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LECTIO DIVINA AS A CORPORATE WORSHIP EXERCISE AT
TRINITY CHURCH IN MENTOR OHIO

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LECTIO DIVINA AS A CORPORATE WORSHIP EXERCISE
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I dedicate this work to my patient family who has endured many days with me away to pursue my studies, not to mention long hours of reading and writing and the massive pile of books that never seemed to disappear. My wife Sarah is an amazing woman who is with me no matter what happens in the world. My two boys are so full of life and energy and constantly cheered me on throughout this program.

To the people at Trinity Church, you have watched me grow, mature, and taught me how to do life and ministry. Thank you for this opportunity to work with you once more on this project. Thank you for your patient endurance as I frequently try new ideas to deepen our corporate worship experience.

Lastly, to the great God who created and sustains all things. Thank you for giving us your Word to know you, hear your voice, and learn to follow you.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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PREFACE

This project is the result of years of prodding from the Holy Spirit and a constant desire to pursue a greater understanding of spiritual formation. I count it a great privilege to have the support of Pastor Paul Sartarelli and Trinity Church who have made the pursuit of this degree possible. Paul was a constant sounding board, worked with me on my Greek and Hebrew, and gave me valuable insight and advice. Special thanks to my good friend and partner in ministry Katherine Wetzel for editing this paper so thoroughly.

I am thankful to have had the opportunity to attend The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, hear from such an amazing faculty, and meet incredible peers in ministry. Dr. Matthew Westerholm especially challenged me in many ways during our classes together and continued to encourage and correct as my advisor in this project. Thanks for all your help and support in making this project a reality.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

God wants his people to be in relationship with him. This relationship is beyond a mere confession of faith but a living and active relationship full of communication. The primary way that God communicates with his people is through his Word. Trinity Church in Mentor, Ohio has as one of its core values the idea of “biblical and spiritual formation.” The staff and elders at the church are always looking for more ways to help the people of Trinity better experience a vibrant relationship with God through his Word, prayer, and fellowship. This project seeks to continue this process of biblical and spiritual formation through God’s Word.

Context

Located in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio, Trinity Church in Mentor is a congregation of around four hundred people in a fairly stable, middle-class community. While the church has seen its share of trials over its more than thirty-five year life, Trinity is currently experiencing a time of stability and joy in the life of the congregation. Yet like many suburban American churches, Trinity Church is in danger of becoming stagnant in ministry. Before focusing on some potential concerns in the congregation, the following is a discussion of some of the strengths of the people of Trinity.

One of the most obvious strengths of Trinity is the generosity of the people. Ever since its inception in the early 1980s, the congregation has given sacrificially to the work of the church as well as to needs in the community and around the world. As a small church plant, they needed a seemingly unsurmountable \$75,000 to purchase the land where the church now sits. God provided even more than they needed for their initial

payment. A few years later, the church assembled volunteers and partnered with an outside organization to construct the building themselves both by giving the money as well as putting hammer to nail to build the church.

Part of the church's financial stewardship over the years is due to quality leaders who ensure that the financial decisions the church makes are wise and prudent. Each year, the church ends up taking in more money than they spend, and they also have a three (or more) month emergency fund. In more recent years, the church has funded another building addition with only a small loan thanks to the continued generosity of the congregation. In addition, the people of Trinity give generously to missions both locally and globally.

Trinity is also a place of care for broken people. This care has shown itself in different ways over the years. Aside from a few years when the church endured significant tragedy, hurting people have found a home among the people of Trinity. In the past, in Lake County—the county where Trinity resides—when many other churches were in turmoil and multiple church splits and fights were happening, a number of those people made their way to Trinity to heal and find new community. Trinity now has thriving ministries for those grieving a loss as well as those dealing with divorce or its aftermath. Like the financial leaders, amazing people have stepped up to own these ministries and make sure that those who walk in the doors of the church feel cared for and experience the love of Jesus.

Yet the church also has places for improvement, some of which have been consistent throughout much of its history. As much as the church has been generous over the years, especially toward missions and those in need, the church has been less apt to volunteer time and energy to support those needs physically. While there are certainly pockets of people who have given volunteer time to missions and outreach, it seems like some people in the church over the years have been satisfied to give money and let other people do the hard work.

Lack of ministry engagement is an area that various ministry leaders and staff members have attempted to address over the years, and some progress does happen from time to time with many people volunteering for the annual Christmas Tree Giveaway as an example. Along the same lines, people at Trinity are less likely to attend special events or classes than serve, even if those events address a specific need that they might have. People seem to fill their lives with many other activities and church becomes just another one of those activities to attend during the week instead of a primary focus for discipleship and service.

Along with outside volunteer opportunities, the church has been challenged over the years to get more than a core group of church attenders to volunteer for ministry in the church as well. As an example of a typical Trinity member that regularly serves, one young woman serves with kid's ministry, youth ministry, worship ministry, and recently decided to fill a part-time paid role on staff. While this may be a little extreme when it comes to examples, ministry leaders at Trinity typically find themselves fighting over different volunteers or at least doing the difficult task of having to schedule people around all the different ministries they are already involved in as well as their full personal schedules.

Over the years, Trinity has been known by its attenders for quality teaching, especially in the pulpit but also in small groups of various types. Many members have been proud of their ever-growing body of knowledge about the Bible and the depth of studies in which they would participate. One example of this is a Sunday school class that would celebrate the anniversary of their study in the book of Daniel each year, even having a cake as they began their fifth year working through the one book.

While there is certainly nothing wrong with in-depth Bible study, the real purpose of studying the Bible is to facilitate life transformation, not just create more knowledgeable people. A more recent push, especially in women's ministry, has helped turn some of these learners into leaders of more learners and new levels of discipleship

are beginning to take place. However, when it comes to a more devotional reading of Scripture, or using Scripture as a prayer guide, there are few at Trinity who have any experience or who practice it regularly. This was confirmed by the research in chapter 4. Again, this is more due to lack of proper instruction than lack of desire on the part of any individuals. A devotional reading of Scripture allows the disciple to enter into a conversation with God through the text differently than typical Scripture study.

This final area is the primary focus for this ministry project. Within the context of a larger church focus on spiritual formation, this project will seek to help the church body discover and implement devotional reading techniques into their lives. However, with the aforementioned history of some Trinity members being unwilling to attend special classes or events to learn new, spiritually enriching activities, the focus for education will be the Sunday morning service since the vast majority of people in the church will be able to experience this type of discipleship.

Plan

Before embarking on the actual implementation of this project, it would be prudent to survey the church body to get an idea of what type of Scripture reading practices and habits the majority of people practice. Based solely on the numbers of people that participate in specific Bible study groups, it is likely that a large number of people practice regular Scripture reading with some kind of study to go along with that reading. The reading for this project, however, will not be the informational reading that attenders at Trinity typically engage in, but instead a more devotional reading that is not typically part of the curriculum of Trinity's discipleship programs.

As referenced above, the education and practice of this project will take place within the bounds of the Sunday morning worship service in order to reach the majority of the church and not have to rely on people's attendance at a specific class or event. Within the context of a church-wide emphasis on spiritual formation, the format of the

Sunday services will change to incorporate Scripture reading with the purpose of giving people tools to use in their own devotional lives. Eugene Peterson calls this “a way of reading that refuses to be reduced to *just* reading but intends the living of the text.”¹ Church, after all, is a place of formation, a place where people come to have their hearts changed, so to focus on the very words that were created to change hearts and give people the tools to do that outside of the church is well suited to the work of the church.

Lectio divina, or *divine reading*, has been practiced for well over 1,000 years in the history of the church and continues to be practiced today.² The desire of this project is to take the elements of *lectio divina*—*lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*—and practice them within the context of the Sunday morning worship service. This not only gives an opportunity to teach the congregation about Scripture meditation but will enhance the service itself by bringing in new elements and additional focus to Scripture in the service.

Paul says in Ephesians that it is his desire that the believers “comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God’s love, and to know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:18–19).³ By practicing this in the church service, it will give the congregation an opportunity to consider the love that “surpasses knowledge” as a community.

Over the course of a designated period of weeks, part of the service will be dedicated to practicing Scripture meditation using primarily the process of *lectio divina*. This slow, attentive look into Scripture will be a major change for many in the congregation and a deliberate and cautious approach is necessary so people do not

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 90.

² Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 91.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations come from the CSB.

become lost or discouraged along the way.

Since the point of *lectio divina* is to read Scripture with life change as the end goal, all the passages of Scripture will have some sort of emphasis on personal or spiritual changes that a person needs to make, allowing “the text to master [us].”⁴ As it is likely that this kind of devotional reading would be unfamiliar to many, the Psalms will provide the initial passages for the church to walk through, followed by selected passages in the Gospels. The Psalms provide the most inherently “devotional” texts in Scripture as well as some of the most personal language found in Scripture. In the Gospels we have the very words of Christ to encourage and instruct the believers. By focusing on Christ’s words in the Gospels, there will be ample opportunity for the congregation to hear from God and hopefully receive instruction from the Holy Spirit on an area of their life that needs further attention.

After the project has concluded, there will then be a follow-up survey to the congregation to gauge what people have learned throughout the project period and if there have been any changes to Scripture reading habits. Hopefully, through this project, the church members will not only have a new tool for approaching Scripture that they regularly use, but their interaction with Scripture will lead to new levels of transformation in their personal lives.

Rationale

The primary purpose of our lives is to be in relationship with God, and Scripture is the place where that conversation with God begins. In Deuteronomy 32:46–47, Moses gives this instruction to the people: “Take to heart all these words I am giving . . . for they are not meaningless words to you but they are your life.” To have a body of believers engaging with Scripture together creates a body of believers that is full

⁴ M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000), 57.

of life. In conversation with other believers, it seems that the process of approaching Scripture can be intimidating or they do not know where to start when it comes to reading God's Word so they become discouraged and give up, leaving the Scripture reading for the "professionals" at church who will then communicate that Scripture to them.

Instead, the Psalmist exhorts the believer to "delight in the law of the Lord" and to "meditate on it day and night" (Ps 1:2). But how can those who have not heard understand? One of the roles of the church is to *make disciples* (Matt 28:19), not just converts who fill a seat on Sunday mornings. John Piper calls the Word of God the "food for the inner man"⁵ that needs to be eaten regularly for a believer to remain healthy. Constance Cherry rightly defines the purpose of Scripture in the corporate gathering as "so people may be addressed by God through the Holy Scriptures and thereby changed for God's glory and kingdom."⁶ The practice of *lectio divina* empowers the church with one of many tools with which to engage Scripture in a meaningful way. In addition, as the pre-project assessment survey will bring to light, there may be many in the congregation who do not engage with Scripture regularly for one reason or another and this project will potentially provide a foundation for their own regular pursuit of God's Word.

Trinity is brimming with people from different walks of life, but there are a couple of larger groups within that community that come to mind. The first group is the well-churched Bible knowledge group, many of whom have been in church or at Trinity for much of their lives. For some in this group, their Bible interaction is primarily for gaining information and while it does lead to life change, they may not have the tools for a devotional and conversational reading of Scripture. The second group are people who are returning to church. For many of these people, they grew up in the Catholic church

⁵ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 25th anniv. ref. ed. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2011), 157.

⁶ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 70.

and are coming back to church because of their children but are finding a new home for themselves and a new relationship with Christ. It is essential that this group learn how to read this Bible in a life-changing and conversational way as well. For both of these groups, *lectio divina* can be a helpful tool for increased interaction with Scripture.

A secondary but still important part of this project is the need to increase the amount of Scripture read and heard during corporate worship. In a recent study performed by Cherry, she discovered that many “Bible” churches do not in fact have regular reading of Scripture in their own worship services.⁷ In fact, she discovered that some of those same churches devote more time to the giving of announcements than the public reading of Scripture. Trinity may no longer be a church that has an extended time of announcements each week, but the practice of reading and considering Scripture corporately is certainly an area where growth needs to occur. So, this project will serve to edify both individual believers in their personal walks with God as well as the church as a whole when it reads God’s Word together.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to increase spiritual formation and encourage Scripture reading habits in the members of Trinity Church of Mentor, Ohio through the use of Scripture meditation, primarily *lectio divina*, within the context of the corporate worship gatherings.

Goals

The following goals are to assess best the current situation among the attenders of Trinity as well as equip the church with a new Scripture reading and meditation practice.

1. The first goal was to assess the current level of regular Bible reading and the type of

⁷ Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 69.

Bible reading (study, devotional, memorization, and meditation) for thirty regular church attenders.

2. The second goal was to develop a plan and timeline under the supervision of a panel of church leaders to bring the principles of *lectio divina* into the corporate worship gathering.
3. The third goal was to equip the church body to better interact with Scripture through the teaching of *lectio divina* during the corporate worship gathering and to assess church attenders' practice of what they have learned at home.
4. The fourth goal was to assess the results of the project as compared to the initial assessment.

Specific research methodology was used to assess the completion of the four goals enumerated above. The following section will detail the methodology and the instruments as well as the measures of success for each goal.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these four goals. The first goal was to assess the current level of regular Bible reading and the type of Bible reading (study, devotional, memorization, and meditation) for thirty regular church attenders using the Bible Reading Self-Assessment (BRSA). This goal was measured by creating a pre-assessment for the volunteer group prior to the corporate worship *lectio divina* series. This goal was considered successfully met when thirty regular attenders at Trinity have successfully completed the BRSA and the results have been compiled for comparison to the final assessment.⁸

The second goal was to develop a plan and timeline under the supervision of a panel of church leaders to bring the principles of *lectio divina* into the corporate worship gathering. This goal was measured by a panel of church leaders including the Lead Pastor, at least one Elder, and at least one lay leader as to its structure and potential effectiveness for use in the worship service. Further, a short, weekly “homework” was

⁸ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

available to anyone in the church (but required of the assessed group) to keep track of their learning. This goal was considered successfully met when the initial plan and homework has been created and evaluated by the panel of leaders from Trinity followed by a revision to the plan, if necessary, and a final approval by all panel members.

The third goal was to equip the church body to better interact with Scripture through the teaching of *lectio divina* during the corporate worship gathering and to assess church attenders' practice of what they have learned at home. This goal was measured by the completion of each week's lesson plan as well as the distribution of "homework" to the church body (with special attention to those who took the assessment) for them to attempt the week's lesson on *lectio divina* at home. Those in this group shall fill out a simple form to show whether or not they have completed the homework. This goal was considered successfully met when the entire series has been completed and all of the assessment group have reported back.

The fourth goal was to assess the results of the project as compared to the initial assessment. This goal was measured by readministering the BRSA to the original assessed group to evaluate any changes in frequency or practice of regular Scripture reading over the course of the weekly series. This goal was considered successfully met when the final results of the second BRSA has been collected from all participants and tabulated. Then, these results were compared to the original results using a paired *t-test* to see if there is any improvement in the assessed group during that time period.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Lectio divina. A way of reading the text of Scripture consisting of four different stages: *lectio* (read the text), *mediatio* (meditate on the text), *oratio* (pray the

text), and *contemplatio* (live the text by applying it to our lives).⁹ Some writers have as many as six stages, and writers and scholars debate the “*contemplatio*” stage; however, for the purposes of this paper, we will only consider those four stages as well as the final stage being primarily that of personal application.

Spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is intentional activity on the part of a believer or group of believers to pursue a deeper understanding of Scripture, the attributes of God, and a relationship with God “for the purpose of godliness.”¹⁰ Second Corinthians 4:16 reminds the believer that God does the work of renewing us daily. Therefore, while we make the effort of participating in spiritual formation activities, it is truly a work of grace from God that actually forms, transforms, and renews.¹¹

Three delimitations will apply to this project. First, while the entire congregation will experience the teaching, only a select group of adult regular attenders were a part of the survey group. Those in the survey group had an already consistent attendance record for Sunday worship and agreed to attend every service during the course of the study period. Second, the instruction took place during Sunday worship. Rather than teach a special class, teaching on Sunday mornings allowed the greatest levels of participation due to the somewhat inconsistent nature with Trinity attenders attending special classes. This approach limited the amount of time available for teaching. Third, the teaching occurred over the course of five weeks. This is due to the second delimitation of focusing the teaching solely during the worship service.

⁹ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 91.

¹⁰ Most of this definition is my own. I added “for the purpose of godliness” based on the wording of Donald Whitney describing spiritual disciplines in general. Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 10.

¹¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 7.

Conclusion

God has given his people his Word as a life-giving, vibrant text. It is our job to respond to his invitation to interact and live with his Word through Scripture reading and meditation. The history of the church has provided many practices for focusing our attention on God, and one of those is *lectio divina*, the practice of spiritual reading. Chapter 2 will focus on the biblical and theological basis for Scripture meditation. Chapter 3 will look at church history as well as current practice for the foundations of *lectio divina* and Bible meditation in general. Chapter 4 will outline the specific methodologies used to assess the attendees Scripture reading practices and then practice corporate Scripture meditation. Finally, chapter 5 will evaluate the project's goals and include personal reflections on the project.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR LECTIO DIVINA AS A CORPORATE WORSHIP EXERCISE

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the Bible teaches the importance of Bible meditation as both a personal and corporate worship practice. While the whole of Scripture speaks to its own power and necessity for the believer's life, this chapter will focus on four passages. Psalms 1 and 119, along with Hebrews 4, provide a foundation for the practice and benefits for Bible meditation, while Colossians 3 paints a picture of a congregation that engages with Scripture together. While chapter three covers the specific process for meditation called *lectio divina*, this chapter covers general scriptural principles for biblical meditation.

Scripture Calls the Righteous to Delight in the Word of God

Since there are different definitions of meditation, we begin by defining meditation according to Scripture. As Richard Foster observes, the Hebrew Bible primarily uses two different words for “meditation”: שִׁיחַ and הִגָּה.¹ The word שִׁיחַ carries with it an idea of “speaking enthusiastically,” where one would read the text and then verbalize the words with emotion and expression.² הִגָּה refers to the sound of a cooing, groaning, or another inarticulate sound.³ Foster continues his unpacking of the biblical use of meditation by listing the various other meanings: “listening to God’s word,

¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th anniversary ed., 3rd ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 15.

² Francis Brown, C. Briggs, and S. R. Driver, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1906), 966.

³ Brown, Briggs, and Driver, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 211.

reflecting on God’s words, rehearsing God’s deeds, ruminating on God’s law, and more.”⁴ Thus, שִׁיר not only refers to meditation in the traditional sense of personally reading and thinking about the text, but “speaking enthusiastically” can indicate a *public* meditation that begins with listening and reflecting and ends by sharing with others.

Psalm 1 and Delighting in God’s Word

Psalm 1 provides the opening exhortations to the Book of Psalms.⁵ In this introduction, the author gives the hearer a choice between the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked.⁶ By placing this Psalm at the head of the Psalter, the editor calls the future users of the Psalms to heed Psalm 1 before entering the rest of the book. Peter Craigie argues that the introductory Psalm did not begin as a psalm for worship but rather a work of poetry classified as a wisdom psalm because of its relation to other wisdom literature in the Old Testament.⁷ After reading Psalm 1, the rest of the Psalter—and of course, all of Scripture—becomes an instruction manual for the path of the righteous. The key to unlocking this manual is not a simple, cursory reading but a deep engagement with the Scriptures through meditation.

To live a happy, blessed, and fulfilled life, the righteous must live according to the Word of God. If Christians today are to live according to the Scriptures, they must have a picture of the life of happiness and joy that comes from deeply knowing God. Mere church attendance and lip-service to God will not lead to true happiness. Psalm 1 demonstrates that happiness comes from being deeply rooted in all of Scripture. A more

⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 16.

⁵ There is agreement among commentators that at some point an editor added Psalm 1—and probably Psalm 2 as well—to the beginning of the Psalter to introduce and set the tone for the rest of the Psalms. Tremper Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, in vol. 15–16 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 56; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 2000), 59.

⁶ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 1–72: Songs for the People of God*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 19.

⁷ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 58.

traditional reading of Psalm 1 begins with “blessed” (NIV, NKJV, NASB) as the translation for אֲשֶׁרֵי, but perhaps the CSB’s rendering of אֲשֶׁרֵי as “happy” is closer to the original Hebrew. “Oh the happiness” might be the most literal translation of אֲשֶׁרֵי.⁸ The LXX here uses the same word here, μακάριος, that occurs in Matthew while Jesus delivers his Sermon on the Mount.⁹ Both English words, “happy” and “blessed,” tend to be problematic for modern readers because “happy” seems trite and “blessed” can have additional connotations that imply “both physical and material prosperity (in form of increase in quantity and quality).”¹⁰

In a world full of messages encouraging physical and material prosperity, the Bible’s definition of happiness stands in stark contrast to the world’s. Michael Wilcock summarizes biblical happiness as “a life of delight and fruitfulness, with a sense of worth.”¹¹ Wilcock’s definition seems to make the most sense in context with the rest of the Psalter. The promise here cannot be worldly prosperity or unending emotional happiness because future Psalms lament the prosperity of the wicked. Instead, the pronouncement “Oh the happiness!” is a promise that the faithful to God and his Word shall experience a life of delight and fulfilment.¹² Happiness is not a temporary condition, but rather a continual journey in the pursuit of God.¹³ Life may not be full of singing and dancing or even the feeling of happiness, but life can have contentment and satisfaction

⁸ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 346.

