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EQUIPPING PEOPLE FOR BIBLICAL MEDITATION  
ON CREATION AT ST. PAUL'S EVANGELICAL  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOMERSET,  
PENNSYLVANIA

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Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by  
Scott Paul Steltzer  
December 2022

**APPROVAL SHEET**

EQUIPPING PEOPLE FOR BIBLICAL MEDITATION  
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PENNSYLVANIA

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To my wife, Anna, and our children, Colton, Susan, John-Michael,  
and Benjamin—who have camped, hiked, rafted, and enjoyed so  
many other outdoor adventures with me, sharing a passion  
for God’s creation, which proclaims his glory.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*WJE*      *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. 73 vols. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008. Edwards.Yale.edu

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## PREFACE

It is not a coincidence that my name, Scott, means Highlander. Over the past twenty-three years, God has planted me in the Laurel Highlands. Those years have been the perfect classroom to learn that—indeed—God’s creation speaks. The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaims the Lord’s handiwork, and the Quaking Aspens clap their praise. I am regularly reminded of these realities as I walk out my front door into the splendorous beauty of Western Pennsylvania. I am profoundly grateful for having had the opportunity to delve more deeply into this subject for my doctoral studies and to have brought others with me on the adventure.

The trek into the wilderness began with my parents, brother, and sister—who were my childhood guides and companions in the Adirondack Mountains. More recently, my wife and kids, the people of Summer’s Best Two Weeks (SB2W), and the people of St. Paul’s Evangelical Presbyterian Church have journeyed alongside me in the Laurel Highlands. They have made it possible for me to pursue this doctoral degree. I am grateful for their support and encouragement—as well as for time in the woods with them. I am also grateful for the privilege of studying at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with top-notch professors and students. I am particularly grateful for Dr. Donald S. Whitney’s supervision of this project and for the editing work of Torey Teer.

Above all, I am grateful to the Lord Jesus Christ, for it is through him that the entire creation was made and to him that it points.

Scott Paul Steltzer

Boswell, Pennsylvania

December 2022

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For the past twenty-three years, I have served as an associate director at Summer’s Best Two Weeks, a summer camp for kids ages eight to eighteen. Recently, I have also become an assistant pastor at St. Paul’s Evangelical Presbyterian Church (hereafter EPC). Both positions are in rural Somerset County in the Laurel Highlands of Western Pennsylvania—an outdoor recreation destination. The church is a congregation of six hundred people. Pulling from many local communities, it has more than doubled in size in the past eleven years. The vast majority of its members are outdoor people—farmers, hunters, fishermen, gardeners, rock climbers, hikers, skiers, and the like. The Somerset Chamber of Commerce lists tourism as one of their most vital industries, specifically highlighting outdoor recreation: “Somerset County is the ultimate outdoor playground, no matter the season and no matter the age.”<sup>1</sup> The numerous state parks (many of which are well known outside of PA), three ski resorts, state forests, and rails-to-trails are a huge draw for tourists. Many, if not most, of the parishioners at St. Paul’s EPC live in the area, wholly or in part, because of access to these economic and recreational outdoor opportunities.

It was, therefore, my intention to explain the strengths and weaknesses that coincide with the church’s context and then offer the rationale for why equipping its members to integrate biblical meditation with their outdoor activities was the best way to grow their appreciation of, and meditation upon, Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> Somerset County Chamber of Commerce, “Tourism,” accessed October 10, 2019, <https://somersetcountychamber.com/>.

## Context

This section addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the people of St. Paul's EPC regarding their engagement of God's revelation in creation. There are three identifiable strengths of the people of St. Paul's regarding creation and revelation. First, the people simply live in an area where they are constantly exposed to God's natural world. The loveliness of the Laurel Highlands is breathtaking; its residents are surrounded by imposing mountain ridges, lush green hills, meandering rivers, ubiquitous babbling brooks, and sprawling cornfields—not to mention lakes, trees, and wildlife. Every season displays unique beauty. The backdrop of the church building itself is a rolling hill, often full of crops.

The second strength of the people of St. Paul's EPC is that they have a higher familiarity and affinity with creation than many people in other places, not only because of less urbanization and greater exposure to the outdoors but also because their vocations and hobbies increase their contact with creation. When I moved to the Laurel Highlands twenty-three years ago, it was readily apparent that if a person did not hunt, they were left out of the conversation. Everyone here recreates outdoors and not just in a marginal way. Their recreation often engages God's creation on more than a cursory level. They can identify wildlife, trees, birds and speak about their characteristics. Residents in the Laurel Highlands do not often own second homes. They own campers, RVs, and rustic hunting cabins. Their vacations are camping, hunting, and fishing trips. Large numbers of people homestead and garden. Many people are in some way tied to the agricultural industry. The parishioners of St. Paul's EPC have a high nature IQ. Their exposure to, familiarity with, and affinity with creation are part and parcel of a deep love for creation.

The third and final strength of the people of St. Paul's is that they have a reverence for God and his Word. The people that come to St. Paul's EPC are hungry for God's Word expounded from the pulpit. This reality is evidenced not just in their love for their preachers and the expository sermons but also in their Sunday School attendance

and Bible study attendance. At a time when many churches' Christian education programs are faltering, St. Paul's has a very vibrant and well-attended Sunday School program from toddlers to adults.

However, a great weakness of many parishioners and attenders at St. Paul's EPC is their lack of personally engaging in the meditation of God's Word. While there is a reverence for Scripture preached or taught and a hunger for God, many people exhibit a lack of discipline in personal study, reading, and meditation upon Scripture. The people of St. Paul's, in general, are not an academic crowd. They tend to be doers more than deep thinkers. There are many for whom meditation on Scripture would be perceived as a large hurdle.

A second weakness of some people at St. Paul's is that they are prone to think they hear from God in a personal way through providence and creation without reference to, or an understanding of, Scripture. A myriad of examples could be given, but the following anecdotes are indicative of the problem. It is not uncommon to have conversations with parishioners in which they state how much they experience "God" in creation. When pressed further, their answers usually relate to their feelings. As another example, two parishioners were convinced that they were meant to marry each other because they observed two doves as mates. In their estimation it was "a sign." There is a common lack of understanding of the appropriate role of general revelation and its relationship to special revelation.

As a third and final weakness, it is rare for parishioners to integrate Scripture while enjoying God's creation via their favorite recreational activities. If they do it at all, it is only at a cursory level. This weakness reflects an unawareness of St. Paul's people concerning the riches of communication present in God's created world as their engagement of God's world is integrated with God's Word.

