options. Either there is something wrong with the Scriptures or something wrong with our approach. I hope you'll agree with me that since God's Word is perfect, it only makes sense that the difficulty lies in our approach.

Let's look at a few more passages to see how they describe this process.

The book of Joshua marks an incredible transition in the life of God's people. The Israelite's great leader, Moses, who led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness, has died.

God charges Joshua to lead the nation of Israel from the wilderness into the land God promised to give them. This task is not easy because the nation of Israel is challenging to lead, and Joshua is leading them to a land occupied by other people.

In Joshua 1, we read about God’s plans and His promises to Joshua.

6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. 8 This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”—Joshua 1:6-9

- What commands does God give Joshua in this passage?
- What seems to be the chief command?

There are several commands in this passage, but the one that appears the most is this... “be strong and courageous.”

- Why is this a difficult command to obey?

“Being strong and courageous” is a difficult command because it deals with our emotions. Our emotions, specifically fear, are often difficult to control. The next most repeated command involves some form of obedience. Obey the law. Do what it says.

- What does God promise to be the result of obedience?

God promises to bless. Blessing simply means happiness or goodness. Obedience produces good results in our life. This isn’t always wealth or success. Sometimes it’s peace or comfort.

So far, we’ve considered three key concepts.

- 1) God’s Word
- 2) Obedience
- 3) Blessing

These are three crucial parts of the Christian life, but they are also areas where we struggle.

We know God’s Word is important, yet we struggle to read and remember.

We know God calls us to obedience, but there are times when our heart turns to lesser things, and we struggle to follow Christ.

We know following Jesus leads to a blessed, good, joy-filled life, but we often feel dull and lifeless.

Is that a fair assessment?

There's one command that we missed. Let's look at the passage one more time.

**This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success—
Joshua 1:8**

- What additional command do we see in this passage?
- What comes to your mind when you hear the word meditate?

The word meditate has many different interpretations in the world today, but through the eyes of Scripture, it simply means thinking deeply on the words of Scripture. Many of us hear Scripture, and it passes through our ears. Sometimes we read Scripture, and it passes through our minds. But we don't meditate on Scripture and allow it to soak in our minds.

George Mueller writes--“the simple reading of the Word of God” can become information that “only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe.”¹

Donald Whitney gives this illustration. *A simple analogy would be a cup of tea. In this analogy, your mind is the cup of hot water, and the tea bag represents your intake of Scripture. Hearing God's Word is like one dip of the tea bag into the cup. Some of the tea's flavor is absorbed by the water, but not as much as would occur with a more thorough soaking of the bag. Reading, studying, and memorizing God's Word is like additional plunges of the tea bag into the cup. The more frequently the tea enters the water, the more permeating its effect. Meditation, however, is like immersing the bag completely and letting it steep until all the rich tea flavor has been extracted and the hot water is thoroughly tintured reddish brown. Meditation on Scripture is letting the Bible brew in the brain. Thus, we might say that as the tea colors the water, meditation likewise “colors” our thinking. When we meditate on Scripture it colors our thinking about God, about God's ways and His world, and about ourselves. Similarly, as the tea bag flavors the water, so through meditation we consistently “taste” or experience the reality taught in the text. The information on the page becomes an experience in our hearts and minds and lives.*²

¹ Roger Steer, *Spiritual Secrets of George Müller* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1985), 61.

² Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016), 47.

Meditation is slowing down to engage with the text. So, now that we know what meditation is, let's get back to Joshua 1:8 one more time.

**This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success—
Joshua 1:8**

What we see in this passage is a process.

WHITEBOARD:

Scripture—Meditate—Obey—Blessing

Meditation is what connects everything together. Meditation affects our mind, so we remember. It affects our emotions to encourage obedience, and it empowers our actions. The result is God's blessing. We find the joy of obedience, we experience God's activity in our life, and we reap the rewards of following Christ.

So, now that we know what meditation is and what it produces, the next step is figuring out how to practice it.

Let me ask a question.

- What's your process for making a grilled cheese sandwich? Walk us through it step by step.

A grilled cheese sandwich is a simple dish with similar ingredients, but we probably all go about it a little differently. We know what we like and what works for us. This is the beautiful part of meditation. There's no one way to go about it. We can each find an approach or approaches that work for us.