⁹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 64.

¹⁰ Simeon F. Kehinde, “A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Metaphors in Psalm 1 and Its Ethical Implications,” *Practical Theology* 7, (2014): 354.

¹¹ Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms*, 19.

¹² Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in vol 5 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: With the New International Version*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 52.

¹³ Kathleen A. Harmon, “From the Beginning to the End: Psalm 1, Walking the Way toward Praise of God,” *Liturgical Ministry* 20, no. 4 (2011): 181.

in the pursuit of God.¹⁴ The source of this contentment begins with meditation on the Word of God.

If meditation on Scripture results in “happiness,” how do the righteous find this type of happiness? Verse 2 contains the secret to happiness: delight (יִפְתֵּחַ). Here, Goldingay translates יִפְתֵּחַ as “pleasure,” indicating that finding pleasure in God is the normal condition for his followers.¹⁵ John Piper’s writings contain some of the richest meditations on the ideas of delight and pleasure. In his introductory chapter to *Desiring God*, he recognizes the universal human desire for happiness and encourages the reader not to resist this desire. At the same time, he states that “the deepest and most enduring happiness is found only in God. Not from God, but in God.”¹⁶ Many of Piper’s writings contend that the pursuit of delight is not optional but rather a biblical imperative. Humans should pursue delight with all their energies knowing that true delight only comes from God.¹⁷

The Psalmist, then, shows that the happy man avoids the wicked and instead *delights*—takes pleasure, finds peace and satisfaction—in the law of the Lord (תּוֹרָה). Craigie defines the use of תּוֹרָה here as “the instruction which God gives to mankind as a guide for life.”¹⁸ This definition encompasses the Pentateuch, the Psalter, and—for

¹⁴ Raymond Apple, “The Happy Man of Psalm 1,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (July 2012): 181.

¹⁵ John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 83.

¹⁶ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2011), 28.

¹⁷ For further reading, see John Piper, *Desiring God*; John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000); John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001).

¹⁸ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 60.

modern readers—the whole of Scripture.¹⁹ Too often, readers can become bored with Scripture when it seems irrelevant to their story. However, Psalm 1 contends that the “happy” delight in God’s law regardless of temporary feelings, when it does not seem relevant, or when we do not understand its meaning. God meets his people in his Word even through dry seasons and difficult moments in life. Goldingay says that confronting a difficult moment in life “is the moment when studying Scripture becomes interesting, significant, and important.”²⁰ Just as a simple English definition of “happy” will not suffice, so, too, “delight” carries more weight, seeking something deeper than fleeting human emotions and into something that only comes from God, the source of all life. N.T. Wright notes that the people of Israel reading this psalm after the temple’s destruction could no longer experience God’s presence in the sacred space of the temple. Instead, they only had access to God’s presence through his Word.²¹ Today, God’s Word continues to be the main place where his people experience his presence.

The righteous will delight in God’s presence through his Word. In the second half of verse 2, the psalmist gives the reader the *way* to delight in God’s Word: *הגה* or “meditate” on it day and night. It is not possible to delight in God’s Word by simply hearing it read or even reading many parts of it frequently. Meditation requires a slower and more deliberate pace while reading.²² This absorption helps the reader move beyond simply *hearing* the word and toward becoming a *doer* of the word (cf. Jas 1:22–23). Looking at the context of Psalm 1, the murmuring-meditation of *הגה* (v. 2) also carries

¹⁹ Hamilton states that while initially referring to only to the Torah, as writings were added to the Scriptures, this definition grew to encompass “the history of God’s acts to deliver his people and all of the instruction that he has given in his word.” James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 93.

²⁰ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 84.

²¹ N. T. Wright, *The Case for the Psalms: Why They Are Essential*, First Edition (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 102.

²² Donald Whitney compares this method of absorbing Scripture to the way a well-watered plant drinks water. Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 51.

with it the idea of congregational prayer and praise, not just individual.²³ The happiness God promises in Psalm 1 works itself out in the congregation of the faithful as they pursue God *together*.²⁴ In this way, meditation becomes a corporate exercise where the people of God gather to experience God's presence and delight in him through his Word.

While Scripture meditation certainly can result in life-transformation, it is curious that the Psalmist does not mandate obedience here. He only mandates *delight* through meditation.²⁵ Obedience without delight can become heartless legalism. Legalism is a dangerous trap for the follower of God to fall into, and finding delight in meditation is not only the alternative to the way of the wicked but also the antidote for legalism. Instead of seeing תּוֹרָה (torah) as a burden, Michael LeFebvre suggests that “it seems more likely the psalmist is rejoicing because of the holy and righteous kingdom *torah* promises to him.”²⁶ So, followers of God reject legalism and delight in the promises of God found only through careful meditation on his Word.

God loves his people, so he does not give his righteous followers rote tasks to perform simply to prove their allegiance to him. This is especially true when it comes to Scripture meditation. God gives his people Scripture for *their* benefit, that they might experience him and grow through reading. In verse 3, the Psalmist provides an extended simile explaining the results of delighting in *torah* through meditation. First, the one who delights in the meditation of *torah* is like a tree planted beside flowing streams. The verb “plant” here is a passive participle indicating that this planting is something that happens *to* the person. This planting is an intentional act, done by God, placing his people beside a

²³ Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 51.

²⁴ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 84.

²⁵ Michael LeFebvre, “‘On His Law He Meditates’: What Is Psalm 1 Introducing?,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 4 (June 2016): 444.

²⁶ LeFebvre, “‘On His Law He Meditates,’” 446.

flowing stream to receive constant nourishment from him.²⁷ The planting here also indicates that blessings (cf. v.1) come from God’s initiation, as all wisdom and knowledge come from God.²⁸ God’s work of planting the one who delights to meditate on his Word leads to that person yielding “fruit in its season.” The picture of planting demonstrates that growth to maturity is slow and intentional, receiving constant nourishment from the flowing streams. Growth eventually leads to fruit in its season, and God strengthens those he plants so they can withstand even difficult times—the leaf will not wither.²⁹

The final line of verse 3 states, “whatever he does prospers.” Proper understanding of the word “prospers” is important since the biblical definition of “prospers” is different from a modern understanding. The Psalmist does not use the word to mean an economic prospering but rather biblical *shalom*.³⁰ To prosper is to find peace and contentment in the joy of the Lord, not money, power, or worldly success.³¹ The pursuit of biblical wisdom through meditation then results in *biblical* success as the happy one joyfully lives out the instruction found within the Word of God.³²

The verb tenses in verses 1–3 give further insights into the importance of delighting in God’s Word through meditation. C. John Collins states that the author of the Psalm used the “gnomic” or “proverbial” perfect tense in verse 1, indicating that the man is happy because he either *never walked* or *did not walk* in the counsel of the wicked. The typical case of a biblically happy person is one who does not associate with the counsel

²⁷ Gerald Henry Wilson, *Psalms, Volume 1*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 97.

²⁸ Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms*, 21.

²⁹ Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 65.

³⁰ Harmon, “From Beginning to the End,” 182.

³¹ Brown, Briggs, and Driver, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 1023.

³² Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 61.

of the wicked but instead receives counsel from God's Word.³³ In contrast, the verbs in 2–3 express the future condition; they are in the imperfect forms, or what Collins calls the “gnomic future.” In other words, “it *will happen* this way, because it *always happens* this way.”³⁴ To summarize, the one who is happy is happy because his *normal state* is delighting in God's law and this person *will* yield fruit because that is the *normal state* of one who delights in God's law through meditation.

Verse 4 and 5 contrast the lives of the righteous in verses 2 and 3 with the lives of the wicked. The wicked will “blow away” and “not stand up in the judgment.” While the Psalmist probably immediately refers to earthly judgment, there is an eschatological sense in these words as well, pointing to the eternal judgment of the wicked.³⁵ When looking at Psalm 1 while considering the rest of the Psalter, the promises here might not seem true. Other Psalms lament the struggle of the righteous as the wicked seem to prevail (cf. Ps 10), apparently contradicting the teaching of Psalm 1. Why should God's people continue to follow God and continue to seek his face through his Word when evil seems to prosper so often? Verses 4 and 5 provide justification to think that while some earthly judgment may occur, even those who avoid earthly judgment will never be able to stand with God's people in the end.³⁶ The “assembly of the righteous” is made of the happy people who delight in God's Word, meditate on his instruction, and are planted by God near his nourishing stream.

The final verse talks about the present and future states of the righteous and the wicked. While “the way of the wicked leads to ruin,” the “LORD watches over the righteous.” Although the CSB translates וַיִּשְׁמַר as “watches,” perhaps “knows” is a better

³³ C. John Collins, “Psalm 1: Structure and Rhetoric,” *Presbyterion* 31 (April 2005): 44–45.

³⁴ Collins, “Psalm 1: Structure and Rhetoric,” 45. Emphasis original.

³⁵ Harmon, “From Beginning to the End,” 182.

³⁶ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1 Psalms 1–41, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 192.

translation. Alan Ross says that “watches” here is “continuous or durative in nature.”³⁷ This is more than God simply knowing information about his people, but a deep caring, a relationship, and adopting as his own children.³⁸ The Lord knows his people, but the way for his people to know him is through meditating on his Word day and night.

Beginning with Psalm 1, the call is to live the life of the righteous, the happy, the blessed. The righteous learn God’s Spirit-empowered plan for this life through regular meditation on the wisdom of all of Scripture and it results in a divine-knowing relationship with God himself. Piper puts it this way: “The summons to all of us is: Come, see (by your meditation) and savor (by your delight) the wonders of God revealed in this great, divine instruction.”³⁹ So, as the Psalmist says, when the follower of God meditates on Scripture day and night, he delights in God’s laws, grows in God’s wisdom, and is comforted to know that he will not suffer the judgment of the wicked but live under the watchful eye of God himself.

Bible Meditation Leads to a Life of Following God’s Commands

There may be no more significant passage on the importance of Scripture meditation than Psalm 119. This Psalm gives an example of Bible meditation—delighting in the Word, savoring all that God has written, and seeking wisdom that can only come from God. Psalm 119 is an extended acrostic poem based on the Hebrew alphabet. In Hebrew poetry, the use of alphabetic acrostic signified completeness, and here the author communicates the comprehensiveness of Scripture for life.⁴⁰ Only a person truly in love with God can find this amount of joy and satisfaction in Scripture. This passage is a vow

³⁷ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:193.

³⁸ Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 66.

³⁹ John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 129.

⁴⁰ James H. Waltner, *Psalms*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 575.

of love and loyalty to God, as the Psalmist reflects on knowing God through his Word.⁴¹ Any discussion on the importance of Scripture for the believer must consider the words of Psalm 119 and what it has to say about loving, learning from, and absorbing God's Word. To live the life of the "happy" person of Psalm 1, followers of God need to follow the example of meditation found in Psalm 119. If the Bible is meant to speak to all areas of life and be the place of discovery of God's promises, then meditation is the necessary step for life and godliness. Each stanza points to the importance of meditating on God's Word in its own way but the following focuses only on the ב (beth) section, or verses 9–16, since it encompasses enough of the themes of meditation appropriate for the present discussion.

Sin is a constant struggle for all people. Since the fall of man and the curse (Gen 3:1–19), all people fight daily with the temptation to sin. God, however, does not want his people to remain in their sin (Rom 6:1) and offers the solution to discovering a life of righteousness: walking daily in the statutes of God. Through a life of prayerful meditation on God's Word, believers discover God's definition of righteousness and can begin to live out his commands.

To begin this stanza, the Psalmist asks the question, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" Goldingay suggests that this is a rhetorical question because the answer should be obvious to the young man, or anyone else reading this teacher's instruction.⁴² The Psalmist provides the obvious answer in the second half of the verse: "by keeping your word." Here, the author chooses the Hebrew word דְּבָרִים for "word." Waltner indicates דְּבָרִים (word) is a "divine word which proceeds from the mouth of God . . . Also the sum total of his revealed will."⁴³ Therefore, it is not just a matter of

⁴¹ VanGemeran, *Psalms*, 736.

⁴² Goldingay, *Psalms*, 385.

⁴³ Waltner, *Psalms*, 577.

hearing God's Word but gaining an understanding of the *totality* of God's Word and then *keeping* its teachings. God here is the "wisdom teacher par excellence," as the teachings from his Word far exceed those of man's writings.⁴⁴ The way of purity comes from keeping God's Word. This reflects the message of Psalm 1 (cf. Ps 119:1–2) that through a deep-rootedness in Scripture by meditation the young man is able to learn to live a life of purity. This level of rootedness is only possible through a relationship with Jesus Christ and must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The approach to reading Scripture is not the same as reading any other text. The reader must come expectant, seeking the very presence of God within the words. The process of meditation requires a different mental and emotional posture. Meditation requires that the reader slow down and absorb the text with their mind—mental—and heart—emotional. Verses 10 and 11 explain the posture necessary for Scripture meditation. Verse 10 begins, "I have sought you with all my heart," and verse 11 states, "I have treasured your word in my heart." Expecting to find God and therefore seeking him in Scripture with "all my heart" is the proper response to the revelation of God.⁴⁵ The reader first *seeks* after God, then moves to *treasuring* the word in his heart. This act of treasuring is not simply knowing or memorizing but instead a "holistic living in devotion to the Lord."⁴⁶ Holistic living in devotion to the Lord is a continual commitment to living more in line with what Scripture commands. The path to this holistic living comes from regular, devotional interaction with God's Word—seeking and treasuring. The Psalmist speaks to this commitment but knows he cannot obey God without God's help. He makes a plea to God: "Don't let me wander from your commands." He also recognizes that meditation leads to understanding the path to righteousness, stating in verse 11 that the

⁴⁴ Leslie C. Allen et al., *Psalms 101–150*, in vol. 21 of Word Biblical Commentary, (Nashville: Nelson, 2002), 142.

⁴⁵ VanGemenen, *Psalms*, 740.

⁴⁶ VanGemenen, *Psalms*, 740.

results of treasuring God’s Word are that “I may not sin against you.” Followers of Jesus learn of this commitment to wholeheartedly living out God’s Word from time spent seeking God and treasuring the Scriptures.⁴⁷

Biblical meditation is not meant to be an entirely solo activity. Certainly, the hard work of meditation needs to occur when a person is alone with God, but one of the results of meditation is that people then share the Word with others. The response of someone who has truly experienced God in the Scriptures continues in verses 13 and 14. Here, the Psalmist states that he will now proclaim the judgments (טִפְפִּנִּי) from God’s mouth. טִפְפִּנִּי here can mean judgments, ordinances, or rules.⁴⁸ Goldingay reminds his readers, “When we take things on our lips, they become a part of us.”⁴⁹ When one proclaims something to others, those other people expect that person to live by that proclamation. This external expression of the Psalmist’s “inner loyalty” reaches its peak as he rejoices in God’s way as much as in all riches (v. 14).⁵⁰ Again, here is another public display of affection for the law, the declarations, the word of God. Proclamation of God’s law and the act of living it out happen within community. Yes, these are personal declarations of loyalty, but they work themselves out in the presence of others. When Bible meditation and proclamation occur in community, the entire assembly receives God’s commands together and can encourage each other to follow his decrees.

There are numerous descriptions throughout Scripture which liken the Word of God to things of human understanding. Examples include God’s Word as sweet as honey (Pss 19:10; 119:103; Ezra 3:3), precious (Ps 139:17), a lamp or light (Ps 119:105; 2 Pet 1:19), and a mirror (Jas 1:23–25). In these examples, the Psalmists echoes the sentiment

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Grogan, *Psalms*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 128.

⁴⁸ The Christian Standard Bible translates טִפְפִּנִּי as “judgments,” The New American Standard Version as “ordinances,” and the English Standard Version as “rules.”

⁴⁹ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 387.

⁵⁰ VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 740.

of Psalm 19:10, that God’s words are of greater worth than gold. Jesus’s words in Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” make a perfect application here. The Psalmist treasures God’s Word, and the actions and attitudes of his heart rightly follow along with his treasuring of Scripture. God’s declarations are not a burden, but a path to an abundant life, and are therefore of more worth than all the treasures in the world.⁵¹

The final declarations of the ב (beth) stanza of Psalm 119 are definitive “I will” statements. First, the Psalmist declares that he will meditate (שִׁיחַ) on God’s precepts (פְּקוּדֵי־יְהוָה). Unlike Psalm 1’s הִגֵּה (meditate), with its sense of murmuring over, שִׁיחַ has a root meaning of an “enthusiastic, and emotion-filled form of speaking,”⁵² yet another example of how meditation can be communal as the reader speaks the words with enthusiasm to others. In addition, the second half of the sentence uses the word וּבִטּוֹ, giving the sense that this form of meditation is an enthusiastic, slow beholding of God’s precepts and ways.⁵³ The second “I will” statement is that he will delight (אֶשְׂתַּעֲשַׂע) in God’s statutes (בְּחֻקֵּי־יְהוָה). While “delighting in commands” might sound strange, only through consistent interaction with God’s Word can his followers find true joy and happiness. The Psalmist concludes by stating that he will not forget God’s word. This is the return of דְּבַר־יְהוָה (word) as a bookend to the stanza. Of course, the proclamation that he will not forget God’s word is also an admittance that there is a possibility he can forget.⁵⁴ This completes the thought which began in verse 9, that the way to live a pure life is to embed God’s word in one’s life through meditation and never forget what God has said.⁵⁵

Meditation is essential to learning how God calls his people to live. The only

⁵¹ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 388.

⁵² VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 740.

⁵³ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 388.

⁵⁴ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 388.

⁵⁵ Waltner, *Psalms*, 578.

way to truly know God's Word is to allow it to sink into one's heart and mind and allow it to give understanding, knowledge, and clarity. Meditation also becomes communal because the one who "stores up" the Word will also declare what God has commanded to others. Not only is it important to experience God's Word alone, but God intends those who follow his Word will also proclaim what he says to others.

Dwelling on Scripture in Community Is Essential

The new life found in Jesus is one of submission and obedience to Christ as he has revealed himself in Scripture. However, the Christian life is not meant to be a solo journey. God designed the church to be a community of believers, studying his Word together and loving one another. In the book of Colossians, Paul reminds the believers about the centrality of Christ, especially over the heresy growing in their church, and how to live the life of the new person in light of Christ.⁵⁶ The new life in which Paul so strongly commends early in chapter 3 also includes a new *community* life. The Christian life is not just about putting "to death what belongs to your earthly nature," (3:5) or even putting on "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" (3:12). The new life includes love, "the perfect bond of unity" (3:14). As the people of God come together, an essential part of the gathering is their corporate experience with the Word of God.

In chapter 3 of Colossians, Paul appears to list virtues he wants *individual* believers to have. However, he is primarily addressing the Colossians with the use of the second person plural of "you," indicating these are virtues he wants the *congregation* to have.⁵⁷ Paul's exhortation to the Colossians is to become a certain type of people, not simply righteous individuals, formed by Christ without the boundaries of race,

⁵⁶ N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 12(Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 26–27.

⁵⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 275.

background, or social status.⁵⁸ It follows, then, that it is important to read this passage in light of the entire church community and not just as a prescription for individual believers. Paul wants the entire church to become a place where the peace of Christ will βραβεύω (rule) in their hearts (3:15). The only way to have the peace of Christ βραβεύω (rule) within the church is to have a body of believers saturated in the Word of God. This ruling peace within the church brings harmony among the body and settles conflicts because the church gets its wisdom from leaders who meditate on and know the Scriptures.⁵⁹

The way to live the life Paul describes in 3:5–3:15 is to know and follow the commands of God. The only way to truly know the commands of God is to spend time *dwelling* on the Word in meditation. Paul instructs the believers to “let the word of Christ dwell richly among you” (v. 16). The church then, needs to be a place where God’s Word dwells—not simply a place where there are cursory readings or summarized Bible stories, but a place where the word *lives*. What is this “word” that must dwell among the believers? Paul’s use of λόγος here does have some debate among various scholars; however, the important agreement is that the λόγος points back to the message of the gospel of Christ.⁶⁰ If the evangelical church believes that all Scripture ultimately points to Christ, then all Scripture fits within Paul’s use of λόγος and is suitable for use in the church. Paul speaks to Timothy about the importance of *all Scripture* (2 Tim 3:16–17),

⁵⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 275.

⁵⁹ F. F. Bruce translates this word as “arbitrate,” calling believers to always have relations with other believers in mind and to let Christ’s peace be the arbitrator when necessary. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 282. Douglas Moo gives the picture of an “umpire,” rendering verdicts when there is conflict. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 283.