## Rationale

In view of the natural affinity that the people of St. Paul's have with creation, it was my intention to leverage that affinity to grow them in relationship with Christ and his Word. While their strength is a natural bent toward God's creation, their lack of personal engagement with God's Word is an opportunity to exploit their strengths in order to address their weaknesses. I intended to explore general revelation as a catalyst for growing their appreciation for special revelation. The people of St. Paul's already love to be outdoors, so it was strategic to use that pre-existing desire to potentially stir up a deeper desire for experiencing God through the simultaneous enjoyment of both general and special revelation. What follows is the rationale for a meditative resource and the intended outcomes of using the resource.

A resource was needed to introduce emblematic theology in a practical way to the outdoors people of St. Paul's. Before presenting my project idea, it was important to explain the concept of emblematic theology.<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Jonathan Edwards and Robert L. Boss for my understanding of emblematic theology.<sup>3</sup> I understood and loved the concept before I ever had heard of the official terminology. Like many in our contemporary culture, I have a deep thirst for meaning. I am always asking, "What does this mean?" or, "What do you mean by that?" My kids and I like to ponder questions regarding why God may have created some creature or object in nature. Jonathan Edwards spent twenty-eight years pondering these same questions as he walked in the woods. His conclusion was as follows:

The whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of the holy Scriptures, be full of images of divine things, as full as a language is of words; and that the multitude of those things that I have mentioned

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<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Boss, *God-Haunted World: The Elemental Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Middletown, DE: JE Society Press, 2019), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Boss is a Southern Baptist theologian and author who has begun the heavy lifting theologically on the subject of Edward's emblematic theology. My interest is in the practical application and integration of that theology through experiential pedagogy.



are but a very small part of what is really intended to be signified and typified by these things.<sup>4</sup>

The vast majority of Christians today are unaware of Edward's unique perspective on creation and that perspective is not accessible to them. I believe few St. Paul's parishioners can articulate the nature of the relationship between general and special revelation. They are not aware of the awe-inspiring wonder of looking through the lenses of general revelation and special revelation at the same time to see the glorious beauty of God. The following idea of using emblematic theology was an attempt to help the people of St. Paul's, as nature lovers, to see more of God's glory by engaging general and special revelation simultaneously.

By producing an emblematic meditative resource, people at St. Paul's could be taught to meditate upon the elements of God's creation. This meditation could happen as they enjoyed their favorite outdoor activities. By connecting their outdoor experience of a wide array of elements in the natural world (e.g., trees, birds, rocks, streams) with Scripture through a meditative resource, participants were enabled to envision how those elements display God's glory.

The intended outcome of this project was to serve St. Paul's hunters, fisherman, kayakers, mountain bikers, hikers, and the like, in learning how to meditate, specifically employing elemental meditation, which means seeing, hearing, and experiencing God's eternal power and divine nature in the elements of creation. This work could be the essential groundwork necessary for helping so many outdoors-oriented parishioners to engage in meditation for the first time. By seeing the meditative connections between their enjoyment of God's creation and Scripture, they would be drawn to value the Scriptures more highly. Ultimately, the underlying rationale for this experience of meditation in God's creation was the integration of people's faith, outdoor activities, and Scripture. St. Paul's members needed guidance in how to integrate faith

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE, 11:152.

and life. This project was meant to aid them in fostering a deeper understanding and integrative meditation practice.

Additionally, this resource could also benefit people outside St. Paul's EPC. For example, it could be used as (1) a preacher's guide to creational emblems and typologies for sermons and teaching, (2) a teaching resource for Christian outdoor recreation organizations, (3) a guidebook for creation meditation, (4) a valuable introduction to emblematic theology, (5) a potential resource to whet the appetite of unbelievers or infant believers for special revelation, and (6) a foundation for teaching an experiential Sunday School class.

### **Purpose**

This project aimed to engage project participants of St. Paul's EPC in Somerset, Pennsylvania, in meditation on God's creation as they enjoyed their favorite outdoor activities in order to equip and inspire them to meditate on Scripture and, ultimately, on God.

### **Goals**

1. The first goal was to develop a biblically informed meditation resource to equip and guide people in the practice of meditation on God's creation.
2. The second goal was to assess a group of twenty participants regarding their knowledge of biblical meditation and their current practices of meditation on creation and Scripture.
3. The third goal was to equip the participants to use the resource on their own to integrate their favorite outdoor activities with creation meditation, thereby increasing their knowledge of and enriching their practice of creation meditation.

### **Research Methodology**

This section details the means of measuring the success of this project, the benchmarks for success, and the methodology of achieving success. The first goal was to develop a biblically informed meditation resource to equip and guide participants in the practice of meditation on God's creation. The resource introduced them to emblematic

theology, creational meditation, and evocation.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, it was designed to help equip them to engage creation in a meditative manner. This goal was measured by the expert panel of mature Christian outdoors people who have substantial experience in the field of outdoor recreational ministry and, more importantly, by theologically trained individuals. They utilized a rubric to evaluate biblical and theological faithfulness, methodology, relevance, and coherence of the resource.<sup>6</sup> This goal was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it met the standard.

The second goal was to assess a group of twenty participants from St. Paul's EPC regarding their knowledge of biblical meditation and their current practices of meditation on creation and Scripture. This goal was measured by administering the Creation Meditation Practices Survey (CMPS) to twenty adult participants who habitually engage in outdoor recreation or vocation.<sup>7</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when at least twenty participants completed the CMPS and the survey was analyzed to yield a clearer picture of the knowledge, current meditational practices, and outdoor recreational or vocational habits of the participants of St. Paul's.

The third goal was to equip the participants to use the resource on their own to integrate their favorite outdoor activities with creation meditation, thereby increasing their knowledge of and enriching their practice of creation meditation. The participants were given an allotted amount of days to use the resource. This goal was measured by re-administering section III of the CMPS to participants and a post-project questionnaire.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See definition of evocation below in the section marked definitions.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 3.

This post-project questionnaire measured the participants' sufficient completion of meditation exercises using the resource, change in level of knowledge, experience with the resource, practice of creational meditation, number of creational evocations generated, likelihood of continuation of creational meditation practices, and how they were most likely to practice creational meditation going forward. This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-project survey scores.<sup>9</sup>

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

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

*Biblical meditation.* This term, as defined by Donald S. Whitney, is “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”<sup>10</sup> The term “biblical meditation” must be distinguished from all other terms for meditation that are not grounded in Scripture. All truly biblical meditation must be thoughts sourced in, or informed by, the revelation from God through his Word.<sup>11</sup>

*Creation meditation.* This term means to steadfastly use one's mind, imagination,<sup>12</sup> and senses to thoroughly ponder<sup>13</sup> and deeply enjoy<sup>14</sup> the spiritual

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 46-47.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1979), 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:9.