At the end of our time together, I'm going to give you an 8-week journal that will introduce you to 23 methods of meditation, but I'm going to cover three tonight.

Practice One: Emphasize Each Word

Here's the first practice. Pick a verse and emphasize each word. You will read a whole chapter or even multiple chapters a day in many reading plans. You're getting a lot of information, and that's good, but sometimes you need to narrow down the focus.

Ephesians 1 is a beautiful chapter, but let's say one verse, Ephesians 1:3, jumped out to you. You highlighted it or underlined it. That's your verse for meditation.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Now, what you do is simply take time to consider each word individually.

Blessed—what does it mean to be blessed? It means to be good. It means to be happy. It means to be honored. God is good and worthy of honor.

Blessed be—be. Right now. In the present. God deserves to be honored and blessed today. He deserves my praise at this moment.

Blessed be the—there is only one God. You are singular. There is no one that compares to you.

You simply spend time thinking about each word. It may take the form of simply thinking and trying to understand, like with the word “blessed.” It could take the form of prayer.

Blessed be the God—you are God. You are above all. You are over all.

You can think it, write it, speak it. You can meditate while sitting, standing, and waiting, lying down at night, or taking a walk. You aren’t in a rush. You can take your time. So, that’s method number 1.

- Is there anything appealing about this approach?
- Is there anything that seems confusing or difficult?
- What do you think would be some benefits to this practice?

Practice Two: Practical Application

The purpose of meditation is not simply to understand but also to apply and live out God’s Word. Sometimes we rush through God’s Word. We read a chapter, close the Bible, say a quick prayer, and move on with our lives, but we don’t stop to consider how God’s Word calls us to respond.

Here’s a helpful acronym for considering how to respond to God’s Word.

Is there...a

Sin to confess?

Promise to claim?

Attitude to change?

Command to obey?

Example to follow?

So, let’s say you’re reading Matthew 4. There’s a lot that happens in this passage.

- Take a moment to scan/read through this passage. Do you find anything that fits this acronym?

This method of meditation is good because it moves God's Word from something on the page to something in our personal life.

Method Three: Pray the Scriptures

Here's the last method. We use God's Word to guide our prayer. Psalms is an excellent place to practice this method.

You simply read a line and pray about whatever comes to mind. Once you've prayed all you like, you read the next line and pray again. This is how I began our time together.

Read a line. Pray.

Read a line. Pray.

Take 7 minutes to walk around campus and practice this. Use Psalm 23.

- What did you think? What did you experience?
- What do you remember?

We meditated to allow God's word to soak into our hearts and minds and lead us to obedience.

That's the process. There are several approaches to take. I've given you three. You'll learn 20 more in the weeks to come.

Pass the journals out and give a quick overview of the resource.

You will get busy. Make time for God and make it as early as possible.

You will get distracted. Don't beat yourself up. Just return to the Word.

Not every day will be incredibly impactful, but some will. Don't give up.

Questions??

Close in Prayer.

APPENDIX 4

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION JOURNAL SAMPLE

The Scripture journal was the backbone of the project. It was the primary means of instructing and encouraging Scripture meditation. While the methods of meditation varied, each day followed a similar structure. The first two weeks of the Scripture journal are included in this appendix, as well as the introductory and concluding sections.

Thank you so much for participating in this Scripture Journal. I'll admit that anything containing the word "meditation" would have made me uncomfortable for most of my life. I would have pictured humming, chanting, or sitting cross-legged on the floor while incense wafted through the air. In my mind, meditation and a serious devotion to the Scriptures were miles apart.

However, after my study of both the Scriptures and the history of Christian spirituality, I'm convinced Scripture cannot be fully appreciated and applied apart from the biblical practice of meditation. My personal practice of this discipline has also confirmed what my studies have revealed.

Thank you for trusting me to walk you through what will hopefully be a rich and rewarding process. It is my hope and prayer that this journal will stir up a renewed passion for the Scriptures and you will experience the blessings that come from this sacred practice.

Jonathan McDuffie

1) What is meditation? Meditation is thinking deeply about the truths of God as revealed in Scripture. It is seeking to remain in the Scriptures so that they affect not only your mind but also your heart and will as well.