⁶⁰ Typically translated “word,” as in the CSB, Moo, however, translates it here as “message.” Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 285. However, these words are not necessarily the words that Christ himself spoke, but rather the message *about* Christ, or the gospel. T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*. The International Critical Commentary of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (New York: C. Scribner’s, 1929), 290. Other potential meanings could be the message about Christ Paul proclaims in 1:15–20 or the word Christ speaks presently to the believers through his Spirit. Regardless, all ultimately point back to the message of the gospel of Christ. N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 148.

likely referring to the Old Testament writings which ultimately tell the story of Christ himself (Lk 24:25–26).⁶¹ Peter then establishes the authority of Paul’s writings as Holy Spirit-inspired Scripture in his second letter (2 Pet 1:20-21), further emphasizing the message of Christ extending to both Old and New Testaments.⁶²

When the body of Christ gathers, they should encounter God through his Word. The sermon, of course, plays a significant role in this encounter but, too often, the Word of Christ takes a back seat during the rest of the service. The Word, the message of Christ, must “dwell richly among you,” Paul says. This is a corporate indwelling of the Word, a place where the message of Christ takes up “permanent residence.”⁶³ The general sense is that *throughout* the worship of the church, the message of Jesus should be a central feature. David Peterson says that when Christians gather to minister to each other, “there is a corporate, spiritual engagement with God, in the Holy Spirit, through [Christ’s] words.”⁶⁴ One of the ways that the church can assure the Word of Christ takes up permanent residence is by corporate meditation on the Word.

The word *πλουσίως*, translated “richly” in the CSB (3:16), highlights the importance of meditation as a practice for the church. This refers to the *way* in which the Word—or message—of Christ is to dwell in the church. Moo says the use of the Word “should not be superficial or passing but . . . it should be a deep and penetrating contemplation that enables the message to have transforming power in the life of the

⁶¹ James R. White, *Scripture Alone* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 50-51.

⁶² White, *Scripture Alone*, 59-60.

⁶³ Abbott disagrees with the translation of *ἐν ὑμῖν* as “among you,” stating that it does not adequately communicate the idea of “indwelling,” and prefer “in you as a collective body.” Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, 290. James Dunn, however, understands the sense of indwelling in the translation “among you” and notes that it can refer both to the acts of preaching and teaching as well as the work of the Spirit through the Word as the readers allow its work in their lives. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 236. Here, Moo says that the message of Christ should “take up permanent residence” or “find a home with you.” Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 286.

⁶⁴ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 198.

community.”⁶⁵ A “deep and penetrating contemplation” of Scripture paints a picture of meditation. While Moo offers a precise description, Wright takes a more poetic approach, saying, “The word is to dwell in them ‘richly’: the church is to be stocked with good teaching as a palace is filled with treasures.”⁶⁶ The pages of Scripture contain a depth and wealth of wisdom and knowledge that is inexhaustible and worth more than gold (Ps 19:10) or all the riches in the world. However, money hidden in a closet does nothing for its owner. Only when riches are used do they become effective. The same is true of Scripture. The Bible requires active participation and response from its users, and it requires slow, careful study and meditation to plumb the riches and allow the text to dwell, to find a home, among the believers.⁶⁷

The next aspect of corporate worship that Paul requires of the church is “teaching and admonishing” (3:16). Certainly, Paul means that the “teaching and admonishing” is all based on the Word of Christ as it informs and instructs the teachers.⁶⁸ Paul notes too that the teaching and admonishing is to be “in all wisdom.” A chapter earlier in 2:3, Paul says that Christ is “God’s mystery” and that “in him are hidden all the treasures of *wisdom* and knowledge” (emphasis added). So, the wisdom about Christ, who himself is the embodiment of wisdom, is found in his message and is then found in the character of those who teach about Christ.⁶⁹

Paul is an advocate for the preaching of the Word of God (1:28), but here, he appears to make the case that another way the Word dwells richly, teaches, and admonishes is through “songs, hymns and spiritual songs” (3:16). Bruce attempts to explain what may be happening here by looking at Tertullian’s description of the

⁶⁵ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 286.

⁶⁶ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 148.

⁶⁷ Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 237.

⁶⁸ Bruce, *Colossians*, 283.

⁶⁹ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 149.

Christian love-feast where “each is invited to sing to God in the presence of others from what he knows of the holy scriptures or from his own heart.”⁷⁰ This would require a church full of believers who have memorized and meditated on the Word of Christ. Knowing that the written word was scarce in Paul’s day, songs and meditations were likely tools used by the early believers to “treasure God’s word in their hearts” (Ps 119:11). Again, not implying that preaching the Word is not important, but that the Word should fill the songs of the church as well. Taken another way, the sung worship of the church is a response to the wise teaching and admonishing of the Word of Christ.⁷¹ James Wilhoit states that in this context, “the emphasis was on a corporate worship that flowed from the group’s knowledge of Scripture.”⁷² The group’s knowledge of Scripture came from the preaching of God’s Word and from the singing of God’s Word. Even singing Scripture-based songs—and singing the Psalms themselves—was a form of meditation as the melodies work to plant the Word in the hearts of the believers.⁷³

There is no reason here to join the discussion of the proper meanings of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” except perhaps to say that Paul likely allows the breadth of vocal, melodic expression in sung worship.⁷⁴ The key here is that the voice “must express the praise of the heart if the singing is to be really addressed to God.”⁷⁵ While singing in worship is not the focus of the present discussion, one application of this passage is the importance of singing Scripture. This does not necessarily mean singing

⁷⁰ Bruce, *Colossians*, 284.

⁷¹ James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 141.

⁷² Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered*, 141.

⁷³ Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 99.

⁷⁴ Scott Aniol, “Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: Assessing the Debate,” *Artistic Theologian* 6 (2018): 13.

⁷⁵ Bruce, *Colossians*, 285.

the exact text of Scripture or even transliterated text—although that is an excellent approach to worship—but that the themes and content of the songs should be informed directly by the content of Scripture. Donald Whitney’s list of meditation practices covered in the following chapter even includes singing Scripture passages as a meditation method.⁷⁶ While the focus here is on reading and contemplating the Word, singing Scripture is another significant way to dwell on the message of Christ in community.

The key point of this passage as it relates to the present project is that Paul wants the Word of Christ to dwell in the community of believers. This passage has a corporate focus. While individual Scripture meditation is needed and important, there is also a place for meditation and memorization of Scripture within the corporate gathering.⁷⁷ Taking time during the corporate gathering to practice various disciplines relating to Scripture would not only build up the individual believer but also allow another way for the Word of Christ to dwell richly among the assembly.

Scripture Promises that Dwelling on the Word Will Transform Our Lives

The Christian disciple does not ultimately dwell or meditate on Scripture to gain more knowledge and understanding. Rather, the end-goal in meditating on Scripture is godliness.⁷⁸ Hebrews 4:12–13 explains the penetrating nature of God’s Word; its effect on exposing the community of faith and the individual with truth and leading that community into Christlikeness.

These two verses situated at the end of Hebrews 4 provide a conclusion to the argument of Hebrews up to that point and a bridge to the next section of the book.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 63.

⁷⁷ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered*, 140.

⁷⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 54.

⁷⁹ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 122.

Hebrews begins by acknowledging the God who *spoke* to the “fathers by the prophets,” (1:1). The author immediately shifts focus from how God used to speak—through the prophets—to his more recent revelation through his Son, Jesus Christ (1:2). The call for the audience in the first few chapters is to follow the pattern for worship set by the Old Testament: God speaks, and humans respond.⁸⁰ However, that call comes with a warning: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (3:7–8; see also 3:15; 4:7), as so many who heard the voices of the prophets did. The promise of God to those who respond to his voice remains the same: rest (4:4). God’s call is the same: Respond to his voice and enter his rest; do not be like the wilderness generation who did not obey.⁸¹ The author ends the section in 4:11 with a plea to the hearers to enter God’s rest “so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience,” before extolling the power of the Word of God. Verses 12–13 are the author’s “why” we should enter God’s rest: God’s Word is powerful and those who do not obey will suffer God’s judgment.⁸²

Each time the church gathers is an opportunity for people to encounter the living God through his Word.⁸³ In addition to the sermon, using Scripture throughout the service gives congregations the opportunity to encounter God himself. Again, corporate practices of Scripture meditation are one way to invite a slow and deliberate encounter with the living God. The CSB begins verse 12 saying, “For the word of God is living and effective,” but, in Greek, the first word of the sentence is ζῶν (living), emphatically emphasizing the *living* nature of the Word of God, like God himself.⁸⁴ An encounter with

⁸⁰ James Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 96.

⁸¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 141.

⁸² Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 146.

⁸³ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 197.

⁸⁴ Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 123.

the Word of God is an encounter with the actual living God, as God is “what God says.”⁸⁵ As God is alive and eternal, so his Word is eternal (cf. Isa 40:7–8). In light of the context, this living Word is also a warning of God’s power to judge those who disobey and do not enter his rest.⁸⁶ While God’s Word has taken a new form in Christ (1:2), it is still the same God who spoke to the Israelites (1:1). So, encountering God through his living, active and eternal Word through meditation provides a way for congregations to experience the actual presence of the living, active, and eternal God.

Consistent and deep meditations on the Word of God leads to a people who are affected by God’s commands. Not only is the Word of God living, but it is also *effective* (ἐνεργής). What the CSB translates “effective,” the ESV translates “active,” and either works here in describing the self-fulfilling nature of the Word.⁸⁷ God, speaking through Isaiah, explains that the “word that comes from my mouth will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do” (Isa 55:11). To “make every effort to enter that rest” (Heb 4:11), the believer must submit to the living and effective Word of God. By dwelling on the Word of God in community (Col 3:16), the church submits itself to the teachings of Scripture and seeks to be a place that strives for godliness.

Just as God’s Word is active, so too submission to God’s Word is an active task. By turning to God in corporate meditation, a church must then submit themselves to whatever the Word teaches. The author of Hebrews uses the picture of a “sword”

⁸⁵ Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 146.

⁸⁶ Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 261.

⁸⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 112.

(μάχαира) to describe the refining work God does on a people who dwell on his Word.⁸⁸ The author uses creative language here, painting the picture of a sharp object probing and separating the inmost parts of the person, body, and soul. Thomas Schreiner focuses on the point of the passage: “the efficacy of God’s word. Nothing can withstand its power.”⁸⁹ When people come under the authority of Scripture, it *will* do its work (Isa 55:11) of refining hearts and souls and working to conform the people into the image of Christ.

When anyone encounters God through his Word, God will use that experience to probe the depths of their souls. Only through God’s exposing the true nature of the heart can true transformation take place. When these encounters occur not only on an individual basis but within the congregation, whole churches begin to experience the Surgeon who cuts away sin. It is a terrifying reality that God’s Word can “judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (4:12). Just as “soul and spirit, joints and marrow” serve as a picture of the Word penetrating the whole person, so the “heart” here represents the whole person.⁹⁰ This leads directly into verse 13 where the author states that all creatures are naked and exposed before God’s eyes.⁹¹ *Everyone* is exposed and vulnerable before God when encountering his Word. James Thompson sums up these two verses, saying, “the sharp word of God uncovers and judges the listeners, leaving them defenseless and prostrate before the eyes of the one to whom we give an account.”⁹² The spiritual practices of corporate meditation, proclamation, and confession all leave a

⁸⁸ There is debate about the “sword” (μάχαира) perhaps referring to a dagger or knife. Paul Ellingworth points out that in the LXX, the word is interchangeable as a sword or dagger or even sacrificial knife. While he feels like knife makes the most sense here in context—the depiction of probing like a surgeon—the idea of a sword expresses the power and judgment of God’s Word. Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 262.

⁸⁹ Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 147.

⁹⁰ Thompson, *Hebrews*, 97.

⁹¹ Here is another debated word in this brief two verse passage: τετραηλισμένα. Two common interpretations are that of a sacrificial animal’s neck exposed before the knife or a wrestler grabbing by the neck or throat, overthrowing their opponent. Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 264.

⁹² Thompson, *Hebrews*, 97.

church open before the eyes of God as he works for healing, forgiveness, and transformation in their lives (Phil 1:6; Ps 130:4).

The final note in verse 13 is that all creation will give an account to the author of the Word. The author here again emphasizes the λόγος (word) as the living, effective, piercing Word of God, the judge of all creation.⁹³ The promise is clear: If someone wants to enter God’s rest, he must then be completely exposed and laid bare in front of God’s Word. In addition, this is not just a passage about individual accountability but also communal accountability as the letter is to the church. The communal call is for a church to hear and respond to God’s Word, listen to God’s voice, not harden their hearts, and enter God’s rest. Piper calls on all believers to approach Scripture: “If we aim to encounter the word of God the way this writer means for us to, we will read the Bible with hope and faith and expectancy that God himself will be encountered. And that means the encounter is supernatural.”⁹⁴ Practicing corporate meditation and equipping the church to experience the Word of God leads to supernatural and transformational encounters with God and ultimately results in godliness.

Conclusion

The Bible demonstrates that Christ followers should strive to know the words of Scripture deeply and interact with the text through meditation. Scripture is the Word of God spoken through the prophets, the apostles, and Jesus himself, who is the living Word of God (John 1:1-5, 14). Just reading the Bible is not sufficient; believers need to soak in the Bible, meditating and memorizing. It is in this act of diving into Scripture that believers find life, happiness, wisdom, instruction, and correction, all in the pursuit of godliness. While some in modern times refer to a “personal relationship with Jesus,” and

⁹³ Cockerill points out that a “wooden” translation of the Greek in verse 13— “to whom in reference to us the word”—shows the passage ending with the word λόγος, giving more emphasis to the importance of the Word of God. Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 124.

⁹⁴ Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, 219–20.

that *is* important, from these passages there is a call to the *assembled* congregation to seek the Word together. When individuals gather around the Word, God can hone and shape entire communities, challenging them and rooting out their sin. When the Word dwells within a community, it finds peace, thanksgiving, and happiness.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORY OF SCRIPTURE MEDITATION AND LECTIO DIVINA IN THE CHURCH AND MODERN DAY APPLICATION

Introduction

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Bible meditation is not a recent invention of the church but rather a practice given to the church by Scripture itself. Scriptures such as Psalm 119 and others are not only *about* meditation but *are* meditations on Scripture.¹ Over the centuries, the church continued to practice Bible meditation and develop systems to help congregations best engage with Scripture. This practice of “focused attentiveness” on the Word allows the follower of Christ to deeply engage with the Word and move to contemplation.² The practice of contemplation, for the purposes of this study, is a Word-centric “gazing on God” that leads the believer toward Christlikeness.³ This chapter will engage with a brief history of the practice of Scripture meditation in general, then specifically with *lectio divina*, ending with a synthesis of these ideas and application for the modern-day church.

A History of Scripture Meditation in the Church

Throughout history, the church has taken the Bible’s mandate for Scripture meditation and made it a common practice. Different eras of church history as well as

¹ Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 19.

² Maxine Hancock, “Meditation,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 606.

³ J.A. Medders, “Grazing and Gazing: Meditation and Contemplation in Puritan Spirituality,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 15, no. 1 (2022): 38.

different sects of the church have given their own meaning to “meditation” over time, however. While many of the early church fathers taught Scripture meditation practices, some in the church began to veer from Scripture as the primary driver of meditation, but the Reformation brought the proper correction back to the Word of God as the primary focus for meditation.

Pre-Reformation Meditation Teachings and Practices

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was one of the most influential writers and thinkers in the church, with many of his writings still impacting the church today. His most famous work, *Confessions*, contains his autobiographical journey to life with Christ.⁴ In the midst of his introspection, he fills the pages with meditations on Scripture. Reflecting on Psalm 102:12, he writes, “But You, Lord, abide in eternity, yet you are not angry with us for eternity for You pity our dust and ashes, and it was pleasing in Your sight to reform my deformities.”⁵ In this way, he sets an example of contemplating Scripture still adopted by believers today. Delighting in the Scriptures was such a part of his life that he even asked for the Psalms to be painted on his walls while lying on his deathbed that he might continue to read and meditate until his dying day.⁶

Another early writer on Scripture meditation from church history is Benedict. Benedict possibly lived from 480 to 547, according to tradition, and wrote his *Rule* on how monks were to behave, and the monastery was to operate.⁷ In chapter forty-eight, he discusses the daily manual labor necessary for a monk. He notes from the start that the

⁴ Gordon Mursell, ed., *The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two Thousand Years, from East to West*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 68.

⁵ Augustine, *Confessions: A New Translation*, trans. Peter Constantine (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018), 125.

⁶ George Lane, *Christian Spirituality: An Historical Sketch* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), 70.

⁷ Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, trans. Abbot Parry (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2000), vii.

job of a monk is to either engage in the appropriate labor or else engage in sacred reading.⁸ Benedict then follows with instruction to balance both the manual work and the spiritual work required by monks each day. Each day began with liturgical prayer using the Divine Office, followed by times of work and spiritual reading. This spiritual reading is a “quiet, prayerful reading of sacred scripture,” but Benedict never uses the word “contemplation” in his writings.⁹ He considered the rewards of this type of prayer to be a gift from God that the reader does not seek out, but instead awaits to receive from God through the course of reading and prayer.¹⁰ Benedict was also one of the early proponents of *lectio divina*, or divine reading. He considered this to be a contemplative type of reading where Scripture reading is turned into meditation, which is then turned into prayer.¹¹

Writing around 1100, Peter of Damaskos is an example of a Christian teacher who encouraged meditation on the things of God but without necessarily using Scripture as the basis. He taught eight stages of contemplation ranging from “knowledge of tribulations and trials of this life” to “knowledge concerning God, or what we call ‘theology.’”¹² For him, contemplation was primarily about grace opening “the eyes of our soul” and how one should act when confronted with the knowledge of each stage of contemplation.¹³ Peter looked to examples in Scripture such as David who was “rapt in ecstasy at God’s marvels” (such as in Psalm 102) and encouraged his followers to do the

⁸ Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 77.

⁹ Lane, *Christian Spirituality*, 23.

¹⁰ Lane, *Christian Spirituality*, 23.

¹¹ Lane, *Christian Spirituality*, 23.

¹² Nicodemus and Makarios, eds., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, trans. Kallistos Ware, G. E. H. Palmer, and Philip Sherrard, vol. 3 (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1984), 108–9.

¹³ Nicodemus, *The Philokalia*, 109.

same.¹⁴ While he does quote Scripture here, “God’s marvels” is loosely defined and seems to reflect more on creation and perhaps even the incarnation of Christ but is certainly driven by man’s thoughts, not the Word of God.

Just prior to the Reformation, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556, not to be confused with the early church father, Ignatius of Antioch) became one of the founding members of a group known as the Jesuits.¹⁵ He is perhaps most famous for his *Spiritual Exercises*, a guide for prayer which “reflects both his vision of the spiritual life and the vital place of mental prayer and spiritual direction for Christians who are genuinely engaged in the world.”¹⁶ Ignatius separated prayerful Scripture reading into two distinct methods: meditation and contemplation. When talking of meditation, he considered this type of prayer to have three “powers” memory, understanding, and will.¹⁷ When approaching a passage of Scripture, one should look for a particular truth that God reveals in that passage. The three powers then come into play as one first *calls to mind* that truth, then *ponders* that truth, and finally *embraces* the truth, all with a heart of love for God.¹⁸

For Ignatius, meditation is a more reflective exercise albeit with practical results. Contemplation is instead an imaginative exercise. In this case, Ignatius encourages readers to imagine themselves within the event they read in Scripture. During this prayerful Scripture reading, readers “imaginatively *see the persons* in the Gospel event . . . *hear the words* they speak, and . . . *observe the actions* they accomplish in the

¹⁴ Nicodemus, *The Philokalia*, 122.

¹⁵ Gordon T. Smith, “Ignatius of Loyola,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Scobie et al., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 522.

¹⁶ Gordon T. Smith, “Ignatian Spirituality,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Scobie et al., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 519.

¹⁷ Timothy M. Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation: An Ignatian Guide to Praying with Scripture* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008), 27.

¹⁸ Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation*, 28.

event.”¹⁹ In this way, the reader puts himself *into* the story of Scripture, perhaps seeing Jesus standing before Pilate or walking along the road to Emmaus with him. It is important that this type of prayer is thoroughly grounded in Scripture to ensure the “essential authenticity of such imaginative prayer.”²⁰

Reformation and Puritan Meditation Practices

Perhaps one of the reasons that some church leaders prior to the Reformation taught meditation on things outside of Scripture was simply because lay people could not even read Scripture as it was not often in their language. Most of the texts referenced previously, however, were written to monks or other church leaders and not necessarily addressed to the church body as a whole. Additionally, the Roman Catholic church taught that extra-Scriptural tradition had equal weight with the authority of Scripture and the traditions and thoughts of the church were also valuable for meditation.²¹ Luther, however, resisted the authority of church tradition and brought Scripture into the vernacular so all could read and understand God’s Word.²² In light of this, Lutheran spirituality emphasized the practices of prayer and Scripture study for all believers.²³

One of the great theologians of the Reformation, and perhaps all of history, was John Calvin. For Calvin, the primary way to understand God was to look for knowledge of him in the Scriptures.²⁴ While there is a sense that people can discover

¹⁹ Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation*, 36.

²⁰ Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation*, 37.

²¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 152–153.

²² McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 153.