<sup>13</sup> Phillip Winter, *The Works of the Right Reverend Joseph, Hall D.D.*, vol. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1813), 49.

<sup>14</sup> Belden C. Lane, “Two Schools of Desire: Nature and Marriage in Seventeenth Century Puritanism,” *Church History* 69 (2000): 383.

significance of elements in creation<sup>15</sup> from a biblically informed perspective, bringing those thoughts and experiences to a fruitful conclusion.<sup>16</sup>

*Emblematic theology.* Theology is the study of God. The term “emblematic” is defined as “a thing serving as a symbolic representation of a particular quality or concept.”<sup>17</sup> Emblematic theology is the study of elements of creation that illuminate by symbolic representation a particular quality, attribute, or truth of God.<sup>18</sup> Creation is filled with emblems that represent God or scriptural truths.<sup>19</sup>

*Creation evocation.* This term is a way to define elements of creation serving as ongoing mental prompts<sup>20</sup> for meditation and prayer. For example, once spiritual significance has been tied to an element of creation and confirmed by Scripture, it can be an ongoing prompt for the mind any time the person encounters that element in creation. To use elements in an evocative manner means to designate an element of creation for the purpose of remembering some unique way that element speaks of God’s truth.<sup>21</sup>

*General revelation.* This type of revelation pertains to God’s revelation through the natural world of both his attributes and his truths in a supplemental fashion to

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 253.

<sup>16</sup> John Ball, *A Treatise of Divine Meditation* (London: H. Matlock, 1660), 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth J. Jewell and Frank Abate, eds., *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), s.v. “emblematic” (p. 555).

<sup>18</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:348.

<sup>20</sup> Kurtis S. Meredith and Jeannie L. Steele, *Classrooms of Wonder and Wisdom: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking for the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2011), 21.

<sup>21</sup> Creational evocation is based upon Meredith and Steele’s educational model called E-R-R (evocation, realization, and reflection). Meredith and Steele, *Classrooms of Wonder and Wisdom*, 21-26.

the Scriptures.<sup>22</sup> Paul K. Jewett simply states that general revelation is God's self-disclosure in creation and providence.<sup>23</sup>

One delimitation was placed on this project. The time frame for participants to accomplish their required amount of meditational exercises was forty days in the fall 2021 season. The fall is the best time because it corresponds with hunting season, yet it still is warm enough for many participants to do their chosen recreational activity.

There were two limitations with this project. First, the project's measurable accuracy was dependent upon participants' committing the time necessary for meditation alongside their recreational activity. Second, the project's measurable accuracy was limited to the degree that participants were willing to be truly honest about their private devotional exercises.

### **Conclusion**

God's creation is an inexhaustible subject for biblical meditation and evocation as believers are outdoors, engaging in their favorite recreational activities. God's creation can be engaged in both a biblically faithful and personally fruitful manner, but people must be rightly equipped to engage creation in this way. Chapter 2 addresses the Bible's clear prescription to meditate on creation and the biblical and theological foundation for this practice. Chapter 3 addresses how creational meditation and evocation can be most transformative in the life of a believer. Chapter 4 addresses the preparation for and implementation of this project, and chapter 5 addresses the analyzation of this creation meditation project.

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<sup>22</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 174.

<sup>23</sup> Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 69.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR BIBLICAL MEDITATION ON CREATION

“It is better for me to be fishing and thinking about God than to be at church and thinking about fishing.” It is not an unfamiliar occurrence for an evangelical Christian to hear someone make such a statement. An initial impression may incline one to agree, but the slightest bit of deeper thinking reveals a thinly veiled declaration of creation idolatry—a greater love for fishing than for God or his people. God’s Word clearly forbids worshipping anyone or anything other than God. The Lord also commands his people not to forsake gathering with one another (e.g., Heb 10:25). However, the Scriptures also unequivocally exhort believers to meditate on the elements of God’s created world (e.g., Job 12:7-10, 37:14; Luke 12:24, 27). Thinking deeply about the connections between God, fish, fishing, and the Scriptures is immensely valuable to spiritual growth. The biblical authors prescribe meditation on emblematic elements in creation as integrally important for enhancing believers’ understanding of, faith in, and worship of God as well as apprehension of, and delight in, his Word.

In this chapter, biblical meditation on creation is explored and defended via exegesis of the following biblical texts: Psalm 19, Romans 1:18-21, Job 12:7-10, Matthew 27:45-54, Mark 15:33-39, Luke 23:44-49, Job 37:14-42:6, Luke 12:22-32, and Psalm 104.<sup>1</sup> Further, the case for believers’ engaging in this unique type of meditation is made by (1) exploring the biblical and theological basis for creational meditation, (2) defending its importance, and (3) demonstrating its benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> The passages listed are in topical order, according to the flow of the argument in the subsequent chapter, rather than in canonical order.

## **An Exegesis of Passages Exploring the Basis for Creational Meditation**

This first section explores the biblical and theological basis for creational meditation by establishing the revelatory character of creation, delineating the limits of creational revelation, verifying the Bible’s prescription of creational meditation for believers, proposing a process for—and biblical definition of—creational meditation, and addressing creational meditation’s potential dangers.

### **The Revelatory Character of Creation**

According to Psalm 19:1-4, the heavens and sky speak abundantly, openly, and extensively. Job 12:7-10 and Romans 1:18-21 confirm that it is not just the heavens and the sky that speak—all of creation is revelatory. As Reformed writer Jared Lovell contends, “The doctrine of [general] revelation—the belief that God reveals Himself through the natural means of His creation—is one that is affirmed to one degree or another by nearly all Christians in the Reformed tradition.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, most modern believers miss out on experiencing the full significance and depth of meaning latent in creation. The three texts above serve as a reminder of the character and scope of God’s speech through his creation.

**Psalm 19:1-4.**<sup>3</sup> Psalm 19 unambiguously states that God has revealed himself in what he has created, explaining in four verses the specifics of this creational revelation.<sup>4</sup> The first verse of the psalm forms a chiasm that is not obvious. James K. Hoffmeier, professor of Old Testament, aids readers of modern translations to see the

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<sup>2</sup> Jared Lovell, “The Heavens Declare: The Extent and Efficacy of Natural Revelation,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 7, no. 1 (January 2015): 57.

<sup>3</sup> Ps 19:1-4: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the *English Standard Version*.