2) How do I use this journal? This journal is less of a devotional and more of a road-map. Each day a prompt will be given for a Scripture reading as well as a specific method of meditation. The general process will be the same each day. First, you will open in prayer. Scripture meditation is impossible apart from the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Prayer paves the way for Spirit-dependent Scripture meditation. Second, there will be a larger section to read. Some days it will be a chapter. Other days it will be multiple chapters. Third, there will follow a guide to meditation. Some methods will resonate with you. Others will be more difficult. Give each a try. Fourth, after meditation, you will be directed to pray. After God has spoken, it is important to thank Him and respond to His speaking into your life. Finally, there will be a "Take it with you" section. This may take the form of Scripture memorization, a catch-phrase to remember, or an action step. Again, the journal is meant to be a road-map, not a devotion. There is no single path to get to your destination. If you see something interesting, pull to the side and check it out. If nothing stands out, move forward. Go at your own pace. Enjoy the trip.

3) What will help in this process? First, make a commitment. Commit to starting, continuing and finishing the process. Second, pick a specific time of the day and be faithful to spending time with God each day at that time. Third, join a group. There are others taking part in this process. Use the discussion questions to touch base each week. Fourth, don't stress. Scripture meditation is a relationship not just responsibility. It's time with God. Not every time will seem as meaningful as others. God is still working. Savor the sweet moments and trust that God is still moving in the moments you don't see Him.

Fifth, if the prompts don't connect with you on a specific day, look to the appendix for a condensed list of meditation methods. Find one that works for you that day.

****Many of the meditation methods mentioned in this resource have been adapted from Don Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. These are indicated in the Appendix.****

Week 1, Day 1

Pray:

Thank God for the opportunity to meet with Him.

Confess any known sin in your life.

Ask God to direct your mind and heart as He Desires.

Read: Psalm 23 (Read it slowly)

Meditation Practice 1: Pray through the Text.

Use each phrase as a guide to your prayer. Read a phrase, and then pray about whatever comes to mind.

*The Lord is my Shepherd...*thank God for how He has shepherded you and provided for you. Ask God for direction in an area of life that you need guidance. Pray that God would shepherd those you love...

When nothing else comes to mind, pray through the next phrase. Continue in prayer as long as time allows or until you finish the Psalm.

Take It With You:

What word or phrase do you want to carry with you today? Write it below.

Week 1, Day 2

Pray:

Did God make Himself known to you yesterday? If yes, thank God for how He spoke to you. If not, ask Him to bless your persistence and speak with you today.

Read: Psalm 23 (Pick a translation you would like to memorize.)

Meditation Practice 2: Emphasize Each Word--Psalm 23:1

Emphasize each word of Psalm 23:1. Slowly roll each word around in your mind. Consider what it means and allow your mind to turn towards prayer.

Example: *The Lord is my Shepherd...*"The" Lord. There is only one Lord. All other gods are imitations and inventions. We don't worship "a" god, but "the" one, true, and living God.

Continue considering each word until you reach the end of Psalm 23:1

Take It With You:

Memorize Psalm 23:1. Write it on a notecard. Save it as your phone wallpaper. Write it in dry erase marker on a mirror. Repeat it to yourself as you go throughout the day.

Week 1, Day 3

Pray:

Consider how God shepherded you yesterday. Thank Him for moving and ask Him to shepherd your time together today.

Read: Psalm 23 (Choose a different translation than yesterday)

Meditation Practice 3: Connection with Life--Psalm 23:2

What would green pastures and quiet waters mean to a sheep?

What are areas in your life where you need God to provide? What are your problems? Where do you need to experience the peace of God?

Pray:

Now that you have considered your problems and areas of life where you need peace. Spend time in prayer seeking God's presence in these parts of your life. Write out your prayers if that helps with your focus.

Take It With You:

Memorize Psalm 23:2. In the same way as yesterday, find a strategy to carry this verse with you so that it remains in your heart and mind

Week 1, Day 4

Pray:

Thank God for all the ways He provided for you yesterday. Ask Him to provide the focus and sensitivity to connect with Him today.

Read: Psalm 23 (Read the version you've been memorizing)

Meditation Practice 4: Whole Bible Connections-Psalm 23:3

What are some examples of God guiding His people in the Bible?