²³ Jane Strohl, “Lutheran Spirituality,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Scobie et al., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 593.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol 1. Ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1.6.1.

information about God through creation, simply meditating on the wonders of heaven and earth is a “vain” attempt to reach God.²⁵ He likens meditation on Scripture to eating, noting that “men try to gnaw at it,” and “those for whom prophetic doctrine is tasteless ought to be thought of as lacking taste buds.”²⁶ It is within the text of Scripture that a person comes face to face with the Living God. God himself speaks through Scripture and the Holy Spirit speaks to the heart of the reader. Calvin listened to the words expecting that the Spirit would confirm the authenticity of what he read.²⁷ He trusts the words of Isaiah, where God says his Word will never fail (59:21) and Paul’s affirmation in 2 Corinthians 1:22 that the Spirit will “seal” and “guarantee” the faith of the godly. Every time Calvin meditated on Scripture, he was expectant for the Spirit to illuminate the Word and remove any doubt as to the Bible being the Word of God.²⁸ Wesley Kort assesses Calvin’s reading of Scripture, highlighting the work of the Holy Spirit in reading. Kort emphasizes that Calvin did not want a propositional knowledge of God but rather a living Spirit-infused knowledge that is “particular and . . . applied to the life of the reader.”²⁹

Ashley Cocksworth notes that Calvin had a grand vision for a society of Word-informed people participating in an almost monastic community.³⁰ Here, people would practice daily reciting of the Psalms, learning through catechisms, and frequent prayer. In chapter twenty of book three, Calvin writes his “rules” for prayer. These rules have an

²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.3.

²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.2.

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

²⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

²⁹ Wesley A. Kort, “Calvin’s Theory of Reading,” *Christianity and Literature* 62, no. 2 (2013): 193.

³⁰ Ashley Cocksworth, “Sabbatical Contemplation? Retrieving a Strand in Reformed Theology,” in *Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*, ed. John H. Coe, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 80.

almost monastic feel to them but with the goal of painting a vision “of Christian existence that is shot through with the benefits of the grace of God received in prayer.”³¹ This chapter includes a thorough meditation on the Lord’s Prayer and its implications for the Christian’s practice of prayer. Not only does this section provide important instructions on prayer but also an astounding example of Scripture meditation. He spends three whole sections simply meditating on the meaning of beginning the prayer with “Our Father.”

Theological descendants of John Calvin (Horton Davies says Puritanism “was born in Geneva, but christened in England”), the English Puritans took the Reformation ideal of *sola scriptura* to the next step of being the sole guide for all worship and practice.³² The gathered practice of hearing the Word of God preached was central to Puritan worship.³³ The Puritan pastors had a deep love and respect for Scripture and desired that their congregations would replicate that love in their own lives. Many ministers took the opportunity to use the cornerstone of the worship service, the sermon, to preach to their members on the importance of, and methods of meditating on, the Bible.³⁴ “Puritan meditation was modelled on the Puritan sermons,” says J. I. Packer. “In meditation, the Puritan would seek to search and challenge his heart, stir his affections to hate sin and love righteousness, and encourage himself with God’s promises, just as Puritan preachers would do from the pulpit.”³⁵

In Puritan spirituality, there are two primary types of meditation: occasional and deliberate. Summarizing the teachings of Edmund Calamy, Joel Beeke describes

³¹ Cocksworth, “Sabbatical Contemplation,” 78.

³² Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 49.

³³ Davies, *English Puritans*, 182.

³⁴ Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 72.

³⁵ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 24.

occasional meditation as “what one observes with the senses.”³⁶ This type of meditation uses creation, not Scripture to “raise up . . . thoughts to Heavenly meditation . . . [using] eyes, or . . . ears as a ladder to climb to heaven.”³⁷ This seems to be dangerously close to the mystic’s practice of climbing “Jacob’s ladder” to approach God. Edmund Clowney warns against this practice because “Jacob never climbed the ladder: God came down.”³⁸ While it is a fine practice to “spiritualize natural things,” it should be done with the desire to meet with the God who has come down, not to try to bring humans up to God.³⁹ John Bunyan echoes the Puritan thought of occasional meditation through the narrative of the *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Christiana’s group arrives at the House Beautiful where they receive instruction to carefully observe beauty in creation and learn whatever creation teaches.⁴⁰ U. Milo Kaufmann analyzes this practice by explaining that the Puritans attempted to prevent the sinful imagination from overwhelming them through the course of daily life. He also points out that one of the results of occasional meditation is the reduction of creation to simple propositions, looking for spiritual instructions in the mundane.⁴¹

Deliberate meditation, on the other hand, is the time when a person deliberately focuses on the things of heaven.⁴² Thomas White stated that there are four sources for deliberate meditation: “Scripture, practical truths of Christianity, providential occasions (experiences), and sermons.”⁴³ Joseph Hall calls deliberate meditation what “we chiefly inquire for” and says that a person must purge themselves of sin before one

³⁶ Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 75.

³⁷ Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 75.

³⁸ Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 61.

³⁹ Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 75.

⁴⁰ U. Milo Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim’s Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 175.

⁴¹ Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 179–180.

⁴² Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 77.

⁴³ Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 77.

can “profitably meditate.”⁴⁴ He also encourages finding a place and time that are constant each day where there are no distractions so as to develop a discipline, instead of meditating “by snatches and uncertain fits.”⁴⁵ This form of meditation, then, becomes a filling with the Word of God. It is interesting to note that Hall, like many Puritans, understands the depths to which inward sin can corrupt experiences with God. It is only by approaching God with a spirit of confession that one can truly be in his presence and hear his voice through Scripture.

Richard Baxter saw Scripture as one of the places where the Holy Spirit condescends to the reader, stating that the reader should “put Christ no farther from you than he hath put himself.”⁴⁶ Therefore, in meditation on Scripture, one can experience the nearness of the *Logos*, Jesus Christ himself, speaking through the text. Baxter continues, encouraging his readers to meditate “boldly . . . to think of God and glory in proper conceivings, without [this view of God] we are lost, and have nothing to fix our thoughts on.”⁴⁷ In the Reformed tradition, the Puritans offer a wealth of teaching on spirituality and Scripture meditation in general. Space limits further plumbing the depths of their contributions, but other important writers on Scripture include John Owen, Thomas Manton, Jonathan Edwards, and Matthew Henry.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Philip Wynter, ed., *The Works of the Right Reverend Joseph Hall* (Oxford: The University Press, 1863), 51, Google Books.

⁴⁵ Wynter, *Joseph Hall*, 52.

⁴⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, vol. 3, *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), 319.

⁴⁷ Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:319.

⁴⁸ See: John Owen, *The Church and the Bible*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol 16, (East Peoria, IL: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968). Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, vol 6, (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010). Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009) 2:26. Matthew Henry, *Daily Communion with God*, ed. Gerald Mick (Westfield, IN: Digital Puritan Press, 2011).

Modern Day Teachings on Meditation

The modern world has been flooded with talk of “meditation.” Typically, this refers to transcendental meditation as influenced by Eastern thinking, particularly Hinduism.⁴⁹ This makes the topic of Bible meditation complicated because the teaching of transcendental meditation, yoga, and—more recently— “mindfulness” disguises the true definition of meditation. Rather than a program or mantra for relaxation and emptying of oneself, Bible meditation is an intense focus on Scripture, a *filling* with the knowledge of God.⁵⁰ Combining the mindset of transcendental meditation with a renewal of classical mysticism and a world continually filled with more syncretism, pluralism, and inclusivism means there are many weeds to work around in search of biblical spiritual practices.⁵¹ This flood of modern writing on meditation also includes many orthodox Christians. The following are simply few of numerous possible examples of these modern orthodox teachers that encourage Scripture meditation practices.

Teaching and preaching underground during the reign of Nazi Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer left the church a legacy of writings on preaching, discipleship, and spiritual living. One of those books, *Life Together*, speaks of his vision of true Christian community. He also gives direction for meditation on the text, saying, “We ponder the chosen text on the strength of the promise that it has something utterly personal to say to us for this day and for our Christian life.”⁵² Bonhoeffer encourages slow and deliberate reading in meditation, taking the burden off the reader even to get through an entire passage or discover a new thought or idea and simply allow the Word to “penetrate and

⁴⁹ Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 7.

⁵⁰ Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 12.

⁵¹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 31.

⁵² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1954), 82.

dwelling within us.”⁵³ In meditation, one should not have any sense of expectation for anything extraordinary, but in seeking after God alone, the reader will find happiness (cf. Ps 1:1). Referencing what he considers truly “extraordinary” in *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer calls the believer to see the regular acts of devotion and piety as extraordinary. The daily risks of a life of a disciple of Jesus are extraordinary since it is a life of quiet sacrifice and devotion.⁵⁴

In 1978, Richard Foster released the first edition of his *Celebration of Discipline* and, with over a million books sold and multiple editions printed, many in the church’s eyes were reopened to spiritual practices that had never been part of their lives. Foster came out of the Quaker tradition, but upon recognizing his own shallow spirituality, turned to writers such as Augustine, St. Francis, and Julian of Norwich to discover a spiritual depth he had not previously encountered.⁵⁵ Placing meditation in the category of “inner disciplines,” he defines it simply as “the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word.”⁵⁶

One friend and colleague to Foster was Dallas Willard. Willard wrote extensively on spiritual formation and worked closely with Foster over the years. In his text *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, he expresses the importance of both Scripture meditation and memorization, saying, “I would never undertake to pastor a church or guide a program . . . that did not involve a continuous program of memorization . . . for people of all ages.”⁵⁷ Even in his discussion on Scripture study, he notes that study alone does not produce transformation; instead, study must be accompanied by meditation,

⁵³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 83.

⁵⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 157.

⁵⁵ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), xii–xvii.

⁵⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 17.

⁵⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperOne, 1988), 150.

prayerfully asking God to meet the reader through his Word.⁵⁸

Last in this brief survey of teachings on meditation throughout history is Donald Whitney, author of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Whitney's entire premise is that all the disciplines are specifically for the purpose of godliness—meditation included. Being a modern text written primarily to lay people in the church today, Whitney's text is the most practical with simple steps for immediate action. In his chapter on meditation, he lists and explains seventeen different methods for meditation, including emphasizing different words in the text, formulating a principle, looking for an application, seeing how the text points to Jesus, and memorizing the text.⁵⁹ He does not get bogged down in mystical philosophy or otherworldly contemplation, he simply calls the reader to focus on the text of Scripture and listen for the voice of God.⁶⁰

***Lectio Divina* as Practiced Throughout Church History**

Lectio divina (divine reading) is a specific process for reading, meditating, and praying through Scripture taught by church leaders throughout history. While it has taken many different forms over the centuries, the basic pattern of praying and meditating on Scripture has remained. *Lectio divina* forms the basis for the corporate practice introduced in the following section, but first, it is necessary to cover a short history and description of the practice in the Christian church.

Kenneth Boa traces the origins of *lectio divina* to the fifth-century Eastern

⁵⁸ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 177.

⁵⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 56–68.

⁶⁰ Additional contemporary writers on Bible meditation not otherwise cited here include: Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1999). Various authors in *Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*, eds. John H. Coe and Kyle C. Strobel, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019). Keith Meyer, *Spiritual Rhythms in Community: Being together in the Presence of God*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012). John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2019).

desert father John Cassian.⁶¹ Around a century later came the *Rule of St. Benedict* by Benedict, a monk living in Italy. In his text, he states that those in the monastery should engage in “sacred reading.” Sacred reading should be the main job of the monk unless he is otherwise occupied by the regular duties of caring for the monastery.⁶² Their private reading is in addition to the regular practice of prayer and Scripture reading that would have happened in the community of monks as they gathered throughout the day. Enzo Bianchi prefers to begin telling the story of *lectio divina* in the book of Nehemiah.⁶³ In Nehemiah 8, the priest Ezra brings out the Law for a public reading. In this dramatic scene, the gathered people who had not heard the Scriptures read for some time stood for its reading (8:5). They then proclaimed, “Amen, Amen!” and knelt low in worship to God (8:6). The people then stood as Ezra read the Law, translating it, and explaining its meaning so all could understand (8:7). Bianchi sees this practice of divine reading as a foreshadowing of a practice of celebrating the Word of God that the Israelites would continue in the synagogues.⁶⁴ He continues by suggesting that even Jesus’s reading of Isaiah 61 (Luke 4:16–21), where he stands before the people and applies the text to his modern context, is another biblical example of corporate meditation.

Lectio divina as a systematized practice is typically credited to Guigo II, a Carthusian monk from the twelfth century.⁶⁵ In his *Ladder of Monks*, he describes a four-step process for reading Scripture using the four Latin words *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). The initial reading is a

⁶¹ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 174.

⁶² Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 77.

⁶³ Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, Cistercian Studies 182, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 29.

⁶⁴ Bianchi, *Praying the Word*, 30.

⁶⁵ Christine Valters Paintner and Lucy Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 2.

slow and deliberate reading while searching for a word or phrase in the text to focus on. The meditation stage is simply spending time pondering that word or phrase. This action of pondering should lead the reader to a prayerful reflection on the passage. Finally, the reader spends a time in silence, resting in God's presence and reflecting on his Word.⁶⁶ Guigo saw this process as a gift from God to the reader as they become passive recipients of the transformation God offers through his Word.⁶⁷

With the Reformed break from the Roman Catholic church, many former church practices were seen as being Catholic or Orthodox. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the Reformers had a very high view of Scripture and certainly encouraged their congregations to meditate on the Word. Calvin himself promoted a style of meditation that seems to have been influenced by the *lectio divina* tradition.⁶⁸ He used a language of "eating" the text similar to the writers of the monastic tradition.⁶⁹ Calvin's teaching on sacred reading may be partially responsible for bringing the practice of *lectio divina* out of the monastery and into the everyday lives of Christians.⁷⁰

With the twentieth century's renewed interest in historic formational practices, it comes as no surprise that there are numerous recent writers from all walks of life explaining *lectio divina*. Henri Nouwen, known for his teaching and work with the intellectually disabled at L'Arche Daybreak in Toronto, says this during his explanation of *lectio divina*: "The Bible is primarily a book not of information but of formation, not merely a book merely to be analyzed, scrutinized, and discussed, but a book to nurture us,

⁶⁶ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 2–3.

⁶⁷ Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 170.

⁶⁸ Kort, "Calvin's Theory of Reading," 190.

⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.8.2.

⁷⁰ Kort, "Calvin's Theory of Reading," 191.

to unify our hearts and minds.”⁷¹ He warns against using the Bible as a tool that people use, but instead encourages people to allow God to disclose himself through the text, speaking to the reader, his message penetrating deep into the heart. Similarly, Eugene Peterson warns against the depersonalization of the text in which a reader simply attempts to get answers and definitions. Peterson describes this way of reading as one that

refuses to be reduced to *just* reading but intends the living of the text, listening, and responding to the voices of that “so great a cloud of witnesses” telling their stories, singing their songs, preaching their sermons, praying their prayers, asking their questions, having their children, burying their dead, following Jesus.⁷²

What an incredible picture of the Word of God! Imagine a personal time of Bible meditation or a church service where Scripture came alive in such a way each Sunday. When people approach Scripture as a *living* text, their entire perspective transforms and true transformation can begin to happen in their lives.

The newly rediscovered interest in spiritual disciplines, meditation, and even *lectio divina* itself goes beyond simply academia or even pastors. Christian popular culture even has interest in these practices. Musician David Crowder wrote about meditation and *lectio divina* specifically in his book *Praise Habit: Finding God in Sunsets and Sushi*. Writing for a broad audience, he defines *lectio divina* simply as “a thoughtful, repeated reading and praying of the passage.”⁷³ Helpfully for this present project—as the goal is to communicate the concepts of *lectio divina* to a diverse group of people—Crowder redefines the four Latin stages into four simple English words: Read, Think, Pray, Live.⁷⁴ The “Live” stage represents a useful divergence from the traditional

⁷¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca Laird, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), xxiii.

⁷² Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 90.

⁷³ David Crowder, *Praise Habit: Finding God in Sunsets and Sushi* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 45.

⁷⁴ Crowder, *Praise Habit*, 169.

“contemplatio” which tends to have vague definitions throughout history. Here, he encourages the reader to find a point of application in the text, allowing Scripture to bring small, daily life change.⁷⁵

Forming a Theology and Practice of Meditation in Community

While the church of God has many great purposes, the primary purpose of the church is for prayer, praise, and the edification of believers.⁷⁶ However, it is not enough for the people of God to simply gather, hear the Word, offer their praise, and depart. They must interact with the Word of God as a regular part of their lives. The Puritans recognized the importance of encouraging personal meditation, since their pastors even preached on how to meditate. Throughout history, as we have seen, the church developed and taught several different methods for meditation so all believers could feel confident about thinking deeply on the truths of Scripture. What follows is a synthesis of the ideas presented in the present chapter and the Scriptures mentioned in the previous chapter to create a method for teaching and practicing Bible meditation within the context of a gathered worship service. In this case, the practice of *lectio divina* will serve as the model practice—although with some modification for a corporate setting.

Habits, Repetition, and Meditation

In recent years, the research of James K. A. Smith influenced the worship practices of the church. In *Imagining the Kingdom*, he synthesizes the available research in anthropology on how various practices shape human behavior. He states that “we are ‘liturgical animals’ whose fundamental longings and desires are shaped by liturgical

⁷⁵ Crowder, *Praise Habit*, 175.

⁷⁶ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 196.

practice.”⁷⁷ He defines liturgical practices as those practices that are loaded with a Story (his capitalization), telling us who we are and inscribing a *habitus* or the inclinations that cause a person to act a certain way in a certain situation.⁷⁸ Therefore, the formative power of worship is contained in the repetitive Story-practices of worship, which create an almost subconscious reflex to help the Scripture-infused person act in a biblical way by default.

The brain development Smith attributes to anthropology is confirmed in neuroscience. Ken Baugh writes about the concept of “neuroplasticity,” or how the brain rewires itself based on habitual practice. Anything that a person constantly repeats creates a new network of neurons in the brain, and the more it is repeated, the stronger that network becomes.⁷⁹ The very act of fixing the eyes on God (Isa 26:3) will eventually rewire the brain to default to thoughts about God more and more. Meditation is a powerful tool for the formation of the believer.

Smith’s work does in support the practice of corporate meditation suggested here, but ultimately—while his research and ideas are profound—his conclusions both seem to put too much pressure on the gathered church and pigeon-hole the worship service in a particular way. He sums up his research by saying that “if Christian worship is going to be formative, it has to be repetitive.”⁸⁰ However, his idea of “repetitive” is simply the historic, formulaic church liturgy that many churches have moved away from in recent centuries. This instruction seems too narrow given the array of liturgical

⁷⁷ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 109.

⁷⁸ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 79; 139.

⁷⁹ Ken Baugh, *Unhindered Abundance: Restoring Our Souls in a Fragmented World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2021), 86–87.

⁸⁰ In all fairness to Smith, based on his other writings (this book is book two in his three part *Cultural Liturgies* series), he would likely encourage a strong personal habit of discipline. However, in this text, he charges churches simply to return to historic liturgies as the solution to the problem he posed throughout the book. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 185.

possibilities available today. The pressure he seems to put on the local church to create a *habitus* is potentially valid since many regular churchgoers will only experience the Bible through the weekly gathering. On the other hand, the weekly work of the local church *cannot* be enough if true Story-training is to happen. Elsewhere, Smith states that a person uses habit to form and direct their “wants” and, in some cases, one needs to perform actions contrary to human desire—Scripture meditation, in this case—to reform those wants and become more like Christ.⁸¹

The goal here is to attempt to accomplish both of those goals—the church helping to create a *habitus* while empowering people to practice on their own. True transformation *must* revolve around the Word. Not only should each believer seek to eat and digest the Word—to borrow from Calvin and Peterson—but the church should be a place where the Word of Christ dwells richly (Col 3:16).

***Lectio Divina* as a Corporate Worship Exercise**

So then, what might it look like to develop a system not only for teaching Scripture meditation but practicing some of the key concepts of meditation as a regular habit in corporate worship? Part of the dilemma in implementing such a system is the sheer lack of Scripture prevalent in American evangelical churches. Constance Cherry’s research on time given to Scripture reading versus time for announcements was referenced earlier.⁸² Chuck Lewis surveyed Southern Baptist churches to discover that a significant percentage do not hear any Scripture in the first ten minutes of a typical service, and many do not hear any Scripture until the pastor delivers his sermon.⁸³ If

⁸¹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 62.

⁸² Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 69.

⁸³ Charles T. Lewis Jr., “Far and Near: Christian Worship of the Transcendent and Immanent God of Wonders” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 88.

worship is a response to the Word of God, it is imperative that the Word be central to Christian gatherings.⁸⁴ The teaching portion of this project is covered in the following chapter, and the details are located in the appendix. Next is a summary of the practice of *lectio divina* as a corporate worship exercise.

Lectio. Traditionally, the first “stage” of *lectio divina* is titled “lectio.” This simply refers to reading the text of Scripture. However, it is the *type* of reading here that is important. This is a slow, deliberate reading of the text, perhaps reading a short passage several times, rather than a brief cursory reading or a reading of a long passage.⁸⁵ It is helpful to begin all Scripture reading with some recognition of the Word of God. Perhaps this is a short prayer for illumination that is found in some Catholic teachings or simply a statement about the importance of Scripture. It is important to remember the work of the Holy Spirit as illuminator of God’s Word to the reader.⁸⁶

For an individual, how long to read and what to focus on could be a decision made in the moment, but when working through this stage in a group setting, one person will read the passage, deciding how long to read and what to repeat. If necessary, the reader should consider practicing reading the Bible out loud, making sure to read the passage slowly, then perhaps slowing down even more.⁸⁷ The obvious difference between the private *lectio* and public *lectio* is the fact that in private one *reads* the words and in public one *hears* the words. In either case, just because one has read or heard the words of Scripture does not mean that one has truly *heard* the words.⁸⁸ Therefore, it is not only

⁸⁴ Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 91.