<sup>4</sup> The doctrine of general revelation includes God’s speech through created elements but can also mean God’s speech through providence and conscience. This paper is exclusively concerned with the creational aspect of general revelation—termed “creational revelation.”



chiasm by re-writing verse 1 as follows: “The Heavens declare the glory of God, the work of his hands are proclaimed in the sky.”<sup>5</sup> The chiasm emphasizes that the heavens and sky—two unavoidable elements in creation—reveal that God is glorious, and creation is his handiwork. The revelation is unavoidable for two reasons, according to verse 2: (1) there is a non-stop speaking, and (2) from day to day speech is gushing. The Hebrew word *yabbia* suggests that speech gushes forth in over-abundance.<sup>6</sup> The implication is that such “speech” is worth listening for. Likewise, the plethora of knowledge implies that the information is worth learning. God uses the glorious heavens and sky to implore his people to pay attention.

Verses 3-4 are difficult to understand and may seem contradictory, but they shed further light on the heavens’ and skies’ speech. In his commentary on this passage, Willem Prinsloo elucidates: “The paradox is that while this ‘speech’ is not audible and not expressed in normal human words, it is nevertheless universal and reaches the ‘end of the world.’”<sup>7</sup> The revelation of God’s glory and handiwork is discernable and is everywhere his people encounter the heavens and skies—but what about the revelatory aspects of other elements of creation? Do these elements (e.g., plants, trees, animals) also speak? Further exegesis of Ps 19 and other passages reveal that all of creation speaks.

**Job 12:7-10.**<sup>8</sup> Eighteenth Century pastor Jonathan Edwards used Job 12:7-10 to explain his understanding of the extent of God’s voice speaking in and through creation:

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<sup>5</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, “‘The Heavens Declare the Glory of God’: The Limits of General Revelation,” *Trinity Journal* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 19.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 135.

<sup>7</sup> Willem S. Prinsloo, *Psalms*, Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 46.

<sup>8</sup> Job 12:7-10: “But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

The whole creation of God preaches to us; its creatures declare to us his majesty, his wisdom and power, and mercy: . . . If we look to the heavens or the earth; or birds, beasts, or fishes; or plants and trees: if we do but take notice of it, they all declare to us that we ought to worship, to fear, to love and obey, the God that made all these things.<sup>9</sup>

Job invites his friends to consider how even God’s flora and fauna witness to and confirm the veracity of Job’s viewpoint that the beasts and bushes teach, the birds tell, and the fish of the sea declare knowledge. Verses 9-10 reveal the specific spiritual lesson to which Job is referring: flora and fauna reveal that God is sovereignly in control of all life, all power, and all wisdom; therefore, he is ultimately responsible for Job’s suffering.<sup>10</sup> Job clearly believes that God’s creatures and vegetation speak (i.e., they are included in general revelation) and that they confirm his supposition regarding God’s sovereignty.

Job’s friends Zophar and Bildad agree with him, at a cursory level, that God’s creation is revelatory.<sup>11</sup> Zophar and Job only disagree on the measure of perspicuity of general revelation. In 11:7-12, Zophar asserts that general revelation is too limited to express the deep things of God.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, God himself, in chapters 38-41, uses beasts, birds of the heavens, bushes, and fish of the sea to teach Job the deeper things concerning his sovereignty. As commentator Robert Alden points out, “Here [in 12:10] Job only spoke [of his viewpoint that creation speaks plainly], but he would existentially embrace [this conclusion] when God spoke it to him in chaps. 38-41.”<sup>13</sup>

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Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.”

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723*, WJE, 10:440.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *Job*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 192.

<sup>11</sup> Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 219.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel J. Estes, *Job*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 75.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Alden, *Job: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, vol. 11 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 138.

Adding further weight to this conclusion—that God speaks with a degree of clarity through his creatures and vegetation—are two compelling verbal connections between Job 12:7-10 and Job 38-41. The first is between 12:7 and 40:15-24. First, the Hebrew word translated in English as “beasts” in 12:7 (*behemot*) is the same term used to describe the creature in chapter 40, where God uses the behemoth to clearly teach Job a remarkable lesson.<sup>14</sup> The second connection is in 12:9. Professor of Old Testament Daniel Estes explains, “This verse contains the only use of the personal name Yahweh (translated as ‘the LORD’) in Job outside the prologue, epilogue, and the speeches by Yahweh in chapters 38-41.”<sup>15</sup> This use of Yahweh in 12:9 is a unique link to the later chapters. These two connections to God’s speeches in chapters 38-41 affirm Job’s conclusions in 12:7-10.

**Romans 1:18-21.**<sup>16</sup> The first chapter of Romans serves as a New Testament confirmation of the conclusion drawn from Psalm 19 and Job 12—God’s creation speaks. Though Romans 1:18-21 does not directly reference any other biblical passage, many scholars point to the parallels between Paul’s statement in verse 20 and Psalm 19:1-6. For example, in his commentary on Romans, Douglas Moo writes, “God in his essence is hidden from human sight, yet much of him and much about him can be seen through the things he has made. Paul is thinking primarily of the world as the product of God’s creation (see, e.g., Ps 19:1-6).”<sup>17</sup> One of the distinctions in Romans 1 is that Paul includes

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel E. Balentine, *Job*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 203.

<sup>15</sup> Estes, *Job*, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Rom 1:18-21: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

<sup>17</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 115.

unrighteous people who “suppress the truth” (v. 18). Both the righteous and the unrighteous hear God speak through creation. God makes his existence “plain to them” (v. 19). God’s general revelation is “clearly perceived” by all people (v. 20). Paul here is primarily concerned with strongly communicating that all idolatrous people are “without excuse” when they worship the creation rather than the Creator.

**Conclusion.** The Scriptures indisputably assert that God—through created elements—reveals his existence and truths about himself. Lovell claims that “despite the near universal affirmation of this doctrine, few doctrines have engendered more debate in the history of the church and even in the Reformed tradition than the extent and efficacy of this natural revelation.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in order to arrive at a justified and suitably relevant role for biblical creational meditation within the world of spiritual disciplines, the next task is to identify and clarify the limits of creational revelation.

### **The Limits of Creational Revelation**

Thus far, exegesis of Psalm 19:1-4, Job 12:7-10, and Romans 1:18-21 has shown creational revelation is real revelation. Additionally, these texts help believers understand the threefold limits of creational revelation: (1) it is limited by the sinful people who encounter it; (2) it is insufficient for complete and definitive knowledge about God; and (3) it is insufficient to communicate salvific knowledge.

**Limited by sinful people.** In Romans 1, the apostle Paul demonstrates that even though creational revelation possesses enough clarity to show God’s eternal power and divine nature, sinful people suppress the truth. Humanity’s futile thinking and foolish hearts, darkened by sin, hamper creational revelation. The perception that creational revelation on its own leads someone to God is false. Edwards comments on humans,

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<sup>18</sup> Lovell, “The Heavens Declare,” 57.

saying, “How blind are they to spiritual things; how impossible is it for any but God to persuade them of their danger, and of the importance of things of eternity, although it be as plain as the sun . . . and his glories appear everywhere throughout the whole creation.”<sup>19</sup> Darkened hearts can only be illumined by special revelation.