As you think about your past, what are some ways God has guided you?

God has a history of guiding His people, and He has guided you personally. That means we can trust God to guide us at the present time and into the future.

What's an area of your life where you need guidance and direction? Offer this up as a prayer to God.

Take It With You:

Memorize Psalm 23:3. Continue to repeat the previous two verses as well. Whenever you have a spare moment, as you walk, drive or wait for an elevator, allow God's Words to work through your mind and heart.

Week 1, Day 5

Pray:

Thank God for guiding you yesterday.

Ask for His continued guidance as you meet with Him today.

Read: Psalm 23 (Recite what you remember. Read the rest)

Meditation Practice 5: Rewrite the Text--Psalm 23:4

Rewrite this verse in your own words. Consider what you are currently walking through that is causing fear. Think through the ways that God comforts you.

Write your version of the verse below.

Pray:

Thank God for any way He has spoken or directed you today.

Take It With You:

Memorize Psalm 23:4. Continue to review the previous three verses as well.

Week 1, Day 6

Pray:

Thank God for working in your life for the past week. Ask for clarity to recognize how He is moving.

Read: Psalm 23

Meditate:

Review your notes or thoughts from the previous five days. Note any repeated themes.

Review Psalm 23:1-4, making sure you can repeat each verse perfectly from memory.

Pray:

Take It With You:

Journal any thoughts from the week you want to remember.

Week 1, Day 7

Use the space below to take notes on this week's sermon. Note any themes from your week that appear in this week's message.

Week 1 Discussion Questions

Use the following questions to process your thoughts from the week and share your responses with a small group or friend who is also taking part in this process.

- 1) What verse was most meaningful to you? Why?

- 2) What proved a struggle for you this week? What could you do differently next week?

- 3) Which method was most enjoyable? How did it enrich your time in the Scriptures?

- 4) How do you understand God as a shepherd after this week?

- 5) How did this week's meditations affect your emotions over the course of the week?

Week 2, Day 1

Pray:

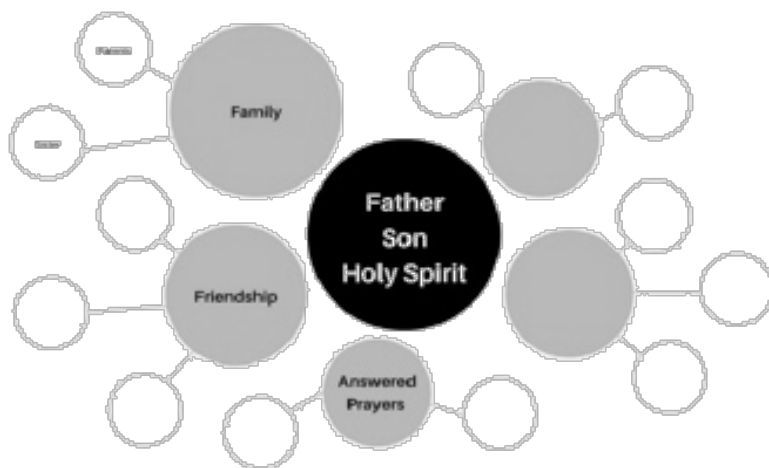
Thank God for a new day and a new opportunity to meet with Him.

Read: Psalm 23 (Recite from your memory slowly and read what you haven't memorized yet.)

Meditation Practice 6: Mind Mapping- Psalm 23:5

The psalmist uses the imagery of a feast to describe God's blessings in his life. Use the process of mind mapping to depict God's blessings in your own life. It may look

something like this.



Use the following page to create your own mind map of God's blessings. With each blessing you record, offer a prayer of thanksgiving.

Mind Map:

Take It With You:

Memorize Psalm 25:5. Repeat it to yourself as well as the previous verses as you move throughout the day.

Week 2, Day 2

Pray:

Thank God for the blessing of entering into His presence. Thank Him for the blessings you've experienced in the past 24 hours.

Read: Psalm 23 (Recite what you remember. Read the rest)

Meditation Practice 7: Thematic Meditation --Psalm 23:6

Sometimes meditation involves looking at each small detail of a verse. Other times meditation involves considering the grand narrative of Scripture and all the verses about a particular theme.