⁸⁵ Jim Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 62.

⁸⁶ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 77.

⁸⁷ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 77.

⁸⁸ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 92.

important to have a well-rehearsed reader, one who does not read anything into the text, but also attentive listeners. Of course, being attentive is solely the task of the listener, so there must be some instruction to the group about what it means to listen attentively. Each person should listen for a word or phrase that sticks out to them, maybe even repeating words in their head or under their breath.⁸⁹ Many distractions follow people into church these days, so the slow, repeated readings intentionally give people an opportunity to focus and hear the words even if not on the first reading.

Meditatio. The idea of meditating on Scripture in a corporate fashion is a difficult part of *lectio divina* to translate to the gathered body of believers. However, as the Puritan pastors demonstrated, it is important for the church body to know and understand Scripture meditation. They preached about it to their congregations in their sermons, and it is still possible to teach by example in the church today. For this stage and the next, Donald Whitney’s accessible teachings provide a great example for bringing Scripture meditation into the Sunday worship service.

In his second chapter on Bible intake, Whitney lists and describes seventeen different suggestions to begin meditating on Scripture.⁹⁰ Most of these exercises work best in an individual setting, but a few will also work in the corporate setting. As noted with the previous stage, it is important for the one leading here to have done some work preparing prior to attempting to lead others in meditating on a passage. In the case of *meditatio*, the leader may even need to do “pre-meditating” to properly lead. The first meditation method Whitney lists is to emphasize different words in the text. He gives the example of John 11:25, with the reader emphasizing the words in italics:

I am the resurrection and the life.
I *am* the resurrection and the life.
I am *the* resurrection and the life.

⁸⁹ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 77.

⁹⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 56–68.

I am the *resurrection* and the life.
I am the resurrection *and* the life.
I am the resurrection and *the* life.
I am the resurrection and the *life*.⁹¹

Using this method, the leader could pick a short verse such as the one above and allow the congregation to consider the meaning of each word by simply varying the emphasis. Whitney compares this method to turning a diamond to examine each of its parts. Another useable method is to think of an illustration from the text.⁹² The illustration is not as long or drawn out as a sermon would be, but a simple one, designed to illuminate the text in a fresh way. Here is a moment where prior preparation from the reader is necessary as there is not time to think of an illustration on the spot. Similarly, the reader may come to the session with a short application from the text or a word or two about how the text points to the Gospel.⁹³

Finally, the brief time of meditation can be an opportunity to help the church memorize a short passage together. Certainly, the above method emphasizing each word would aid in memorization, but other brief, slow, repeated readings can also help people memorize the passage. While this type of reading may not exactly equate to meditation in this setting, memorizing a passage will help people meditate on the passage later.⁹⁴ There are several musicians today who write music word-for-word with Scripture.⁹⁵ Playing one of these arrangements—or writing a new one—while letting the congregation simply listen would provide an additional opportunity for people to consider the text and hear from God.

As an aside, it could be helpful to add in different postures when engaging with

⁹¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 56–57.

⁹² Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 58.

⁹³ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 59–60.

⁹⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 62.

⁹⁵ The website www.biblevox.org offers a searchable database of websites, albums, and projects that include songs written based on word-for-word Scripture.

Scripture. Having the congregation stand demonstrates an honor and respect for the text. Sitting down with palms open indicates a bodily receptivity to Scripture that churches do not typically consider. Simply looking up can give the impression of listening to the Word of God coming symbolically from “the heavens,” where God dwells.⁹⁶

Oratio. Whether at home or at church, it is easy for prayers to become a list of asks to God. It is, of course, important to come to God with our needs (Phil 4:6–7), but as a regular practice and as an example to the congregation, prayers in church should spend time beyond the simple list of requests. In the case of *lectio divina*, prayer becomes a “development of the work of God experienced through reading and meditation.”⁹⁷ Once again, Donald Whitney’s writings will inform the process for this stage of *lectio divina*. His book *Praying the Bible* provides an ideal framework for developing the work of God from the last two stages and keeping the focus on Scripture.

The task here is to pray about pastorally appropriate topics using the passage of Scripture as a guide. Even people who regularly pray in church may fall into the trap of praying while using the same speech patterns, so praying through a passage of Scripture can help break that pattern with new, biblical language.⁹⁸ Whitney describes praying the Bible as going “through the passage line by line, talking to God about whatever comes to mind as you read the text.”⁹⁹ In this case, instead of praying about “whatever comes to mind,” it is the job of the person praying to have a plan for the prayer. Some potential prayers may include needs of the local body, needs in the community, local and national political leaders, and missionaries. Another option is to focus on liturgically minded prayers, including confession, assurance, justice, peace, and comfort for the hurting.

⁹⁶ Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 84.

⁹⁷ Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 99.

⁹⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 20.

⁹⁹ Whitney, *Praying the Bible*, 33.

Using Psalm 1 from the previous chapter as an example, here is what praying through part of a passage might look like. The Psalm begins, “How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked.” After reading this passage—this would be done in the previous two stages of *lectio divina*—a pastoral prayer might sound like this: “God, let our church be full of people who are *happy*, who do not walk in the advice of the wicked.” Verse 2 says that “his delight is in the LORD’s instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.” Here, the prayer continues, “Lord, show us how to delight in your instruction both corporately as well as privately. Forgive us for when we neglected your Word and did not meditate on your teachings day and night.”

Praying in this manner is not meant to restrict but to form a framework for richer prayers. Additionally, praying the Bible is not an exercise in interpretation but rather to focus on God in prayer, glancing at the words as a prayer guide.¹⁰⁰ While not necessarily designed to provide additional insight, this type of praying in the middle of a corporate focus on a passage increases the focus on the passage as the group meditates together. Finally, this is another type of instruction that shows the congregation what it looks like to use the Bible as a guide for all types of prayer.

Contemplatio. Of all the stages of *lectio divina*, this one is the hardest to describe, partially because the definition of contemplation has varied over the centuries or simply between individuals. To some, contemplation is the same as meditation, while to others it might be an active discipline, or a supernatural gift “infused” in a person by the Holy Spirit. Still others consider contemplation as a particular type of praying.¹⁰¹ Peterson describes contemplation as “getting the text into our muscles and bones, our oxygen-breathing lungs and blood-pumping heart.”¹⁰² In less poetic language, he says

¹⁰⁰ Whitney, *Praying the Bible*, 35.

¹⁰¹ Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 112–113.

¹⁰² Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 109.

contemplation means “submitting to the biblical revelation, taking it within ourselves, and then living it unpretentiously, without fanfare.”¹⁰³ So, the ultimate goal of *lectio divina*, or any meditative interaction with Scripture, is submission to the Bible and living out what it says. It is impossible to manufacture a direction from God for each member of any size group, let alone an entire congregation, but it is still possible to include a brief time of contemplation. For the purposes of this exercise, contemplation is a part of reading Scripture whereby the reader thinks deeply on the text, gazing at God through his word, and deriving a point of application from the text that leads to sanctification.¹⁰⁴

First, *silence*. One of the most uncomfortable sounds in the world today is no sound at all. This is especially true when people gather in a group. Contemporary church services may feature synthesized pads or drones as a bed underneath all talking and services as planned to the minute to ensure that there is no dead air during the service. Even a few moments of silence may be difficult to endure. Elijah’s famous interaction in 1 Kings 19 with God on the mountain demonstrates that sometimes God’s people need to be silent before him. Modern life, however, is full of beeps, vibrations, notifications, glowing screens, and distraction. A momentary respite could be a breath of fresh air for the congregation. Not only is the corporate practice of *lectio divina* intended to bring new depths to the use of Scripture in the church, but its purpose is also to instruct the people on a practice for their lives. Therefore, silence must be a part of this training as silence before God is necessary.¹⁰⁵ Since Sunday service time is short and valuable, this entire process will probably only take five to eight minutes, so the time of silence may be only thirty to sixty seconds of the entire experience. Additionally, churches with projection systems can keep the passage on the screen as a helpful tool to some attenders as they

¹⁰³ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 112.

¹⁰⁴ Medders states that “Puritan meditation and contemplation led to resolutions, decisions to walk faithfully with Christ.” Medders, “Grazing and Gazing.” 41.

¹⁰⁵ Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 118.

continue to ponder the words.

Since the goal of contemplation is right living, the reader should say a brief word of application or encouragement to the congregation following the reading. The final thought could be a repetition of an application from the *meditatio* stage or something additional. The reader may also give an exhortation to the congregation to leave with a renewed sense of Jesus being the *life*—using John 11:25 as an example. Like before, it is necessary for the reader to prepare these statements in advance so as not to create awkward moments during the service. To close the time of *lectio divina*, it is beneficial to state a word of thanks to God for the Scriptures. The church has used many such sayings throughout history that recognize God speaking through his word. An example is the following call and response from *The Worship Sourcebook*:

God, has spoken to us.
Thank you, God, for your Word.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

Scripture meditation is essential for a disciple of Jesus. Scripture itself, as well as the history and traditions of the church, is clear on the importance of this practice. Perhaps the influence of eastern religious practices on the term *meditation* or simply the lack of teaching has lessened the discussion on biblical meditation lately, but it does not lessen the need. Church leaders should not have an expectation for their attenders to know or practice anything that they have not been taught. Jesus' call to make disciples (Matt 28:19) was not a call to create converts but to “teach them to observe everything [he has] commanded” (28:20). Therefore, it is the duty of pastors to instruct their congregations on the process of Scripture meditation. *lectio divina* provides a simple, teachable framework for Scripture meditation as well as an accessible process to engage

¹⁰⁶ Carrie Titcombe Steenwyk and John D. Witvliet, eds., *The Worship Sourcebook* (Kalamazoo, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013), 148.

Scripture in a corporate setting. Whether in a separate class setting or following the Puritan example of preaching on Scripture meditation, pastors should find the best place in their context to teach on meditation and continue to train disciples to read, think, pray, and live the Scriptures in their own lives.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter details the undertaking to accomplish the four goals outlined in the first chapter at Trinity Church in Mentor, Ohio. These goals further the purpose of the project to deepen spiritual formation and encourage Scripture reading habits in the regular attenders at Trinity Church. The project began on July 1, 2022, and was concluded on October 14, 2022. This chapter will cover the preparation and the implementation phases of the project, and the following chapter covers the evaluation of the project as a whole.

Preparation (Weeks 1–8)

The first phase of this project was an eight-week preparation phase which began on July 1, 2022. This phase included drafting the original Bible Meditation Curriculum (BMC), surveying the congregation on the Scripture reading and meditation habits using the Bible Reading Self-Assessment (BRSA), and modifying the BMC based on the BRSA results and feedback from the BMC evaluation committee. The BRSA was completed as part of the Applied Empirical Research course in the Fall of 2021. This was created with feedback from peers and the professor.

Creation of the Bible Reading Self-Assessment

The Bible Reading Self-Assessment (BRSA) was created to evaluate the Bible reading, study, meditation, and memorization practices of the congregation at Trinity Church. The goal was to understand how a portion of the congregation regularly uses—or does not use—Scripture. A few additional questions were also added to assess the

understanding of meditation as a practice throughout church history. After gathering feedback from multiple peers and making corrections, the final product was submitted to Dr. Joseph Herrod, who provided additional feedback, eventually leading to the final product used during the project.

Items 1–15 on the BRSA used a six-point Likert scale. The possible answers were Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Disagree Somewhat (DS), Agree Somewhat (AS), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA). The six-point scale was used to eliminate a potential “neutral” answer typically found in a five-point Likert scale, forcing subject to at least disagree or agree somewhat with each item. Following those fifteen items were three additional items assessing how often the subject reads their Bible, meditates on Scripture, and prays. Possible answers for these were: More Than Once a Day, Once a Day, More Than Once a Week, Once a Week, A Few Times a Month, and Only at Church. Finally, a yes or no question simply asked if the subject had a set time and place for Scripture reading and prayer.

While most of the items on the BRSA had a desired response of SA, items eleven and twelve both had a desired answer of SD. These were both statements about the practice of meditation which go against biblical teaching on the subject. Item eleven stated “Meditation is a practice the Bible does not address,” and item twelve stated, “Meditation is primarily about relaxation.” Varying the desired response hopefully caused the subject to better think through their answers and less likely to move quickly through the survey. After completion of the BRSA, the survey format was transferred to a Google Forms survey to make it more accessible to the entire congregation. The entire survey is available in appendix 3.

Weeks 1–5

Weeks 1 through 5 were primarily for the creation and refinement of the BMC. Weeks 1 through 4 were for the creation of a rough draft of the BMC. The BMC had two

separate components: a Sunday morning service component and a personal homework component where each person practiced Bible meditation throughout the week. The BMC was designed to systematically introduce the congregation to Scripture meditation and then walk through the four-stage process of *lectio divina* as outlined in chapter three.

In week 5, the congregation was given the opportunity to participate in the BRSA. The lead pastor and I addressed the entire congregation during both church services explaining the essence of the project and how each person can be involved. While the project goal was to assess thirty members of the congregation, by opening the survey to all in attendance, perhaps more than thirty would take the survey, thereby giving a more accurate picture of the congregation. In all, forty-nine attenders took the survey, and the results are detailed in the following chapter. Anyone willing to participate in the survey was directed to a simple online sign-up form which in turn e-mailed them a link to the Google Form. The list of those who signed up was then used following the completion of the project period to send out the post-test survey.

Week 6

Following the results of the BRSA, the curriculum was refined based on the findings from the survey. The survey showed a majority of people in the survey group regularly interacted with Scripture—even if they did not practice meditation—so the curriculum for the first week was modified to lessen the time spent on encouraging people to begin reading their Bibles.

Additionally, nearly 80 percent of the congregation stated that they have little knowledge of the historical church's teachings on meditation. The curriculum for the second week was modified to include a brief overview of the historical church's teachings on meditation. This primarily focused on the formation of *lectio divina*, since it was the primary method taught during the project. The teaching also drew attention to the teachings of the Reformers and the Puritans in case there are congregation members leery

of this curriculum drawing too much from those that they believe to be mystics.

Weeks 7–8

During the final weeks of preparation for the Bible meditation Psalms series, the curriculum was continually refined into its final form. After completing the changes following the survey, this new draft of the BMC was sent to an advisory panel for additional feedback. This panel consisted of two other pastors on staff at Trinity Church and two of Trinity's lay leaders. They were provided with a rubric for evaluating the project along with the BMC.¹

Except for the lead pastor, the panel had little knowledge of the details of the project and were given the materials with little context. This allowed them to evaluate everything without bias and hopefully from a similar perspective as the congregation. Their feedback was extremely valuable in shaping the final version of the BMC as they asked important questions for clarification.

Following the evaluation period, the final changes were made to the BMC during week eight. Final preparations for the project included the development of a take-home version of the BMC for the congregation to engage in the meditation materials throughout the week. This six-page booklet contained only the homework portion of the BMC designed to reinforce the practices taught in the service. The book also included daily readings from the Psalms to use in practicing the meditation methods.

The church also purchased copies of *The Abide Bible Journal: Psalms*.² These journals have the entire book of Psalms in the New English Translation on one side of the page and blank space for writing on the other. They also contain Bible meditation prompts which aligned with many of the methods taught in the BMC. The journals served as an additional helpful tool for members of the congregation who wanted to write down

¹ See appendix 1.

² Phil Collins, ed., *The Abide Bible Journal: Psalms*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020).

their meditations. Many members brought the journals with them to church each week as their copy of Scripture or for sermon notes.

The Bible Meditation Series

Alongside the Bible meditation project, the pastoral staff decided to preach a series in the book of Psalms entitled, “Poetic Realism.” This series was an overview of example Psalms throughout the entirety of the book teaching the congregation how to examine different types of Psalms. While the sermon series lasted longer than the project period, the five sermons during the project period included Psalms 1, 55, 119, 23, and 138. The typical structure of the church service was modified to accommodate additional time for teaching and practice of Bible meditation. Full outlines of the weekly in-service and at-home curriculum is available in appendix 2. In addition, prior to the beginning of the series, the Lead Pastor taught a “Deep Dive” class on a Saturday morning. This dug into the structure and themes of the book of Psalms to give congregation members an overview of the book before the sermon series began. Some of the meditation methods outlined in this chapter were taught as a part of the Deep Dive to give those attending a preview of the material that was coming throughout the project period.

Week 9

The teaching materials for the first week were designed to provide an overview of the next five weeks, a brief defense of the reason for reading Scripture in the first place, and an introduction to hearing the Bible read in a slower and more deliberate manner. First, it was important for the church to understand that one of the ultimate reasons for reading the Bible is godliness.³ No one can know, understand, or obey God’s teachings if they do not read those teachings in the first place. Of course, there are many

³ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 23.

ways to hear the Word of God, but personal Bible reading is certainly an important practice. A brief report on the American Bible Society’s annual State of the Bible was included before revealing a few of the findings of the research on Trinity’s church body. The State of the Bible defines “Bible owner” as anyone who owns a Bible at all. Of these people, around 12 percent report reading their Bibles less than once a year, and 40 percent report never reading their Bibles at all.⁴ At Trinity, about 55 percent of people read their Bibles regularly, with 40 percent reporting that they read their Bibles at least once a day according to the results of the survey. However, 26 percent of those surveyed reported they never meditate on Scripture, and more than half meditate on Scripture only seldom. Lastly, nearly 86 percent of those surveyed do not memorize Scripture regularly. This brief report was given both to show the need for this Bible meditation project as well as to encourage everyone that there are opportunities for growth in their own Bible reading and meditation practices.

Three potential reasons were given for why someone might not engage with Scripture: not enough time, not knowing where to start, and not feeling excited about it. One of the hopes in the series is that people would grasp a method that would make the most of their time, give them a good place to start, and get them excited about reading Scripture.

There was no Scripture meditation practice during the first week, but simply an increase in the amount of Scripture read to begin to prepare the congregation for the upcoming changes to the service. This included lectionary-style readings with passages from the Old Testament (Jer 15:16), New Testament (Col 3:12–16), Psalms (119:57–60), and the Gospels (John 1:1–5; 14). The invocation passage to open the service was Psalm 63:1–4 and portions of Psalm 25 were read as part of a prayer of confession during the

⁴ Jeffery Fulks, John Farquhar Plake, and Randy Peterson, “State of the Bible USA 2022” (American Bible Society, October 2022), 16–17.

service. The at-home instructions for this week were simply to make sure each person was reading the Bible at least once a day. They were encouraged to find familiar, easy to read passages and spend at least ten minutes reading. The instructions also encouraged those participating to find the same time and place each day to begin building consistent habits. As an additional spiritual practice, they were instructed to begin with a prayer for the Holy Spirit to guide them through the text and end with brief prayer thanking God for the gift of his Word.

Week 10

This week began the first of the four stages of *lectio divina*: Read. The practice for this week was a slow, deliberate style of reading meant to prevent people from speeding through the text and instead be able to begin to sit and meditate on what they are reading. Since the findings of the BRSA discovered that many in the congregation did not have much historical knowledge of the church’s teachings on meditation, this week included a brief overview on meditation teaching throughout church history. The historical overview included a history of *lectio divina* as well as teachings from the Reformers, Puritans, and twentieth-century authors.

The Bible meditation practice taught was not only to read a passage slowly and more than once but also to pick a part of the passage to use for meditation. Psalm 121 was the chosen passage for meditation this week, and the passage was read, in its entirety, two times at a slow pace. Following the reading of the passage, the “emphasize different words” meditation method outlined in the previous chapter was practiced.⁵ The church meditated on a portion of Psalm 121:5 using this method, emphasizing each of the italicized words as each line was read:

The Lord protects you.
The *Lord* protects you.

⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 56.

The Lord *protects* you.
The Lord protects *you*.

The weekly homework for this week was to continue to practice this slow and deliberate reading of the passage, and to read each whole passage two to three times very slowly. This was the first week to assign a Psalm reading for each day. After reading through the entire passage, each person was instructed to find a phrase, sentence, or verse to practice the “emphasize each word” method while listening for God to speak through his Word. Finally, they ended each daily reading in prayer, thanking God for speaking through his Word.

Week 11

The second portion of *lectio divina* was “Think” or meditate. While the entire process taught throughout this series was designed to help people learn a cohesive meditation method, this week focused on specific methods for meditating on a passage. The lesson began with an additional reminder about meditation and its importance. Bible meditation differs from others forms of meditation such as transcendental meditation since it is primarily about *filling* your mind with the Word of God, not emptying your mind or relaxing. Those reading Scripture may be tempted to read large portions of the Bible, but it is impossible to meditate on all the details of chapters or large passages. A better approach is to read *large* portions of the Bible and then choose a *small* portion of the reading for meditation. The corporate meditation methods for this week were to list out what Paul commanded his readers to dwell on in Philippians 4:8, to find something in the passage that fits each of those areas, and to create an artistic expression of the text. For the artistic expression, I wrote a song using the word-for-word text of Psalm 27:13–14 in the English Standard Version.

After hearing the entire Psalm read slowly, we listed out the Philippians 4:8 aspects of the text:

What is true: the Lord is my light and my salvation.

What is honorable: I will be confident regardless of my circumstances.
What is just: even if everyone abandons me, God will not.
What is pure: be strong and let your heart take courage.
What is lovely: dwelling in the house of the Lord.
What is commendable: to wait on the Lord.
What is excellent: seeking God's face.
What is praiseworthy: seeing the goodness of the Lord.