**Insufficient for complete and definitive knowledge about God.** Creational revelation is also limited in what it communicates. Romans 1:20 asserts that creation speaks only of God’s invisible attributes of eternal power and divine nature. Job 12:7-10 confirms that God alone is sovereign. Psalm 19:1-4 confirms that only God is glorious and that he alone is the maker of all things. Yet, Zophar says to Job in Job 11:7-8, “Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?” Zophar’s claim is that God’s creation hides his ways, and that God’s will is mysterious.<sup>20</sup> Zophar is partially correct, contra Job in 12:7-10, that creational revelation is incomplete—as Job later discovers. While Job does have a degree of clarity in 12:7-10, his knowledge is not complete or definitive until he experiences God’s appearance in chapters 38-41 and God’s affirmation in 42:7. Indeed, his earlier statements remain unconfirmed until God’s declaration in 42:7. Further, systematic theologian Michael Horton asserts that general revelation goes no further than displaying “God’s power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and justice, as well as human responsibility, ‘but there it stops: it has no saving power.’”<sup>21</sup> Creational revelation has limits to what knowledge it can communicate.

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<sup>19</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723*, WJE, 10:538.

<sup>20</sup> Balentine, *Job*, 201-2.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 149; quotation from Emil Brunner in Eugene Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1959), 38.

**Insufficient to communicate salvific knowledge.** Unregenerate human beings do not need more—or clearer—creational revelation, as that will never be enough to overcome their darkness; they need the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6b). This light is the hope of redemption that Job anticipates in Job 19:23-27 and what Paul speaks of in Romans 10 as the necessary word preached for salvation. This light is God’s Word and the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, illuminated by the Holy Spirit. It is not a coincidence that Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 in this section pertaining to the necessity of preaching the gospel. Romans 10:18 connects the universal witness of creational revelation in Psalm 19 with God’s design for the eventual universal witness of the gospel.<sup>22</sup> Notably, in verse 18, Paul further highlights the utter inadequacies of creational revelation to communicate knowledge of God’s redemptive work.

God’s revelation through created elements is indeed limited, yet Romans 1:18-21 prompts the question “What about *believers*’ experience of creational revelation?” God’s redeemed people can benefit greatly from engaging creational revelation because of their regenerated nature. As Psalm 36:9 says, “In [God’s] light do we see light.” Only God’s people, filled with the Spirit, can truly apprehend creational revelation in a transformative and spiritually edifying way.<sup>23</sup> As is shown by exegeting the rest of Psalm 19 (vv. 7-14), special revelation and a redeemed relationship with the Lord are a necessity for rightly handling God’s revelation through created elements. Creational theologian T. M. Moore sums it up this way: “Any attempts to make full and proper sense, from a theological or any other perspective, out of the data of creation will falter,

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<sup>22</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 287.

<sup>23</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 150.

and be less than God intends, unless they are grounded in and ordered according to the teaching of Scripture and the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

No better place in Scripture exists to exemplify the prescription for creational meditation and to learn creational meditation than the Psalter, for it is a handbook for showing believers how to meditate.<sup>25</sup> Biblical commentator John W. Kleinig explains that “the whole Psalter is meant to show the righteous person how to meditate on the Lord’s teaching in all the vicissitudes of his or her life.”<sup>26</sup> This concept is equally true for meditation on God’s created world. The nature psalms (Pss 8; 19; 29; 65; 104; 148), in particular, supply believers with ample examples of creation meditation and material for a working model and definition of creational meditation.

### **The Bible Prescribes Creational Meditation for Believers**

The Scriptures extol biblical meditation on creation both by example and implicit invitation in nature Psalms 19 and 104. Additionally, the Scripture’s prescription of creational meditation can be verified in the direct mandates for this meditation found in Job 12:7-10, Job 37:14-42:5, and Luke 12:22-32.

Psalms 19 and 104 implicitly issue an invitation to join the psalmists in biblical meditation on creation by providing examples of this type of meditation. The author of Psalm 19 invites readers to consider how “the heavens declare the glory of God” and how “the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (v. 1). The psalmist gives some examples of his own musings. In verses 5-6, the sun is shown to be an emblematic element in the heavens that highlights the glory of God’s omnipresence, for “there is nothing hidden from its

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<sup>24</sup> T. M. Moore, *Consider the Lilies: A Plea for Creational Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 88.

<sup>25</sup> John W. Kleinig, “The Attentive Heart: Meditation in the Old Testament,” *Reformed Theological Review* 51, no. 2 (May 1992): 56.

<sup>26</sup> Kleinig, “The Attentive Heart,” 56.

heat” (v. 6). In verse 10, the psalmist uses imagery of gold and honey to encourage readers to muse on Scripture’s value and sweetness; then, at the end of verse 14, he refers to God as “my rock.” Unlike the heavens and sun earlier (vv. 1, 4, respectively), as well as gold and honey (v. 10), the psalmist provides no connections for rock; instead, he leaves readers to wonder, to explore the Scriptures for connections, and to think deeply on their own. It would appear the final verse ends with an implicit invitation for readers to meditate on the element of a rock for themselves.

In Psalm 104:34, the psalmist invites readers to consider his meditation and to rejoice in the Lord with him.<sup>27</sup> The author packs about fifty creational elements into thirty-five verses for readerly meditation (e.g., springs [v. 10], cedars [v. 16], lions [v. 21]). Mostly, he explains the elements’ connections to God’s sovereign activities, but with so many elements packed into this psalm, there are endless musings to explore. This psalm appears to serve as a teaser intended to encourage readers to slowly pick their way through its contents, pausing to consider all of the elements. There is an implicit invitation to meditate, and Psalm 104 is in effect a concordance of creational elements for meditation.

In Job 12:7-10, the author offers an overt invitation for readers to meditate upon the beasts, the birds of the heavens, the bushes of the earth, and the fish of the sea. Examples for creational meditation appear all throughout the book of Job. For instance, in 37:14, Elihu says, “Hear this, O Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God.” Elihu has already offered many creational elements for Job to stop and consider, but in the final verses of his speech, following his clear invitation in verse 14, he directs Job to consider the following works of God: lightning, clouds, skies, wind, and sun (vv. 15-24).

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<sup>27</sup> Ps 104:34: “May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.” While the invitation to meditate is not explicit, the fact that the psalm is a part of a communal collection of songs for worship means the psalmist is expecting others to join him in singing the song, considering its meaning, and rejoicing in the Lord through all he has created. Additionally, per verse 31, the psalmist joins God in rejoicing over creation.