This meditation is upon thy everlasting rest. I would not have you cast off your other meditations; but surely, as heaven hath the preeminence in perfection, it should have it also in our meditation. That which will make us most happy when we possess it, will make us most joyful when we meditate upon it--Richard Baxter

The following QR code will take you to a collection of verses on the topic of heaven. Consider the verses individually and collectively. What are some common themes? What are you most anticipating?

Pray: Offer a prayer of thanks for your future home.

Take It With You:

Memorize Psalm 23:6 and carry it with you today.

Week 2, Day 3

Pray:

Ask for God's grace to meet with you in this moment.

Read: Recite Psalm 23 from Memory

Meditation Practice 8: Remember Jesus-Psalm 23

Christ is the center of Scripture. As you consider the words of Psalm 23 one more time, consider each word and phrase. Which words point to Jesus? How does Jesus answer or fulfill what is described in the Psalm? How have you experienced God in these ways?

Pray:

Thank God for any insights you've gained and thank Him for the ways He's worked in your life.

Take It With You:

Continue to recite Psalm 23 to yourself as you move throughout your day.

Week 2, Day 4

Pray:

Spend a few moments thanking God for meeting with you.

Read: Mark 1

Meditation Practice 9: Catchphrase

Each of the previous meditations has centered on a Psalm. Mark is much different. It is narrative, not poetry. After you read this chapter, consider a single event. What was the point? Why do you think Mark included this story? What's the principle he wants the reader to apply?

Once you've determined the principle, strive to make it memorable. What's a catchphrase that could help you memorize your insights today?

Pray:

Prayer today will depend on whatever God initiated through your reading and meditation. Allow God's direction to determine the path of your prayer time today.

Take It With You:

What was the principle from your reading today? Repeat the phrase to yourself to stimulate your memory throughout the day. Use this phrase to remember what God has taught you.

Week 2, Day 5

Pray:

Ask the Lord to guide you through His Word today.

Read: Mark 2

Meditation Practice 9: Catchphrase

Using the same strategy as yesterday. Consider the main message of this chapter as a whole or a single section. What's the point? How can you make the point memorable?

Pray:

Allow the day's reading to guide your prayer. If you are struggling to find the words to pray, you can always return to Psalm 23 and allow those words to stir your memory and give words to your prayers.

Take It With You:

Similar to yesterday, use your principle or phrase as a stimulant to your memory. Try to recall this phrase throughout the day to remember what God has impressed upon you. And, as you see opportunities to respond to God's leading, take action.

Week 2, Day 6

Pray:

Thank God for working in your life for the past week. Ask for clarity to recognize how He is moving.

Read: Psalm 23

Meditate:

Review your notes or thoughts from the previous five days. Note any repeated themes.

Review Psalm 23, making sure you can repeat each verse perfectly from memory.

Pray:

Allow your time of meditation to guide your prayer of response.

Take It With You:

Journal any thoughts from the week you want to remember.

Week 2, Day 7

Use the space below to take notes on this week's sermon. Note any themes from your week that appear in this week's message.

Week 2 Discussion Questions

Use the following questions to process your thoughts from the week and share your responses with a small group who is also taking part in this process.

1) How did you do memorizing Psalm 23? What were some practices that helped?

2) How could you make sure you remember the words you've memorized?

3) How was meditating on Mark compared to the Psalms?

4) What's a catchphrase from the week and what did you learn?

5) Have any themes been repeated over the course of the past two weeks?

APPENDIX 1: MEDITATION METHODS

1) Pray the Text*: Use each line of Scripture to stimulate your prayer. Read a line and then respond to that line in prayer. This method combines the prayer and meditation time and works well in the Psalms.

2) Emphasize Each Word*: This method involves picking a single verse or phrase and then carefully thinking through the meaning of each word. This process works well in teaching sections of Scripture and can also be combined with Praying the Text. Each word can become an opportunity for prayer as well as meditation.

3) Life Connection*: This method seeks to connect Scripture with your personal life. Is there a promise that relates to your life? Is there a sin mentioned that is a personal struggle? Is there a characteristic you need to develop?