Following that reading, the church worship team performed the sung version of Psalm 27:13–14 I wrote while the text was displayed on the screen. This method is not only useful for meditation but also to aid in the memorization of the text.

The homework for the week consisted of a list of various Bible meditation methods to practice from the previous week. Each person was to continue to read each Psalm slowly two to three times, then choose *one* of the Bible meditation methods outlined in the homework found in appendix 2. They were encouraged to attempt a different meditation method each day even if it seemed unfamiliar or uncomfortable to try out a new experience with Scripture.

Week 12

The third stage of *lectio divina* was called “Pray.” Part of engaging in Scripture is to be able to enter a prayerful conversation with God through the text. This week focused on praying through the Bible after spending time meditating on the Word. In this way, prayers become an extension of the work of God experienced through reading and meditation. Using the Bible as a guide brings fresh language to prayer. For the congregational setting, prayers were focused on pastoral topics in contrast to individual prayer, which might focus on personal needs, family, and friends. The passage for prayer this week was Psalm 1. Below is the prayer prayed during the service:

God, I pray for *happy* people here in this room. I pray that you would show us how to be happy by following after your Word and avoiding the advice of the wicked. I pray that for our families, I pray that for our friends and our neighbors and our schools, that we would not walk in the advice of the wicked. And God, I pray that we would delight in you as a church, that we would delight in your law, your instruction and that we would meditate on your words. God, I pray that this would be a church that bears your fruit. We might not always know what that looks like, or what the timing might be, but I pray that we would bear *your* fruit. God, watch over

us. Care for us. You are the good shepherd. I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

After this example prayer was prayed, Psalm 23 appeared on the screen (the Psalm for that week's sermon) and the service paused for four minutes to allow each person to practice praying through the passage on their own. During this time, the keyboard player played quiet background music.

The at-home portion of this week's curriculum was to continue to build on the previous three weeks, this time adding praying through the Bible to each day's Bible readings. Again, they read the entire passage slowly once or twice, chose one of the Bible meditation methods from the previous week, then concluded their time of meditation by praying through the prescribed Psalm for the day.

Week 13

The final week of the in-service portion of the project, focused on the last stage of *lectio divina*, "Live." The goal of the final stage was to find a point of application from the text to take away from the time of meditation and be able to continue to meditate on that application throughout the day. The lesson also included a brief time of silence to sit in God's presence as an additional practice of slowing down in a noisy and fast-moving world. This week's passage for meditation was Psalm 146 and, instead of simply practicing this week's method alone, this time the congregation engaged in all four aspects of *lectio divina*. For the purposes of this final stage, several application-oriented questions were given during the service (these same questions were in the at-home instructions for the week), and then one of those questions was answered in order to arrive at a point of application from the text.

To begin, Psalm 146 was read slowly, two times. Then, the congregation meditated on the passage by creating questions that can be answered by reading the text:

How long shall we praise the Lord?
In whom should we trust?
Who is happy?
Who does the Lord raise up, love, and protect?

How long does the Lord reign?

This brief meditation was followed by praying through the passage:

God, we gather today to praise you. We gather in your presence to praise the Lord of life and to sing to you together in the midst of separately living lives of singing to you. We do not ultimately put our trust in nobles, knowing that they cannot save us, yet we do pray for our leaders: The President, the governor, members of congress both nationally and in Ohio as well as our local governments. May you give them wisdom to govern. We pray for those in our congregation that need help today. Whether it's physical, emotional, or otherwise, we pray that they would put their hope in you. Give food to those who need it, protect the righteous, the fatherless, and the widows in our midst. God, you reign forever! We pray for all the generations represented here that grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren would proclaim your greatness with their lives. Amen.

Moving on to this week's specific stage of *lectio divina*, the service paused in silence for a moment before considering one of the methods for application outlined in the at-home instructions. These methods are simply questions that can be asked of the text to help draw out a point of application. The question asked during the service was, "What should I believe about God?" The brief statement answering this question was, "God is the maker of heaven and earth; he remains faithful forever, feeds the hungry, frees prisoners, opens the eyes of the blind, loves the righteous, protects aliens, the fatherless, and the widow." Concluding this time of meditation was this simple statement: "God has spoken to us. Thank you, God, for your Word."

The final week of at-home meditation practices sought to synthesize the entire month's teaching and provide a venue for each person to practice all stages of *lectio divina* each day. The hope was that someone could budget as little as ten minutes of their day to walk through each of the four stages but could certainly spend as much time as their day allowed. After practicing the first three stages of *lectio divina* this week added six possible application questions:

- Does this text reveal something I should believe about God?
- Does this text reveal something I should praise or thank or trust God for?
- Does this text reveal something I should pray about for myself or others?
- Does this text reveal something I should have a new attitude about?
- Does this text reveal something I should make a decision about?
- Does this text reveal something I should do for the sake of Christ, others, or

myself?⁶

The congregation was instructed to simply choose one of those questions each day and attempt to think about their answer to the question throughout the day as a way of meditating on the Word “day and night” (Ps 1:2). To conclude the time of meditation, they used the same closing prayer used in the service, modified with personal language: “God has spoken to me. Thank you, God, for your Word.” The final page of the at-home instructions provided some encouragement to continue in their Bible reading and not become discouraged. There was also an explanation on how to choose a “Psalm of the Day” for prayer even when meditating on a passage somewhere else in the Bible.⁷

The Re-Administration of the BRSA

One week following the conclusion of the in-service portion of the BMC—allowing for those in the test group to conclude their final week of at-home meditation practices—the BRSA post-test was e-mailed out to the original test group. They were then given one week to log back into the Google Form to take the post-test. This test began in identical fashion to the pre-test but had additional questions that asked how many services each person attended and how much they engaged with the at-home portion of the BMC. There was also a series of short-answer qualitative questions to receive additional feedback from the participants on their experiences during the project period. Unfortunately, of the forty-nine individuals who took the pre-test, only thirty-six of them returned to take the post-test.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the methodology used to complete the Bible meditation project at Trinity Church as well as to provide a picture of the corporate meditation

⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 74.

⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 51–52.

practices. The pre-test survey gave insight into the current Bible reading and meditation practices of those at Trinity and provided helpful information to rewrite portions of the BMC to better address the needs of the congregation. The teaching time in the services gave congregation members an opportunity to learn new ways to meditate on Scripture as well as deepen the experience with Scripture in the corporate gathering. The at-home portion of the project allowed individuals to solidify these practices in their own lives and gain confidence in their ability to meditate on the Psalms.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This concluding chapter evaluates the major aspects of the Bible meditation project at Trinity Church in Mentor, Ohio. The evaluation includes an assessment of the original goals of the project as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the project and recommendations on how the project could be improved upon. Finally, there will be concluding reflections from both a theological and personal perspective on the results of the project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of the project was to increase spiritual formation and encourage Scripture reading habits in the members of Trinity Church of Mentor, Ohio through the use of Scripture meditation, primarily *lectio divina*, within the context of the corporate worship gatherings.

Evaluating an “increase in spiritual formation” is somewhat subjective and can be difficult to properly ascertain, but it is possible to evaluate a change in Scripture reading habits. Better Scripture reading habits do not necessarily equate to deeper levels of spiritual formation, but they still may be an indicator of formation occurring. One of the reasons for this project is that Trinity has people who are full of Bible knowledge and understand Bible study well, but there has not been a history of teaching on meditation and fewer members regularly participate in Bible meditation or memorization. Completing the project during a corporate worship gathering instead of during a separate class on meditation allowed the largest amount of people to be able to participate. As mentioned in chapter 1, Trinity has a history of faithful attendance on Sunday mornings

but can have a lack of attendance for additional events and classes. Since Bible meditation is such an important practice, the leadership of the church agreed that having this project occur on a Sunday morning would be beneficial to increase our use of the Bible corporately and teach meditation methods to the entire church.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Four goals were determined at the project outset: (1) assess the current level of regular Bible reading and the type of Bible reading for thirty regular church attenders; (2) develop a plan and timeline under the supervision of a panel of church leaders to bring the principles of *lectio divina* into the corporate worship gathering; (3) equip the church body to better interact with Scripture through the teaching of *lectio divina* during the corporate worship gathering and equip church attenders to practice what they have learned at home; and (4) assess the results of the project as compared to the initial assessment.

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess both the current amount of Bible reading as well as what type of Bible reading—Bible study, devotional reading, memorization, or meditation—was practiced among thirty regular church attenders. This goal was met by administering the BRSA to anyone at Trinity who desired to be a part of the test group. Analyzing the results led to a clearer picture of the Bible reading habits of Trinity Church.¹ While the survey showed that most (about 62 percent) people find that reading the Bible comes easily to them, half (49 percent) of respondents agreed at least somewhat that most of their Bible reading occurred in church or a church class. 55 percent of people at least somewhat agreed that in-depth Bible study was a common practice in their lives, but only 14 percent said the same for Bible memorization, 37 percent for Bible

¹ See appendix 4 for results of the pre-test assessment.

meditation, and 34 percent for praying through Scripture. Since a significant part of this project was meditating on Scripture in the corporate worship gathering, each respondent was asked if the amount of Scripture they heard regularly in service was sufficient for corporate worship. Around 71 percent of respondents at least somewhat agreed that Trinity reads a sufficient amount of Scripture during its gatherings in their opinion.

In general, respondents had very few misconceptions about Bible meditation. Only 10 percent somewhat agreed or agreed to the statement, “Meditation is a practice the Bible does not address;” however, another 24.5 percent only somewhat disagreed with this statement. When responding to the statement, “Meditation is primarily about relaxation,” 45 percent of respondents strongly disagreed. Nearly 84 percent of people at least somewhat agreed with the statement, “I understand how the Holy Spirit works through Scripture as I read.” This aligns with the initial assessment that Trinity attendees generally have good Bible knowledge even if they do not engage in Scripture meditation or other spiritual disciplines.

Bible engagement seems to be a common practice among the survey group, with almost 41 percent stating they read the Bible at least once a day and another 36.7 percent saying they read it more than once a week. However, Bible meditation was much less common, with most answering “Rarely/Never” (26.5 percent) or “A few times a month” (26.5 percent).

Overall, these results were promising because they showed positive engagement with Scripture and understanding of the importance of Scripture in the lives of a significant number of those in the survey group. For the project, the results also showed areas—particularly regarding meditation—where the respondents had need for growth. These are the areas that the project was designed to address. This goal was considered successfully met when thirty people successfully took the BRSA but, in total, forty-nine people participated in the pre-test assessment.

Goal 2

The second goal was to create a plan and a timeline under the supervision of church leaders to bring the principles of *lectio divina* into the corporate worship gathering at Trinity Church. I worked directly with the Lead Pastor to create the timeline for the project. By choosing the fall season for the project, the hope was that most church attenders would be back from any summer travel and more settled in their normal routines. This would hopefully mean maximum participation from the congregation. The Lead Pastor also decided to incorporate the project into a longer series on the Psalms that would continue into the fall and beyond the project period.

After the BMC was modified following the initial survey period, the newly revised draft was sent to a panel including the Lead Pastor, Associate Pastor, and two lay leaders from the church. Each was also given a rubric to use in evaluating the BMC.² While all four members of the panel provided valuable insights either verbally or via e-mail, only two members of the panel returned completed rubrics. This goal was successfully achieved after feedback was received from all the panel members and then the final version of the BMC was created based on their feedback.

Goal 3

The third goal was to equip the church body to better interact with Scripture by teaching *lectio divina* during the corporate worship gathering and giving them resources to practice Bible meditation at home. Upon completion of the BMC, the five-week Bible meditation series was implemented into the Sunday morning services. The details of these services were covered in chapter 4. Each week, a different aspect of *lectio divina* was taught and there was an opportunity to practice that aspect during the service. As a handout, a small booklet was made that contained the at-home portion of the BMC that was available to anyone in the church, even if they did not take the initial assessment.

² See appendix 1.

This was one of the advantages of doing this project during the regular gathering—everyone attending had an opportunity to learn and grow in their practice of Bible meditation. This goal was successfully completed after the congregation members received their handouts and all five weeks of the Bible meditation series had concluded.

Goal 4

The fourth goal was to assess the results of the project as compared to the initial assessment. Following the conclusion of the in-service portion of the project, the participants still had one week left of at-home Bible meditation practices that they could utilize. At the end of this week, the participants were e-mailed a link to the post-test and given instructions to take the post-test within forty-eight hours of receiving the e-mail. As previously mentioned, only thirty-six of the original test group returned to take the post-test, so I was not able to compare the changes between all those who were originally tested. As an additional problem, each participant was given specific written instructions—with an example—on how to generate a unique identifier to associate their pre-test and post-test answers; however, many of these identifiers on the pre-test were clearly created improperly (having the wrong number of digits or entire names instead of simply initials) and that trend continued for the post-test. This made it a challenge to associate all the individuals with their previous responses. A few times, there was clearly a simple typo in the identifier, perhaps reversing the order of two numbers, but other times, the identifiers were so different, there was no way to confidently associate pre-test and post-test results. In total, thirty-one of the original forty-nine responses were used for comparison.

Of those responses, four people had scores lower in the post-test than in the pre-test, and another three had the exact same total score. In comparison, fourteen had a score increase of ten or more with two of those being higher than twenty. Total results of the survey can be found in appendix 4. Based on the thirty-one available results, this goal

was successfully accomplished because a two-tailed, paired *t*-test for dependent samples ($t_{(30)} = -5.75, p < .0001$) demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre and post-test survey scores. For the final results, item three on the survey, “I feel that the amount of Scripture I hear read during a corporate worship gathering is sufficient for proper corporate worship,” was omitted for two reasons. First, this question is entirely subjective, based on a person’s opinion and not necessarily an opinion the project attempted to change. Second, there was a different desired response from the start of the project to the finish. Before the project began, the desired response was a negative one—disagreement with that statement—and after the amount of Scripture read in the service was increased, the desired response was now agreement. It was an interesting data point to see people’s feelings on the subject but not a point to use in statistical analysis. Finally, the amount of people who selected “agree” or more on the pre-test and the post-test was around 70 percent in each survey, showing their opinions did not change in any significant way. Detailed results from the survey can be found in appendix 4.

While the ultimate results are positive, explaining the few negative outliers is challenging. Fifty percent of the respondents attended all five services live or viewed the services online and an additional forty-four percent attended four of the services. Only one of the people with negative change between the pre-test and the post-test attended less than four services—that person only attended two. The qualitative items at the end of the post-test gave some insight on the negative changes. When asked the question, “How has the Bible meditation series changed your practice of Bible meditation?” one example person responded, “Prodding me to begin.” So, this individual already struggled with reading the Bible. Another, when asked, “How have you seen yourself grow spiritually during the last month?” responded, “I haven’t seen anything yet.”

In addition to the positive results from the *t*-test, the Bible reading classification items on the survey showed positive movement. The number of people reading their Bibles at least once a day increased from 41 percent to 51 percent and the

number of people meditating on Scripture at least once a day increased from 10 percent to 30 percent. Those indicating that they meditate on Scripture “more than once a week” increased from 18 percent to 31 percent. To get an idea of the survey group’s relation to Trinity, in the post-test they were asked to respond to the statement, “What is your level of involvement at Trinity?” 61 percent responded that they are a member and regularly serve, 25 percent are attenders and regularly serve, 8 percent attend regularly and do not serve, and the rest (6 percent) either attend infrequently or are new to Trinity.

While numbers do tell a story, the short, qualitative responses on the post-test gave a broader picture as to how this series helped those in the congregation. It seems that many people were able to successfully incorporate the practice of Bible meditation into their lives either for the first time or at least in a more confident manner. When responding to the question, “How has the Bible meditation series changed your practice of Bible meditation?” a few responses included: “I have been able to meditate more on scripture. Having more available tools for diving deep, thinking through, and praying through scripture,” “Slowing down with the scripture reading. A passage is meant to be slowly ingested. When a verse sticks out that day, read it a couple of times over, put it into memorization, or think about it. Even praying through the passage has helped my quiet time become more enhanced,” and “I try to incorporate the Scriptures I've been studying to every facet of my life and share the things I've learned with those around me.” When asked how they have seen themselves grow spiritually during the Bible meditation series, a respondent answered, “The Psalms never resonated with me, but this series has taken me deeper in understanding and application to my life.” Finally, when asked about the most significant thing they learned, seven of the respondents mentioned praying through Scripture and others focused on the various methods for meditation in the at-home book. A full report of the qualitative answers is available in appendix 4.

Strengths of the Project

One of the most significant strengths of this project is the positive impact it had on the congregation. Beyond the statistics and even the qualitative answers by the survey group, several people over the course of the project period and beyond have candidly reported the significant difference in their lives from learning and practicing Bible meditation. As previously mentioned, Trinity attenders generally have good Bible knowledge and regularly serve, but, as the research confirmed, few had previously learned how to meditate on Scripture. Throughout this project, many expressed a new desire to seek God through the Scriptures and others said that Bible reading now comes easier than before. I did not expect so many to express excitement over learning to pray through the Bible, but that should not have surprised me. When I originally learned that practice years ago, it forever transformed how I can choose to approach prayer. I do hope that this has a lasting effect on the church body and that people maintain their excitement and new habits when it comes to meditating on Scripture.

Another strength of this project is the positive change to our corporate worship gatherings. While the personal growth portion is significant, the major point of this project was to develop and practice a method for *corporate* meditation based on *lectio divina*. Having spent the last decade or so studying forms of liturgy and making incremental changes to how Trinity's services are structured, I still felt that our use of Scripture was not enough, especially in relation to many formal liturgical churches. This project was developed in part to address this problem. In addition to simply reading passages of Scripture as a service element, the church now has the additional tool of corporate meditation to include in services throughout the year. In working with the Lead Pastor, the plan for this project was not simply to create something as an academic exercise but to be able to change how Trinity uses Scripture going forward. While it does appear—based on the survey responses—that people generally thought enough Scripture was used in the worship services, it was positive to see that even after a dramatic increase

in the use of Scripture in services, people were very open to the new experience and depth it brought to the gathering.

A final strength of this project was my own personal development both academically and spiritually. The months of research, writing, surveys, and preparation have expanded my knowledge and abilities to take on similar tasks in the future. In fact, I have already been able to assist other staff at the church create helpful surveys for their ministries. My own spiritual growth is even more significant. While I have long been a student of spiritual formation practices including Bible meditation, I have been less of a consistent practitioner. I knew going into this project that I would have to practice these methods consistently for the months leading up to the project period so I could be a confident teacher. I did find that it can be easy to simply slip back into the Bible reading “checkbox” for the day, but still I forced myself to practice *lectio divina* often, especially during the four months leading up to the project period. The Psalms journals we made available to the congregation began as a tool for myself that I simply wanted to share with as many people as possible. While using this journal as part of my daily meditation practice, I have journaled more consistently than ever before in my life.

Weaknesses of the Project

The first weakness of this project was the constraining time put on the project. This time constraint was problematic both in the number of weeks allowed for the project as well as the short time allotted in the service. A few people expressed that they wished we had additional weeks to explore these meditation practices, and I would agree. The entire process sped by and this project only scratched the surface of Bible meditation. Another person remarked that they would have liked to learn more about the historical teachings of the church regarding Bible meditation as well. Even more constraining was the time in the service itself. Sunday morning church services have many elements including prayer, Scripture, songs, sermons, announcements, communion, and more, so it

makes sense that adding something new to the service would present time challenges. While we attempted to shorten other aspects of the service, the project felt crammed into the service and rushed, and each service ran significantly longer than Trinity's normal services. Fortunately, no one seemed to complain about the longer services, and everyone remained engaged during the corporate time of meditation.

The most glaring weakness of the project was the method chosen for the surveys. In theory, an online signup open to the whole congregation should have been an easy pathway for people to participate. However, this quickly became problematic in a few different ways. First, the instructions were given verbally during the service with a link to the survey placed in the bulletin as well as on the website page where all church signups occur. The verbal instructions were clear that those signing up were committing to take the survey at that time and then take it again after the project period. Fifty-six people signed up to take the survey and were sent the link to the Google Form, but only forty-nine of them participated. The next problem was clearly the instructions for generating a unique identifier. While slightly complicated, the process for creating an identifier should have ensured that no one would have the same identifier as another, and that, if following the same directions, someone would be able to generate this identifier again. Not only were some identifiers clearly not created properly during the pre-test, but there were also some identifiers that did not correlate at all with those created in the post-test. Additionally, only thirty-six people of the original forty-nine returned to take the post-test survey. I do not believe any of these errors had a significant impact on goal four, but it did cause frustration.

A final weakness of this project was the need for additional separation on the teaching of Bible meditation as opposed to other forms of meditation. Part of this was removed from the curriculum after the pre-test surveys showed most people had a good understanding of Bible meditation not being like yoga or transcendental meditation, but there was at least one qualitative response that indicated more education in this area may

have been necessary. If one person in the survey group had this line of thinking, it is likely others in a congregation of hundreds of people could still have some misconceptions. Of all the areas that were trimmed back due to time, this is such an important distinction to make, and it needed additional teaching to ensure correct thinking for as many people as possible.