Elihu's prescription for Job to stop and consider is not just pertinent to Job; Elihu's words challenge all of God's people to meditate for themselves upon God's created works.

The veracity of Elihu's prescription is corroborated by Job's interaction with God in chapters 38-41. God questions Job's understanding, knowledge, and comprehension using these synonyms to point out that Job has infinitely more to understand and to consider. As believers listen in on God's challenging Job, they recognize their own lack of understanding and their need for meditation. God's challenge and instruction to Job is akin to Elihu's exhortation; once again, the prescription is to stop and consider God's creation and creatures. Not only does God speak out of a storm, but also in asking so many questions about each created element (e.g., stars, the sea, and clouds) God urges deeper consideration upon stars (38:7), the sea (38:8), clouds (38:9), waves (38:11), springs (38:16), snow and hail (38:22), rain (38:26), ice and frost (38:29), constellations (38:31-32), lightnings (38:35), lions (38:39), ravens (38:41), donkeys (39:5), hawks and eagles (39:26-27), and many more created elements. God is prompting Job, and the readers of the book of Job, to contemplate the answer to the questions he has posed. Consideration upon these elements is a means of deeper understanding of God, his works, his ways, and his Word.

Lastly, in Luke 12:22-32, the Lord Jesus himself exhorts his followers to meditate on emblematic elements of creation.<sup>28</sup> It is evident from the Synoptic Gospels that much of Jesus's life was spent outdoors. Most of the major events of his life were outside (e.g., his baptism, his temptation, his transfiguration, and his crucifixion). He appeared to prefer created elements as the primary means of analogy for teaching truths to his followers (e.g., tree [Luke 6:43-45], thorns [8:7], foxes [9:58], leaven [12:1],

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<sup>28</sup> When Jesus tells his disciples to consider the ravens and lilies (Luke 12:24,27), he is exhorting them to attentively engage their minds upon these two created elements (not unlike Elihu's call to Job to consider the works of God). This attentiveness of mind used to consider an element of creation is equivalent to meditating upon that element.

mustard seed [13:19], sheep [15:4-6], and fig tree [21:29]). In Luke 12:24 and 27, Jesus offers ravens and lilies up for consideration as two elements that are emblematic of God's care and concern for his people. He desires his people to observe and to think deeply about these two created elements so they might not worry but enrich their understanding and enjoyment of life lived in faith under God's care. Jesus wants his people to be observant of all that he created and to follow his example of meditating upon created elements.

While Psalms 19 and 104, Job 12 and 37-41, and Luke 12 do not comprise an exhaustive list of passages prescribing creational meditation, these passages are unambiguous that God intends for his people to engage in this type of meditation.

### **Process for and Definition of Creational Meditation**

Further exegesis of Psalm 19, as well as exegesis of Psalm 104:34, is more than adequate for developing a biblical process for, and definition of, creational meditation consistent with the rest of the nature psalms. First, a look at the progression of Psalm 19 illumines a proper conception of the creational meditation process and its fruits. Second, with the addition of Psalm 104, exegesis of these two psalms lead to an appropriate definition for this unique type of biblical meditation.

**Process for creational meditation.** Psalm 19 presents a biblical basis for the process of creational meditation. The movement of the psalm is from creational revelation (vv. 1-6) to special revelation (vv. 7-10) to intimate personal relationship (vv. 11-14). Many commentators have downplayed the unified movement of this psalm, but according to scholars Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf Jacobson, and Beth Tanner, "Against this older, fragmenting approach, more recent interpretation has almost

universally focused on the poetic unity of the psalm.”<sup>29</sup> Even if this psalm originated with different authors, the meditating editor has beautifully drawn together a unified meditation on creation, Scripture, and his own personal relationship with the Lord. Further, deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner point out that the psalm closes with a prayerful request “similar to the closing petition in Psalm 104:34-35.”<sup>30</sup> Both meditators petition the Lord to be pleased with their meditations, and they both have biblically meditated on creation.

The progression of meditation in Psalm 19 is particularly instructive. While it would seem that meditation on Scripture should precede creational meditation because of the primacy of the Bible, in this case an experiential observation of creation led to meditation on the text. The psalmist obviously recognizes how meaningful experiences with created elements (vv. 1-4a) can lead to pondering the interconnecting spiritual realities revealed by the element—in this case, between the sun and God (vv. 4b-6).

Just as in Psalm 19, creational meditation begins with embodied experiential observation and wonder. The meditator’s engagement with the heavens, sky, and sun is not just cogitation but a full-bodied encounter with those elements. His sense of sight and touch are indisputably involved—he sees the sun rise and set, and he feels the heat of the sun on his skin (v. 6). Likely, his experience of the glory of the Lord via the heavens, sky, and sun also include other senses too. If the skies thundered, he would hear it; if it rained, he would feel it on his skin; if his skin burned under the sun’s intense heat, he would sense it. The point is that creational meditation, as evidenced by Psalm 19, front-loads the experiential dimension of meditation, thus making the subsequent figurative connections with the Bible more powerful and memorable. Metaphors and similes are often the connective tissue between creational elements and Scripture, as exemplified by “sun,”

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<sup>29</sup> DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 134.

<sup>30</sup> DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 139.

“honey,” “gold,” and “rock.” Further, “bridegroom” and “strong man” are not natural occurring elements, but they are still God’s creation; thus, they exemplify the use of simile in Psalm 19.

In Psalm 19, the meditator also experiences the wonder of the heavens. In his commentary on this passage, Tremper Longman III observes, “Even to the ancients, who did not have an awareness of the actual vastness of the heavens or the size of the sun, moon and stars, the skies gave a sense of transcendence, of someone above themselves.”<sup>31</sup> People nowadays still look to the skies with wonder. Wonder expresses enraptured “attention or astonishment at something awesomely mysterious or new to one’s experience,” but it also can carry a sense of curiosity, uncertainty, alongside admiration.<sup>32</sup> Wonder is a proper word to help define and understand creational meditation. Wonder is a process—sparked by rapt attention, astonishment, novelty, curiosity, uncertainty, or admiration in creation—that ignites conjecture and proactive reflection. This process is reciprocal between the creational element and the figurative text. As scholar C. H. Dodds explains, “A metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, [arrests] the hearer by its vividness and strangeness, and [leaves] the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”<sup>33</sup> In creational meditation, experiencing a creational element arrests the believer, sparks wonder, ignites reflection on biblical associations, and fuels active engagement with the Scriptures. Psalm 19 not only attests to this sequence in verses 1-6 but also anchors the meditative process to God’s Word in verses 7-10.

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<sup>31</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 118.