4) Bible Connections: This method takes a word or phrase and connects it to the rest of the bible. It may be blood or bread, water or forgiveness. Start with something in your reading and then consider what other connections in the rest of the Bible connect with this word, phrase or event.

5) Rewrite the Text*: Take the text and put it into your own language and terms. What would this verse sound like if you wrote it?

6) Mind Mapping*: This process might require a Google search. Essentially, its putting words on paper using bubbles and lines. You can use this process to consider the text itself or how the text plays out in your own personal life.

7) Thematic Meditation: This process is similar to the whole Bible connection but involves meditating on key themes often repeated in the Bible such as heaven, the crucifixion, or sin. An internet search will provide a plethora of passages that connect with whatever theme you choose.

8) Jesus Connection*: All of Scripture points to Jesus. What in this passage directs our hearts and minds to Jesus? What does it tell us about Jesus? This process works especially well in the Old Testament.

9) Catchphrase*: This process involves condensing the main idea or purpose of the text into a short, easy to remember statement. While you may not remember the exact words of your Scripture reading. This helps you to carry the main idea with you throughout the day and perhaps even the week.

10) Artistic Expression*: Bring out your inner child and scribble out the Scripture as best as you can. What does this text look like?

11) Number of Insights*: Before you begin. Pick a number of insights you hope to gain from this text. You now have a numbered list to work from. What truths does this text present?

12) Common Thread*: This process involves synthesizing multiple sections of Scripture. When reading in multiple places in the Bible, try to find the common theme that connects them. This process can also work in a single chapter where multiple events are described.

13) Personal Application*: This process moves from understanding to action. What would it look like to live out this passage? What is a tangible act of obedience?

14) Philippians 4:8 Questions*: Use Philippians 4:8 to guide your meditation. What is true? What is honorable? What is right in this passage?

15) Proverbs Process: After reading a section of Scripture as well as a chapter of Proverbs, seek to find a proverb illustrated in the other section of Scripture.

16) Answer or Solution*: What problem does this Scripture solve? Or, what question does this Scripture answer?

17) Poetry: Similarly to the "Rewrite the Text" process, use the text to stimulate poetry. This process provides an easily remembered phrase you can carry through your day.

18) Bible Markup: Read a paper Bible with pens or highlighters. As an alternative, print out a section of Scripture. Highlight, circle, underline, draw arrows. John Piper's "Look at the Book" video series provides a good example of this process.

19) Joseph Hall Questions*: Use the following questions...

- 1) What is it (define and/or describe what it is) you are meditating upon?
- 2) What are its divisions or parts?
- 3) What causes it?
- 4) What does it cause; that is, what are its fruits and effects?
- 5) What is its place, location, or use?
- 6) What are its qualities and attachments?
- 7) What is contrary, contradictory, or different to it?
- 8) What compares to it?
- 9) What are its titles or names?
- 10) What are the testimonies or examples of Scripture about it?

20) Sentence Tracing: Similarly to the "Bible Markup" process, this practice involves writing out the text using a diagram structure to highlight the flow and argument of the text.

21) Summary: When reading a larger section of Scripture, summarize the passage to emphasize the main points or truths.

22) Study: Often Scripture reading will lead to confusion or questions. Write these questions down and turn to study to answer them.

23) Memorize the Text*: Commit a text to memory and repeat it to yourself throughout the day.

*Methods marked with an asterisk were specifically adapted from Don Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SCRIPTURE MEDITATION IN FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH DOUGLAS, GEORGIA

Jonathan Randall McDuffie, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. John D. Morrison

This ministry project was designed to equip college students at First Baptist Church in Scripture meditation. The purpose of the project was to increase students' understanding and practice of Scripture meditation. Chapter 1 explains the context, rationale, purpose, goals, and methodology of the project. Chapter 2 describes the biblical practice of meditation based on the exegesis of Psalm 1:1-3, Joshua 1:8, Philippians 4:8-9, and Psalm 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 79, 97, 99. Chapter 3 reviews the history of Scripture meditation in the church along with the spiritual benefits it produces, comparing and contrasting Scripture meditation with other forms of meditation in church history. Chapter 4 details the implementation of the project from creation through analysis of statistical results of the project. Chapter 5 presents an assessment of the purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the project, and concludes with suggested changes, theological and personal reflections.

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