What I Would Do Differently

When considering these weaknesses, there are some ways this project can be improved if it were repeated. The first would be to address the issue of time allotted to the project both in number of weeks as well as amount of time in the service. Even an additional one or two weeks would have given extra time to practice corporate *lectio divina* and solidify it as a part of Trinity's regular practice. The entire four-stage *lectio divina* only occurred during week five, and it had to share its time with teaching on the final stage—Live. Perhaps spending an additional two weeks simply practicing *lectio divina* without any teaching would have helped the congregation have a greater understanding of its practice and its potential role in the corporate gatherings.

The amount of time allotted in each service was generally only five to eight minutes. This compressed time was enough to say a few words of instruction and practice the method for the week but not sufficient to truly teach the Bible meditation practices. Removing or shortening additional service elements during the project period could have provided the extra time for a more relaxed pace of teaching and additional instruction. It may have also been beneficial to preach an entire sermon that included a full explanation of Bible meditation from biblical, historical, and practical perspectives.

Another option for creating more time would have been to teach a class at a separate time where there could be focused attention on all aspects of Bible meditation. Having a class would also have given people an opportunity to discuss what they were discovering with their peers and provide additional encouragement in their spiritual

walks. However, part of the reason for the project occurring in the corporate gathering was because Trinity people have the reputation of not wanting to attend many learning events beyond their current involvement.

Clearly, a better process for surveying the participants was necessary. At the time, I was unable to think of a process that would be accessible to everyone who wanted to participate and identify them from the pre-test to the post-test. Not only did people sign up and not participate—either initially or returning for the post-test—but the directions for creating a personal identifier were clearly too complicated for many people. Having a separate class and handing out paper surveys with pre-selected identifiers may have helped this situation but would have still been dependent on people returning for the post-test.

Finally, this project should have had additional materials to help the congregation continue their meditation practices beyond the project period. This was another comment a few people made in the qualitative section of the post-test. While people could purchase the Psalms journal and continue meditating on the Psalms, they received no additional Bible reading plan beyond the five-week at-home booklet. They were also not provided with any additional Bible meditation resources such as books, websites, or podcasts that would align with Trinity’s doctrinal stances.

Theological Reflections

The biblical call to engage constantly with the Word of God is one that all believers must heed. The few Psalms covered in this study represent only a small portion of what the Bible has to say about the importance of God’s Word. Joshua 1:8 contains the oft-quoted command: “This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it.” God’s people cannot carefully observe everything written in his Word if they do not read the book of instruction. As the research here showed, people at Trinity—and

most likely people at many other churches too—have never been given the proper tools to meditate on Scripture. It is the job of those who have studied, learned, and practiced these things to teach them to others so their walks with God may thrive (2 Tim 2:2).

Fortunately, the Bible is still commonly found in twenty-first century America. Research shows that around 77 percent of people in the United States at least own a Bible but, of course, far fewer regularly read their Bibles.³ To be set apart in our pursuit of Christlikeness, we need to engage with the Bible regularly. There is an incredible scene in Nehemiah 8 when the people who had been deprived of the public hearing of God’s Word gathered to hear Ezra read. He stood above all the people, and when he opened the book, they all stood at attention (8:5). After he said words of praise to God, all the people said, “Amen, Amen!” and then knelt and worshipped with their faces to the ground (8:6). As he read the Scriptures, the priests and scribes translated and explained everything to all the people (8:9–10). What incredible reverence and awe for the Word of God! Good preachers and teachers are essential for the church but so are people in awe of holding God’s very breath (2 Tim 3:16) in our hands.

Finally, returning to Colossians 3 and its parallel passage in Ephesians 5, imagine a church where God’s Word dwelled. This is evident because the people speak the Word to one another and are full of thankfulness to God (Eph 5:19–20). Paul’s call in both passages is to godly living because of the work of Jesus Christ. The way that his people know his works and his person is through his Word. In fact, Jesus is the Word of God in human form (John 1:14). By beholding Christ through his Word, the church becomes a people transformed to live for righteousness and carry out his mission in the world.

³ Jeffery Fulks, John Farquhar Plake, and Randy Peterson, “State of the Bible USA 2022” (American Bible Society, October 2022), 16.

Personal Reflections

Through this project, I have grown personally in many ways. I have deepened my knowledge of Scripture, Bible meditation, and worship leading. I have a revived joy in Bible meditation and have hopefully developed new habits that will continue to transform my time with the Lord. Of course, my abilities as a student, researcher, and writer have been honed throughout this process as well. In some ways, this project is the continuation of a decade-long pursuit to combine the areas of spiritual formation and corporate worship, and this is an area in which I have the tools to continue to expand going forward.

It has been a long time since I have dug into Scripture passages with the depth necessary for this project. I returned to exploring the original languages—although I do not read them—and discovering meaning sometimes lost in our great—but not perfect—translations. One of my plans going forward is to study the original languages and hopefully one day be able to read at least parts of the Bible in Hebrew and Greek.

Reading numerous authors from across church history has given me so much insight into Bible meditation. This was especially true when I discovered the writings of the Puritans. Typically, when I searched for meditation, I had to sort through quasi–New Age sources, Roman Catholic writings, or the church fathers—with some notable exceptions—but to discover the spirituality of the Puritans was a breath of fresh air.

For many years now I have pursued private study in spiritual formation. I have always had curiosity as to how the principles and practices of spiritual formation might apply directly to the corporate worship gathering. Certainly, the acts of gathering, singing, hearing the Word, and practicing the ordinances are formational on their own, but I wanted to see if there was also a place for personal disciplines to be practiced and taught in the corporate setting. This project was an opportunity to pursue after this curiosity and perhaps serve as a foundation for future teaching and practicing of the disciplines in corporate worship. The role of Worship Pastor cannot simply be a person

who organizes musicians and leads songs. This person must be a formational leader, intentionally using whatever tools necessary to develop gospel-minded, life-long worshippers. Hopefully this project served to deepen the corporate worship as well as the individual worship of many at Trinity Church.

Finally, I have used this project as an opportunity for personal spiritual growth in a way I did not expect. I knew that the best way for me to teach these principals was to be a practitioner first. However, I did not expect the profound transformation in my own Bible meditations that I would experience. This quickly moved beyond a school project or academic exercise to a habit-forming, spiritually enriching pursuit of God through his Word. The final challenge will be to continue to build on this practice of Bible meditation and allow it to take full root in my life that I may continually be nourished by the flowing streams (Psalm 1:3).

Conclusion

This chapter explored the outcomes of the BMC and the accompanying BRSA research survey at Trinity Church in Mentor, Ohio. The goals of this project were evaluated as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the project. This project seemed to have a positive effect on both the worship services and the personal lives of people attending Trinity. In the future, the hope is to continue to utilize the practice of corporate Bible meditation and perhaps other spiritual disciplines in the Sunday morning worship service. This is hopefully one step down the continued path of discipleship for Trinity and its members.

I am grateful for this opportunity to pursue doctoral studies at Southern Seminary and for the insights from the faculty during the course of study. I am also thankful to be able to serve at Trinity Church for so many years with a staff so faithful to the teachings of the Bible and an incredible body of believers constantly pursuing after Christ. They all have endured many extended lectures as I moved through the program

and were kind and generous during the project period. It is my hope and prayer that, just as I have grown through this experience, Trinity has grown as well, and we will see the fruits of dwelling with Scripture for many years to come. May the Word of Christ dwell richly among us, in all wisdom, as we teach and admonish one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in our hearts. May whatever we do, in word or in deed, be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col 3:15–17).

APPENDIX 1
SUNDAY MORNING CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT
RUBRIC

The Sunday Morning Curriculum Assessment Rubric was used by the panel of members from Trinity to evaluate the curriculum used in the worship service. One rubric was provided for each week in the series and participants completed the rubric and left additional comments as needed.

Sunday Morning Curriculum Assessment Rubric – Week 1

LECTIO DIVINA AS A CORPORATE WORSHIP EXERCISE
AT TRINITY CHURCH IN MENTOR, OHIO

Evaluator Name: _____ Date: _____

1 = Insufficient 2 = Requires Attention 3 = Sufficient 4 = Exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is relevant to teaching the church the practice of meditation.					
The lesson is faithful to Scripture in its content.					
The goal of the lesson is clearly understood.					
The points of the lesson are clearly understood.					
The practices taught in the lesson are accessible to the church body.					
Given the short timeframe, the lesson covers the material sufficiently.					
The practices outlined in the “home” section are clearly understood.					
Overall, the lesson is presented well and sufficient for a Sunday morning service.					

Sunday Morning Curriculum Assessment Rubric – Week 2

LECTIO DIVINA AS A CORPORATE WORSHIP EXERCISE
AT TRINITY CHURCH IN MENTOR, OHIO

Evaluator Name: _____ Date: _____

1 = Insufficient 2 = Requires Attention 3 = Sufficient 4 = Exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is relevant to teaching the church the practice of meditation.					
The lesson is faithful to Scripture in its content.					
The goal of the lesson is clearly understood.					
The points of the lesson are clearly understood.					
The practices taught in the lesson are accessible to the church body.					
Given the short timeframe, the lesson covers the material sufficiently.					
The practices outlined in the “home” section are clearly understood.					
Overall, the lesson is presented well and sufficient for a Sunday morning service.					

Sunday Morning Curriculum Assessment Rubric – Week 3

LECTIO DIVINA AS A CORPORATE WORSHIP EXERCISE
AT TRINITY CHURCH IN MENTOR, OHIO

Evaluator Name: _____ Date: _____

1 = Insufficient 2 = Requires Attention 3 = Sufficient 4 = Exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is relevant to teaching the church the practice of meditation.					
The lesson is faithful to Scripture in its content.					
The goal of the lesson is clearly understood.					
The points of the lesson are clearly understood.					
The practices taught in the lesson are accessible to the church body.					
Given the short timeframe, the lesson covers the material sufficiently.					
The practices outlined in the “home” section are clearly understood.					
Overall, the lesson is presented well and sufficient for a Sunday morning service.					

Sunday Morning Curriculum Assessment Rubric – Week 4

LECTIO DIVINA AS A CORPORATE WORSHIP EXERCISE
AT TRINITY CHURCH IN MENTOR, OHIO

Evaluator Name: _____ Date: _____

1 = Insufficient 2 = Requires Attention 3 = Sufficient 4 = Exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is relevant to teaching the church the practice of meditation.					
The lesson is faithful to Scripture in its content.					
The goal of the lesson is clearly understood.					
The points of the lesson are clearly understood.					
The practices taught in the lesson are accessible to the church body.					
Given the short timeframe, the lesson covers the material sufficiently.					
The practices outlined in the “home” section are clearly understood.					
Overall, the lesson is presented well and sufficient for a Sunday morning service.					

Sunday Morning Curriculum Assessment Rubric – Week 5

LECTIO DIVINA AS A CORPORATE WORSHIP EXERCISE
AT TRINITY CHURCH IN MENTOR, OHIO

Evaluator Name: _____ Date: _____

1 = Insufficient 2 = Requires Attention 3 = Sufficient 4 = Exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is relevant to teaching the church the practice of meditation.					
The lesson is faithful to Scripture in its content.					
The goal of the lesson is clearly understood.					
The points of the lesson are clearly understood.					
The practices taught in the lesson are accessible to the church body.					
Given the short timeframe, the lesson covers the material sufficiently.					
The practices outlined in the “home” section are clearly understood.					
Overall, the lesson is presented well and sufficient for a Sunday morning service.					

APPENDIX 2

BIBLE MEDITATION WEEKLY CURRICULUM

The following outline contains all the curriculum for the Sunday morning Bible meditation teaching and the weekly at-home practices. Each week, the congregation participated in these lessons as part of the Sunday morning services. The at-home portion of this curriculum was reformatted into a booklet for distribution to the congregation.

Bible Meditation Weekly Curriculum

Week 1 – Intro to Scripture Reading

In service

- Begin with an explanation of the Bible reading process for the next month's services
 - We will be practicing corporate Scripture meditation
 - We will slowly build upon the practice each week
 - For this week, we will hear Scripture read, but not as part of the meditation process
- Why read the Bible?
 - For the purpose of godliness – the only way to know God's instructions and obey them is to learn them from his word
 - For our faith – Romans 10:17 says that faith comes from *hearing* the word of Christ
 - We need to be connected to the source of living water (Psalm 1)
 - In 2022, 10 percent of *Bible owners* read it every day; 12 percent < than once a year and 40 percent never read their Bible at all
 - At Trinity, we surveyed x people and discovered:
 - About 55 percent of people said reading the Bible is a common practice
 - 40 percent read the Bible at least once a day
 - But, 26 percent of people never *meditate* on Scripture
 - More than half, meditate only seldom
 - Nearly 86 percent of people do not *memorize* Scripture regularly
- We want to help you engage with Scripture
 - The top three reasons why people do not engage with Scripture are:
 - Time, don't know where to start, don't feel excited about it
 - Over the next month, we will show you how to start, how you can make the most of your time, and *hopefully* how to get excited about Scripture
- Have four separate lectionary-style readings
 - Old Testament – Jeremiah 15:16
 - New Testament – Colossians 3:12–16
 - Psalms – Psalm 119:57–60
 - Gospel – John 1:1-5; 14
- This week's prayers will be either based on Scripture or word for word Scripture
 - Invocation – Psalm 63:1–4
 - Prayer of Confession – Psalm 25:6–8, 11, 1–18

Homework

The homework for this week is to be sure each person participating is in the habit of Bible reading before starting the meditation practices next week. The following is a helpful place to start:

- Pick something to read for the week that you are familiar with and that is easy to read
 - Examples: Gospels, Paul's letters, revisit the book of James.
- Read for at least ten minutes *every day*.
 - We are trying to build a habit of daily Bible reading, so we will be reading every day.

- Ideally, you will find the same time and place each day for consistency but do whatever works best for you.
- Pray before and after you read.
 - Begin with a prayer for the Spirit to guide you through the text.
 - End with a prayer thanking God for his word.
- If you have not yet picked up the *Psalms Abide Journal*, make sure you pick one up this week and familiarize yourself with the layout of the book if you are using one.

Week 2 – Read

This week focuses on simply reading the text of Scripture. However, we will talk about a *specific* type of reading—slow, deliberate, *lectio divina*-style reading.

In service

- Meditation in church history
 - Our method this month is based on a practice called “lectio divina.” But, it’s not important to remember the name.
 - Based on the teachings of Benedict in c.500 A.D.
 - Encouraged a prayerful reading and engagement with the Word
 - Ignatius of Loyola taught readers to place themselves *in* the Bible story. See, hear, smell the world Jesus lived in and imagine walking alongside him and listening to him.
 - John Calvin taught that meditation is akin to eating. If “prophetic doctrine is tasteless . . . [you are] lacking tastebuds.”
 - Puritans continued the tradition of *sola scriptura* and their pastors frequently taught meditation to the congregation.
 - Richard Baxter says “put Christ no farther from you than he hath put himself.” Christ is in the Scriptures, so stay close to him there!
 - Recently, meditation has been overtaken by eastern thought, but that is *not* Biblical meditation.
 - The survey shows you all already know that!
 - Authors such as Richard Foster and Donald Whitney teach how to meditate in practical and accessible ways.
 - Bonhoeffer says that meditation takes the burden off the reader to read a whole passage or make something happen. Just allow the word to “penetrate and dwell within us.”
- The focus verse is Psalm 121
 - The entire Psalm is only eight verses, and they are relatively short verses, so it will work well in a corporate setting
- Begin with an explanation of the type of reading being practiced today and this week
 - We read slowly and repeat the reading a few times
 - We are sensitive for words and phrases that stick out during the reading
 - We read the passage out loud and encourage people to read out loud when by themselves
- Read Psalm 121
 - Read all of Psalm 121 *twice*, slowly
 - Explain the “Emphasize different words method”
 - We read the verse out loud, emphasizing each word as we repeat the phrase
 - Read 121:5 using this method
 - *The* Lord protects you
 - The *Lord* protects you
 - The Lord *protects* you
 - The Lord protects *you*

Homework

The homework for this week is to practice the art of slow and deliberate reading. The first step in meditative reading is to learn to read slowly and learn to *listen* to the text rather than simply reading for information gathering.

- Say a brief prayer before reading. Always start with prayer before hearing from God. This is a conversation!
- Weekly Psalm readings
 - Monday—Psalm 8
 - Tuesday—Psalm 12
 - Wednesday—Psalm 19
 - Thursday—Psalm 66
 - Friday—Psalm 93
 - Saturday—Psalm 110
 - Sunday—Catch-up day or any other Psalm
- Read the entire Psalm 2–3 times. You may read additional times if the Psalm is shorter.
- Look for a part of the passage that sticks out to you today and focus on that part.
 - Perhaps it is a phrase, sentence, or entire verse.
 - Practice the “emphasize each word” method on the selected passage.
 - Listen for God to speak truth to you through his word.
- End with a prayer thanking God for his word and for speaking to you today.

Week 3 – Think

This week focuses on various Scripture meditation practices. While technically *all* of the lectio divina method is a Scripture meditation practice, this week provides additional tools for Scripture meditation for use in the service as well as for personal devotion.

In Service

- Begin with an explanation of Scripture meditation
 - This kind of meditation is about *filling* your mind with the word of God, not an emptying of your mind or a relaxation method taught in the secular world or eastern religions.
 - We read *big* and mediate *small*.
 - In Philippians, Paul gives his readers an example on how to *fill* your mind, how to properly meditate:
4:8—Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.
- Our task today is to meditate on a passage of Scripture together by discovering these things in the passage.
 - *List out all of the Phil 4:8 aspects of the passage*
 - What is true – the Lord is my light and my salvation
 - What is honorable – I will be confident regardless of my circumstances
 - What is just – even if everyone abandons me, God will not
 - What is pure – be strong and let your heart take courage
 - What is lovely – dwelling in the house of the Lord
 - What is commendable – to wait on the Lord
 - What is excellent – seeking God’s face
 - What is praiseworthy – seeing the goodness of the Lord
 - *Hear the passage through song*

Homework

- This week, you will begin to practice new and exciting methods of meditation on Scripture. Below are numerous methods (these are just great suggestions, not a complete list) of ways to meditate on Scripture. Pick one each day and write what God shows you in your Psalms journal.
- We are building a full method of meditating on Scripture, so this week begin reading the same way you began last week. Read the entire passage through slowly 2–3 times and see what verse(s) or section stick out to you. That is the part you will focus on for meditation.
- Each day, pick *one* of the following methods to try. Please pick a different one each day so you can experience a variety of options throughout the next few weeks.
- Meditation Methods (adapted from *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by: Donald Whitney):
 - Rewrite the text in your own words
 - Think of an Illustration of the Text—What picture explains it?
 - Ask how the text points to the Law or the Gospel
 - Ask how the text points to something about Jesus

- Ask what question is *answered* or what problem is solved by this text. (Imagine you are making a *Jeopardy* answer for this passage i.e. “What is sin?” that is answered in this passage)
- Memorize the text—not the entire Psalm, just the section you focused on
- Create an artistic expression of the text—draw a picture, write a poem or song
- Ask the Philippians 4:8 questions of the text—like we did in service
- Set and discover a minimum number of insights from the text. Perhaps you want to find 10 (or more!) observations from the text, set the number and don’t stop until you have made all the observations
- Daily Reading Passages
 - Monday—Psalms 1 and 2
 - Tuesday—Psalm 33
 - Wednesday—Psalm 40
 - Thursday—Psalm 75
 - Friday—Psalm 81
 - Saturday—Psalm 96
 - Sunday—Catch up day, or free choice of any Psalm

Week 4—Pray

This week, we add a method of praying through the Scriptures adapted from *Praying the Bible* by Donald Whitney. The goal this week is to be able to use any passage of Scripture as a guide for prayer, bringing new life into our prayer times.

In Service

The goal of today is to briefly explain the method of praying the Bible, give a short demonstration of how it works, then give the congregation an opportunity to try it on their own.

- When we meditate on Scripture, our prayer time becomes an extension of the work of God we experience through reading and meditation.
- We use the Bible to bring fresh language to our *own* prayers.
 - This is *not* about proper exegesis or interpretation, instead it is about using the language of Scripture to inform our prayers.
 - We can finally stop saying the same old things about the same old things!
- In a congregational setting, our prayers are more pastoral, and far-reaching as opposed to a more personal prayer in an individual or small group setting.
 - To begin, we will read Psalm 1 slowly.
 - Then, a pre-written pastoral prayer based on Psalm 1 will be prayed as an example.
 - “God, let our church be full of “happy” people who delight in experiencing your word.”
 - “Lord, show us how to delight in your instruction, lead us a church body.”
 - “Where there are wicked people, Lord, bring justice.”
 - “If there are people here today experiencing the wickedness of sickness, be their God of healing and comfort.”
- Ok, time to practice:
 - We will spend 4 minutes in quiet, individual prayer time, allowing the congregation to practice praying through Psalm 23.
 - I will give a little more instruction and examples:
 - “Lord, shepherd me through this season of life.”
 - “Thank you for providing _____ for my family.”
 - “When I go to (work, school, home, vacation) you are with me.”