<sup>32</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003), s.v. “wonder” (p. 1361).

<sup>33</sup> William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 8.

The marriage of contemplation on the elements of creation with meditation on the biblical text is essential in order to transform the believer. In other words, meditation on creation will not yield an enhanced understanding, strengthened faith, and enlivened worship of God unless it is wedded to Scripture. The bridegroom in the sky leaves his chamber with joy (Ps 19:5) in anticipation of joining with the Torah to rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes (v. 8), and illumine hidden sin (v. 12).<sup>34</sup> This marriage is best highlighted by noting, as Old Testament commentator Craig Broyles does, the word associations linking the two sections of the psalm:

*As the skies . . . display knowledge* (v. 2), so *the statutes of the LORD* are described as *making wise the simple* (v. 7). *In the heavens he* has provided the sun (v. 4), and the *commands of the LORD* give *light to the eyes* (v. 8). As the sun is depicted as *rejoicing* (Hb. [sws], v. 5), so *the precepts of the LORD* are described as *giving joy to the heart* (Hb. [smh], v. 8), thus implying that when God's creatures follow his laws, whether natural or [scriptural], there is joy.<sup>35</sup>

The first fruits of understanding, enjoyment, and faith are evident in the connections pointed out by Broyles above. Another fruit of biblical meditation on creation—blameless (v. 13) and acceptable (v. 14) worship—grows out of the psalmist's revelation-enriched understanding, enjoyment, and faith. In sum, experiential wonder leading to biblical thinking and confirmation resulting in spiritual fruit is the process. Psalm 19 affords believers a coherent conception of the process and fruit of creational meditation.

**Definition of creational meditation.** Understanding the biblical word for “meditation” is essential in order to arrive at an appropriate definition of creational meditation. The Psalter's two primary Hebrew words used for meditation are found in

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<sup>34</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1-41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 289. Goldingay states, “So each morning the sun is like a groom emerging with a smile on his face from his room, ready for his wedding.”

<sup>35</sup> Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 96. All italicized text was originally bold in Broyles's work.

Psalms 19 and 104.<sup>36</sup> Psalm 19 uses the Hebrew noun *higgayown*, meaning a musical musing or meditation.<sup>37</sup> The Hebrew root word and action verb behind a *higgayown* is *hagah*, literally meaning to moan, growl, utter, speak, or muse.<sup>38</sup> The animal sounds related to the word *hagah* are noteworthy. Kleinig exposes the creational and biblical connections, explaining that the biblical authors used the word *hagah* to “describe the moaning of a dove (Isa. 38:14; 59:11) and the growling of a lion (Isa. 31:4).”<sup>39</sup> So, here the biblical word for meditation itself is an invitation to consider God’s creation. In Psalm 19:14, meditation is connected to speech, thinking, and prayer. The meditation of the psalmist’s heart and the words of his mouth together are a spoken—and written—prayer reflecting his synthesized thinking on God’s created world, God’s Word, and his relationship with God.

In Psalm 104, the meditator uses a different Hebrew word for meditation (*siyach*), but its meaning is essentially the same as *higgayown* in Psalm 19—musing.<sup>40</sup> Parallel uses of *siyach* appear in Psalm 119, each time translated as meditation. In Psalm 119, the meditation is on God’s Word, but in Psalm 104, the entirety of the meditator’s musing involves God’s works in creation. In accord with Psalm 19, Psalm 104 links meditation with the spoken and written word as well as with deep thinking about how God’s interactions with created elements reflect his glory and character. Psalm 104 also

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<sup>36</sup> The first mention of the word meditation in the Psalter is in Psalm 1. There, the word *hagah*, a root word of *higgayown* (Ps 19), is the Hebrew word used for meditation. Psalm 1 begins the Psalter with a statement of the blessedness of meditation upon God’s Word. It is no coincidence that Psalm 1 also uses creation imagery (tree, streams of water, fruit) to further illustrate how a person is blessed by meditation. Psalm 1 is another poignant example of the marriage of creational and biblical revelation.

<sup>37</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 10th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 212.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 211.

<sup>39</sup> Kleinig, “The Attentive Heart,” 56-57.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 967.

begins and ends in worship, making clear that meditation on creation must be permeated by, and culminate in, worshipful exaltation.

In his classic work on spiritual disciplines, Donald S. Whitney provides a definition of meditation that aptly corresponds with the progression and fruit of meditation described in Psalm 19: meditation is “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”<sup>41</sup> The following definition of creational meditation resembles Whitney’s definition, with a few alterations to accommodate the nuances of meditation on creation: creational meditation is an experiential wondering on emblematic elements in creation—leading to deep thinking on the interconnecting truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture—for the purposes of deepened understanding, strengthened faith, and enlivened worship. This definition reflects the progression and fruit of creational meditation found in Psalms 19 and 104.

### **Dangers of Creational Meditation**

Though the call to creational meditation is unmistakable, there are a variety of theological dangers to avoid and points of concern to address. Using the word “meditation” opens creational meditation to misconstrued notions tied to forms of meditation among secular advocates. Secular and transcendental types of meditation are unbiblical. They promote a passive mindset, encouraging the emptying of one’s mind. Creational meditation, on the other hand, seeks to actively engage and fill the mind with Spirit-illuminated connections between emblematic elements in creation and biblical truth from Scripture. Believers who practice biblical meditation on creation must be wary of temptations toward idolatry, mysticism, and neglect of corporate fellowship.

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<sup>41</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 46-47.

Nevertheless, believers must likewise be wary of the temptation to neglect God’s revelation through creation.

**Idolatry.** The temptation toward idolatry is ever-present for believers in various ways. The recent rise of the cultural influences of environmental extremism, pantheism, animism, New Age spirituality, and syncretism with Buddhism are threats.<sup>42</sup> All of these influences promote the reverence of created elements themselves, causing people to equate God too closely with the elements. Sadly, there are even more subtle influences from within orthodox Christianity that may tempt believers to misunderstand or misuse creational meditation. Anglican scholar Gerald McDermott, writing about types (i.e., creational emblematic elements) opines, “It seems to me, on the basis of what Scripture tells us about types, that the type participates in the antitype—that is, it shares in the *being* of that to which it refers.”<sup>43</sup> This thinking is dangerous because it equates participation with ontology. In his insightful work on biblical metaphor, William Brown’s explanation of a metaphor’s ontological limitations is helpful:

A metaphor qua metaphor is limited in its transference of meaning. . . . Put theologically, if any metaphor, no matter how profound, becomes absolutized, as though it were itself considered ultimate, idolatry becomes the norm. . . . Idolatry arises when the deity’s power is immanently lodged within the material structures of the image or source domain, and transcendence, consequently, is eviscerated.<sup>44</sup>

Paul’s warning in Romans 1:21 about futile thinking and foolish, darkened hearts is pertinent for guiding creational meditation, reminding believers that all of their experiences and thinking in creation must be subject to God’s infallible Word and sanctified by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Horton adds, “Apart from the gospel this general

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<sup>42</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 56.