Homework

- Now it is time to practice praying through the Bible every day.
- However, we will continue to build upon the previous weeks.
 - Begin by reading the passage slowly, 1–2 times.
 - Select a part of the passage to meditate on.
 - Look back to last week’s list of meditation practices and practice some that worked well for you but try something new as well.
- Pray through the entire passage of Scripture
 - Continue praying until you run out of things to pray about, or you run out of Psalm.
 - Feel free to go onto the next Psalm if you have more to pray about.
 - Remember, there are no “rules,” you are just using the words of Scripture to help give new life to your own prayers.
- Daily Reading Passages
 - Monday—Psalm 103

- Tuesday—Psalm 113
- Wednesday—Psalm 115
- Thursday—Psalm 116
- Friday—Psalm 118
- Saturday—Psalm 121
- Sunday—Catch up day, or free choice of any Psalm

Week 5—Live

In this final week, we will add the fourth and final stage of lectio divina: *contemplatio* or “live” in our context. The focus this week will be on finding a nugget of application to take away from the text. This can be something that we allow God to bring to our minds throughout the day as we work to meditate on his word “day and night.” We will also combine all four stages together this week to demonstrate the full Bible meditation method of lectio divina.

In Service

- The fourth stage of our meditation method is to remember that we are to live out what we hear from God in the Bible.
 - Our goal here is to find a point of application that can then become a part of our life.
 - Part of contemplating Scripture is to simply sit in silence before God, so we will begin the contemplation stage with a moment of silence.
 - Then, we will look back on what we have read, meditated, and prayed on and ask “application-oriented questions of the text” (Donald Whitney *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*).
 - Does this text reveal something I should believe about God?
 - Does this text reveal something I should praise or thank or trust God for?
 - Does this text reveal something I should pray about for myself or others?
 - Does this text reveal something I should have a new attitude about?
 - Does this text reveal something I should make a decision about?
 - Does this text reveal something I should do for the sake of Christ, others, or myself?
- Now, we will end by meditating on Psalm 146.
 - *Read*—We read all of Psalm 146 slowly, two times.
 - *Think*—We will ask what questions this passage answers (Jeopardy method).
 - How long shall we praise the Lord?
 - In whom should we trust?
 - Who is happy?
 - Who does the Lord raise up, love, and protect?
 - How long does the Lord reign?
 - *Pray*—We will pray through the passage.
 - God, we gather today to praise you. We gather in your presence to praise the Lord of life and to sing to you together in the midst of separately living lives of singing to you. We do not ultimately put our trust in nobles, knowing that they cannot save us, yet we do pray for our leaders: The President, the governor, members of congress both nationally and in Ohio as well as our local governments. May you give them wisdom to govern. We pray for those in our congregation that need help today. Whether it’s physical, emotional, or otherwise, we pray that they would put

their hope in you. Give food to those who need it, protect the righteous, the fatherless and the widows in our midst. God, you reign forever! We pray for all the generations represented here that grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren would proclaim your greatness with their lives. Amen.

- *Live*—We pause for a moment to sit in silence before God
 - Something I should believe about God: God is the maker of heaven and earth, he remains faithful forever, feeds the hungry, frees prisoners, opens the eyes of the blind, loves the righteous, protects aliens, the fatherless, and the widow.
- Conclude with a brief prayer of thanks
God has spoken to us. Thank you, God for your Word.

Homework

- Now, it is time to put it all together!
- This week, we will practice lectio divina in its full form and we will discover how much we can receive from God through his word even if we only have a few minutes each day.
- Ok, take a deep breath, here's your daily instructions:
 - Say a brief prayer asking God to speak to you through his word.
 - *Read*—Read the passage slowly 1–2 times (more if it's a shorter passage).
 - Decide on a small part of the passage for meditation
 - Remember, we read big and meditate small
 - *Think*—Pick one of the meditation methods that you would like to use today.
 - Try not to keep coming back to the same one so you don't get bored.
 - If there's something you haven't tried yet, try it out this week.
 - *Pray*—Pray through the entire passage.
 - Pray for things you would normally pray about (family, friends, sickness, physical needs, spiritual needs, the country, the world, the church) using the text of Scripture to inform the words you use.
 - *Live*—It's time to find a point of application (you may already have several just by simply going through the process up to this point).
 - Pause for 30–60 seconds and simply sit in silence before God. It's not a magic formula, just our lives are so busy that we rarely pause, so take a moment to do that knowing that you are in the presence of God.
 - Then, we will look back on what we have read, meditated, and prayed on and ask “application-oriented questions of the text” (Donald Whitney *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*).
 - Does this text reveal something I should believe about God?
 - Does this text reveal something I should praise or thank or trust God for?
 - Does this text reveal something I should pray about for myself or others?

- Does this text reveal something I should have a new attitude about?
- Does this text reveal something I should make a decision about?
- Does this text reveal something I should do for the sake of Christ, others, or myself?
 - Using those questions, simply try to answer *one* of them from the text with something you can carry with you throughout the day.
 - Say a brief closing prayer, thanking God: God has spoken to me. Thank you, God for your Word.
- Daily Reading Passages
 - Monday—Psalm 3
 - Tuesday—Psalm 7
 - Wednesday—Psalm 18
 - Thursday—Psalm 39
 - Friday—Psalm 46
 - Saturday—Psalm 68
 - Sunday—Catch up day, or pick any Psalm

You made it! The tools you have discovered over the last month can apply to any book of the Bible and will hopefully become a life-long process when you sit down to meditate on Scripture. If you have a *Psalms Abide Journal*, go back and work through the Psalms you have yet to meditate on, taking notes on what God is teaching you along the way.

If you're not using the entire lectio divina method for meditation, but still want to use Scripture as a guide for prayer, consider praying through a Psalm a day. While you can pray through any passage of Scripture, the Psalms are already the Bible's prayer book. Simply note what day of the month it is, and pray through that Psalm, or continue to add 30 to the date to discover 5 potential Psalms of the day. If it's the 5th of the month, you can choose Psalms 5, 35, 65, 95, 125. If you're on day 31, you can pick anything or go to Psalm 119 and pray through a portion of the longest Psalm. Quickly skim through the five options and pick one that resonates with you today. Remember, there are no "rules," just a great tool to help bring life to your prayers: the Bible!

Lastly, don't give up. The Bible is a vast book, inspired by an infinite God and full of his immense riches. Meditating (and studying!) God's word is a life-long task. God wants to know you and be known by you, and he gives us his word as the primary mode of communication. Seek him and you *will* find him. Be the "happy" person who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night (Psalm 1).

APPENDIX 3

THE BRSA

The following are the Bible Reading Self-Assessments (pre-test and post-test) given to all participants in the survey group. The final form was delivered via Google Forms and the participants took the survey online. The major difference were the classification questions at the end of each test and the qualitative section at the conclusion of the post-test.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your current practice of Bible reading and meditation as well as your understanding of those practices. This research is being conducted by David Erlandson for purposes of a Bible meditation research project. In this research, you will primarily answer each prompt with your opinion and in the post-test only, provide a few short answers to additional prompts. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

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

Bible Reading Self-Assessment Pre-test

Directions: The questions in this section ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

Using the following scale, please write the number that best corresponds to your feelings in response to the following statements:

1. Reading the Bible comes easily to me.
SD D DS AS A SA
2. Most of my time reading the Bible is in church or a church class.
SD D DS AS A SA
3. I feel that the amount of Scripture I hear read during a corporate worship gathering is sufficient for proper corporate worship.
SD D DS AS A SA
4. In-depth Bible study is a common practice in my life.
SD D DS AS A SA
5. Bible memorization is a common practice in my life.
SD D DS AS A SA
6. Bible meditation is a common practice in my life.
SD D DS AS A SA
7. Praying through Scripture is a common practice in my life.
SD D DS AS A SA

8. I feel equipped to study the Bible on my own.
SD D DS AS A SA
9. I feel equipped to pray through a passage of Scripture.
SD D DS AS A SA
10. Practicing the spiritual disciplines including prayer, Bible reading, solitude, and fasting generally comes easy to me.
SD D DS AS A SA
11. Meditation is a practice the Bible does not address.
SD D DS AS A SA
12. Meditation is primarily about relaxation.
SD D DS AS A SA
13. I have a good understanding of what the historic church teaches about meditation.
SD D DS AS A SA
14. I frequently write out thoughts, prayers, or insights while reading the Bible.
SD D DS AS A SA
15. I understand how the Holy Spirit works through Scripture as I read.
SD D DS AS A SA

For the following section, please select the most appropriate response:

1. I read my Bible (check one)
 More than once a day
 Once a day
 More than once a week
 Once a week
 A few times a month
 Only at church
 Rarely/Never
2. I meditate on Scripture (check one)
 More than once a day
 Once a day
 More than once a week
 Once a week
 A few times a month
 Only at church
 Rarely/Never

3. I pray (check one)
- More than once a day
 - Once a day
 - More than once a week
 - Once a week
 - A few times a month
 - Only at church
 - Rarely/Never

I have a set time for Scripture reading and/or prayer each day

Yes

No

Bible Reading Self-Assessment Post-test

Directions: The questions in this section ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

Using the following scale, please write the number that best corresponds to your feelings in response to the following statements:

1. Reading the Bible comes easily to me.
SD D DS AS A SA
2. Most of my time reading the Bible is in church or a church class.
SD D DS AS A SA
3. I feel that the amount of Scripture I hear read during a corporate worship gathering is sufficient.
SD D DS AS A SA
4. In-depth Bible study is a common practice in my life.
SD D DS AS A SA
5. Bible memorization is a common practice in my life.
SD D DS AS A SA
6. Bible meditation is a common practice in my life.
SD D DS AS A SA
7. Praying through Scripture is a common practice in my life.
SD D DS AS A SA

8. I feel equipped to study the Bible on my own.
SD D DS AS A SA
9. I feel equipped to pray through a passage of Scripture.
SD D DS AS A SA
10. Practicing the spiritual disciplines including prayer, Bible reading, solitude and fasting generally comes easy to me.
SD D DS AS A SA
11. Meditation is a practice the Bible does not address.
SD D DS AS A SA
12. Meditation is primarily about relaxation.
SD D DS AS A SA
13. I have a good understanding of what the historic church teaches about meditation.
SD D DS AS A SA
14. I frequently write out thoughts, prayers, or insights while reading the Bible.
SD D DS AS A SA
15. I understand how the Holy Spirit works through Scripture as I read.
SD D DS AS A SA

For the following questions, select the appropriate response:

1. I read my Bible (check one)
 More than once a day
 Once a day
 More than once a week
 Once a week
 A few times a month
 Only at church
 Rarely/Never
2. I meditate on Scripture (check one)
 More than once a day
 Once a day
 More than once a week

- Once a week
 - A few times a month
 - Only at church
 - Rarely/Never
3. I pray (check one)
- More than once a day
 - Once a day
 - More than once a week
 - Once a week
 - A few times a month
 - Only at church
 - Rarely/Never
4. How many Sunday services did you attend during the Bible meditation series?
- 1 2 3 4 5
5. What is your level of involvement at Trinity?
- Member and regularly serve
 - Regular Attender and regularly serve
 - Occasional attender but serve
 - Member, but do not regularly serve
 - Regular attender, but do not regularly serve
 - Occasional attender, but not do regularly serve
 - New to Trinity
6. I have a set time for Scripture reading and/or prayer each day
- Yes
 - No

For the final questions, please provide as detailed an answer as you are willing to give and as time allows.

1. How has the Bible meditation series changed your view on Bible meditation?
2. How has the Bible meditation series changed your practice of Bible meditation?
3. How have you seen yourself grow spiritually during the last month?
4. What is the most significant thing you learned during the Bible meditation series?
5. What is one thing you wish was covered or covered in more detail during the Bible meditation series?

APPENDIX 4

THE BRSA PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST RESULTS

Here are the results from the BRSA tests. Data from the pre-test was used to refine the Sunday morning curriculum prior to being sent to the evaluation panel. All items on the survey have a desired answer of 6. For most items, 6 indicated, “Strongly Agree,” except for items 2, 11, and 12 for which 6 indicated, “Strongly Disagree” after the data was reversed for the purpose of proper calculations. The data from item 3 has been removed as the item was ultimately thrown out. Some participant data contains errors. These errors were made on the part of the survey participants and were explained in chapter 5. The data does not include everyone who took the test, only the results which were confidently matched from the pre-test to the post-test.

Table A1. BRSA pre-test results

PARTICIPANT	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	I11	I12	I13	I14	I15
567Elizabeth8025	4	3		3	2	1	1	6	5	3	5	6	3	6	6
470L7124	4	3		1	1	2	2	4	3	1	6	4	1	1	3
499M7332	3	3		3	1	5	3	3	3	3	6	5	2	1	5
669E7312	5	5		4	1	1	1	3	1	3	4	6	1	3	5
331a147	3	5		2	1	1	1	5	5	1	6	6	5	5	5
339A7253	6	5		5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	1	5
771A9010	4	6		5	6	6	4	5	5	4	6	6	4	5	4
339J1831	6	5		3	2	5	4	5	4	2	5	5	3	5	5
463J7761	4	4		5	3	3	4	3	3	1	6	6	3	1	4
213J7245	1	3		2	3	3	1	2	1	1	6	5	1	4	6
799A9146	2	5		2	1	2	2	2	4	2	4	6	2	2	3
413K6260	2	1		6	1	1	1	4	4	3	5	5	1	1	3
216A7761	3	2		2	2	2	3	3	3	2	4	4	3	2	4
391A8262	4	5		5	3	2	2	1	3	3	2	2	2	2	5
773B10960	4	3		4	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	2	5
749L9768	3	3		4	3	2	4	4	3	2	5	6	1	4	5
488C911	5	6		4	2	3	2	5	2	4	6	6	2	4	4
954K569	3	5		3	1	1	1	5	4	2	6	6	3	3	4
402R9010	6	6		6	4	4	5	6	5	6	6	6	3	6	6
315L132	3	1		3	1	1	2	3	3	3	4	5	2	2	4
798C374	4	3		2	2	4	5	3	5	3	6	6	5	4	5
703E7730	4	3		4	4	3	2	4	2	3	4	5	2	4	4
956m10338	5	4		3	1	1	3	5	3	3	2	4	1	4	3
749L199	5	3		4	2	2	2	4	4	2	5	5	2	5	5
231A569	3	4		4	2	4	3	5	4	2	6	6	5	2	5
725D12119	4	5		5	2	2	2	4	3	2	5	5	2	3	3
440S7785	2	1		3	2	1	2	3	3	2	6	5	1	1	3
749M1200	6	6		6	4	5	4	5	5	5	6	6	4	2	6
313A9146	2	2		3	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	6	1	1	4
478L7094	5	5		1	2	4	1	2	2	3	6	5	4	1	4
488R9322	5	6		5	3	4	5	5	5	5	6	6	1	6	6

Answers to Classification Items in Percentages:

I read my Bible (check one)

More than once a day–12.2 percent

Once a day–28.6 percent

More than once a week–36.7 percent

Once a week–4.1 percent

A few times a month–14.3 percent

Only at church–4.1 percent

Rarely/Never–0

I meditate on Scripture (check one)

More than once a day–2 percent

Once a day–8.2 percent

More than once a week–18.4 percent
 Once a week–8.2 percent
 A few times a month–26.5 percent
 Only at church–10.2 percent
 Rarely/Never–26.5 percent

I pray (check one)
 More than once a day–69.4 percent
 Once a day–20.4 percent
 More than once a week–8.2 percent
 Once a week–0
 A few times a month–2 percent
 Only at church–0 percent
 Rarely/Never–0 percent

I have a set time for Scripture reading and/or prayer each day
 Yes–40.8 percent
 No–59.2 percent

Table A2. BRSA post-test Survey results

PARTICIPANT	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	I11	I12	I13	I14	I15
567Elizabeth8025	5	2		6	3	5	3	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	6
470L7124	4	3		3	3	3	3	4	6	3	6	2	3	3	4
499m7332	3	3		3	1	3	2	3	6	2	6	4	4	1	2
660E7312	5	5		5	2	3	2	4	3	4	5	5	2	5	5
331a147	5	2		3	1	1	1	5	6	3	6	6	2	5	5
339A7523	6	6		6	4	5	3	5	4	4	3	6	2	1	5
771A9010	5	6		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	5	4
339J1381	5	4		5	4	5	5	5	5	4	6	5	5	5	5
463j7762	5	5		5	2	3	2	2	5	2	6	6	3	1	4
213J7245	2	2		2	1	3	2	2	3	2	6	5	1	2	6
799D9146	2	4		3	2	3	4	4	6	3	5	5	1	2	4
413K6260	4	4		4	1	5	5	3	5	4	6	6	3	1	5
255A7761	4	3		3	2	2	3	3	3	2	4	4	2	2	5
391A8262	4	1		6	4	5	5	1	6	4	5	5	4	3	6
773B10960	5	5		4	3	3	3	5	5	4	6	6	4	3	6
749L9768	5	5		4	2	4	5	5	5	4	6	5	4	5	6
488C911	5	6		4	4	4	4	5	5	3	6	6	3	3	3
954K569	3	4		2	1	1	1	5	5	2	6	6	5	2	5
402R9010	6	6		6	4	4	5	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6
315L132	3	2		5	2	2	2	4	3	3	5	4	1	1	4
798C374	5	6		6	5	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	5	6
703E7730	4	4		4	5	4	4	4	4	3	4	5	3	4	5
956m10338	4	4		4	3	3	5	4	5	5	4	5	1	6	6
479L299	4	3		5	4	5	6	6	6	5	6	3	5	6	6
231A569	5	5		5	4	5	5	6	6	4	6	6	5	5	6
725D12119	4	3		5	1	1	1	4	4	2	6	6	2	2	3

440S7785	4	2		3	3	2	2	3	4	3	5	5	3	4	4
749M1200	5	6		6	4	5	4	5	4	5	6	6	4	2	5
313A9146	3	4		4	1	2	3	1	4	2	5	6	1	1	5
478L7094	5	4		2	1	2	2	3	3	2	6	5	5	1	4
488R9322	5	6		6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	6

Answers to Classification Items in Percentages:

I read my Bible (check one)

More than once a day–19.4 percent

Once a day–30.6 percent

More than once a week–44.4 percent

Once a week–2.8 percent

A few times a month–2.8 percent

Only at church–19.4 percent

Rarely/Never–0 percent

I meditate on Scripture (check one)

More than once a day–16.7 percent

Once a day–13.9 percent

More than once a week–30.6 percent

Once a week–5.6 percent

A few times a month–19.4 percent

Only at church–5.6 percent

Rarely/Never–8.3 percent

I pray (check one)

More than once a day–80.6 percent

Once a day–11.1 percent

More than once a week–5.6 percent

Once a week–0 percent

A few times a month–2.8 percent

Only at church–0 percent

Rarely/Never–0 percent

How many Sunday services did you attend during the Bible meditation series?

1–0 percent

2–2.8 percent

3–2.8 percent

4–44.4 percent

5–50 percent

What is your level of involvement at Trinity?

Member and regularly serve–61.1 percent

Regular Attender and regularly serve—25 percent
Occasional attender but serve—0 percent
Member, but do not regularly serve—0 percent
Regular attender, but do not regularly serve—8.3 percent
Occasional attender, but do not do regularly serve—2.8 percent
New to Trinity—2.8 percent

I have a set time for Scripture reading and/or prayer each day
Yes—61.1 percent
No—38.9 percent

Below are selected answers given for each of these qualitative questions:

How has the Bible meditation series changed your view on Bible meditation?

It has opened up a new perspective on pondering scripture and allowing it to marinate in my mind.

My view on meditation and the need has not changed but feeling equipped now to actually do it.

I look at scripture passages differently. I ponder/meditate on phrases or sections and have started journaling my insights/revelations.

Prior to the series, I only thought about Bible reading and not Bible meditation. I now have a better understanding of the separate and unique benefits of Bible meditation.

How has the Bible meditation series changed your practice of Bible meditation?

How have you seen yourself grow spiritually during the last month?

What is the most significant thing you learned during the Bible meditation series?

What is one thing you wish was covered or covered in more detail during the Bible meditation series?

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ABSTRACT

LECTIO DIVINA AS A CORPORATE WORSHIP EXERCISE AT TRINITY CHURCH IN MENTOR, OHIO

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
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This project was designed to develop a system for incorporating Bible meditation based on the practice of *lectio divina* in the corporate worship services at Trinity Church in Mentor, Ohio. Additionally, this project provided tools for the people of Trinity Church to practice the discipline of meditation on their own. Chapter 1 explains the unique situation of the ministry context at Trinity Church and the reason for the project. Chapter 2 provides an exegesis on four Scripture passages (Pss 1; 150; Col 3:16; and Heb 4:12–13) focusing on how those passage emphasize Scripture meditation and its benefits for individuals as well as the corporate gathering of believers. Chapter 3 briefly details how the church throughout history has taught and practiced Bible meditation. Chapter 4 describes the research methodology used for the project and how Trinity Church taught and practiced Scripture meditation. Chapter 5 is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the project considering the goals set forth in chapter 1. This project sought to increase spiritual formation at Trinity Church through the practice of Bible meditation as the church continues to develop disciples committed to deepening their relationship with Jesus Christ.

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