<sup>43</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Everyday Glory: The Revelation of God in All of Reality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 33.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 10.



revelation is always distorted by our [sinful] hearts.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, Psalm 19:1 and Romans 1:22-23 serve as useful guiderails for creational meditation: “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps 19:1)—not their own glory, lest believers become foolish and exchange “the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Rom 1:22-23).

**Mysticism.** Another danger in creational meditation is mysticism. According to scholars Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, mysticism is “the belief and practice that seeks a personal, experiential (sometimes referred to as contemplative) knowledge of God by means of a direct, nonabstract and loving encounter or union with God.”<sup>46</sup> It is not uncommon to hear believers speak of experiencing God in nature. Some are looking for God to speak to them directly and personally through creation, often manifesting itself as seeking “a sign” from God through nature. The psalmist’s meditation in Psalm 19 and Paul’s statements in Romans 1:18-21 are the way believers ought to understand proper interaction with nature. Unfortunately, it is easy to take Job’s statement in Job 12:7-10 too literally and ask God to speak directly through beasts, birds, and bushes. Poor exegesis of Job 38-41 can also lead believers to perceive Job’s experience of hearing God directly and personally through nature (a whirlwind) as normative. The theophany in Job 38-41 is atypical, as is Elijah’s experience on the mountain where God spoke in a whisper (1 Kgs 19:12), or Balaam’s experience with his talking donkey (Num 22:28-30), or Moses’s conversation with God through a burning bush (Exod 3:2-6). Desiring an experience of supernatural revelation outside of Scripture regularly leads believers astray.

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<sup>45</sup> Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 203.

<sup>46</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 82.

Biblical meditation on creation provides a space for the experiential dimension of faith without falling into mysticism by insisting that authentic spiritual illumination happens in conjunction with God's Word.<sup>47</sup> As professor of theology Donald Bloesch asserts, "The Spirit does not speak directly to the human soul, that is, apart from historical mediation."<sup>48</sup> Hence, an ecstatic experience with a creational element or spectacular creational occurrence (i.e., "a sign") is not God's speaking personally to a particular human. Renowned theologian Karl Barth was correct when he declared that "no such object can ever be allowed to become a source of authority for the church's preaching, for no such object can have independent revelatory or epistemological status."<sup>49</sup> The same principle is true for believers who are tempted to take "a sign" in creation as authoritative for their life's direction.<sup>50</sup>

**Neglect of corporate fellowship.** Creational meditation may tempt Christians to minimize the importance of Christian fellowship or corporate worship. In some instances, the outdoor person's undervaluing corporate worship will be pure selfishness and outright idolatry, and it should be confronted as such. However, to the extent that selfish individualism is a potential danger of creational meditation, it is of equal danger to meditation in general. Meditation, by its very nature, encourages solitude. Psalm 19, for example, does have an individualistic tone. A Christian's walk with God must strike the proper balance between the personal and the corporate.

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<sup>47</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New*, 85.

<sup>48</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New*, 85.

<sup>49</sup> Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 205.

<sup>50</sup> This doctrine will be difficult for many modern Christians to accept. There are numerous stories, including Martin Luther and the lightning storm, that would seem to indicate otherwise. A closer look at the theoretical, practical, and historical aspects of creational meditation in chapter 3 will illumine an appropriate path forward.

Properly engaged, creational elements speak rather loudly against individualism. The vast majority of creational elements speak communally. God's creation does not possess an abundance of solitary elements. By way of illustration, of the fifty or so elements in Psalm 104 referenced earlier, forty are plural words or communal (e.g., trees, mountains, lions, rocks, grass). In addition, believers must remember that all of the nature psalms are part of the Psalter, which is the communal song book of worship for God's people.

Creational meditation requires Christian fellowship in order to avoid some of the above dangers. American theologian and philosopher Richard Mouw offers an exhortation to creational meditators: "We need the Spirit's guidance in our hearts and minds as we seek to identify traces of the Spirit's work in the larger creation. And we need to ground ourselves in the life and thought of that community where the Spirit is openly at work."<sup>51</sup> Accountability is necessary to confirm the biblical connections and conclusions about God drawn from meditation on creation are appropriate.

**Neglect of God's revelation through creation.** Though valid concerns exist regarding the potential dangers of creational meditation, the other concern for contemporary Christians is neglecting this type of experiential and thoughtful engagement of creation and Scripture. Since the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky proclaims his handiwork, what happens when humans' technological advances result in the majority of their days being spent indoors? The psalmist in Psalm 19 claims nothing is hidden from the sun's heat, but he could not have conceived of air-conditioned buildings. In his penetrating critique of American culture, *The Luminous Dusk*, Dale Allison Jr. concludes, "Technological artifacts point us to the wrong creator—to the human race, not God; so they seem bereft of real signals of transcendence. Further, as

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<sup>51</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 68.

they become our environment, they imprint in the collective subconscious the message that things exist in order to serve us. That is the very last thing we need to intuit.”<sup>52</sup> The majority of analogies in the Bible are not created by human hands—they are God-created elements found outdoors like sheep, sparrows, ravens, and lilies. In order to fully understand and appreciate creation’s emblems in Scripture, creational meditation in the outdoors is essential. Moreover, to more fully enjoy the Scriptures, creational meditation must not be neglected.

### **An Exegesis of Passages Defending the Importance of Creational Meditation**

This section defends the importance of creational meditation by proving it is not peripherally insignificant to meditation on the biblical text. Creational meditation is not inconsequential to spiritual growth but integrally important in nurturing maturity. An exegesis of Psalm 19 shows the critical connection between meditation on created elements and meditation on the sacred text. The exegesis uncovers the complementary and interdependent relationship between these two distinct types of meditation. Further, exegesis of the crucifixion accounts preserved in the Synoptic Gospels demonstrates the intrinsic connection between creational revelation and special revelation.

The Scriptures’ specific witness to the connection between creational meditation and biblical meditation elevates the value of creational meditation for the life of believers. Before re-engaging Psalm 19, it is needful to begin by delineating the nuanced difference between creational meditation and biblical meditation. The difference is simply between the initial object of meditation. In creational meditation, the meditator first engages an element of creation for general revelation then moves to biblical text, never abandoning a scriptural perspective. In biblical meditation, the meditator first

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<sup>52</sup> Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Luminous Dusk: Finding God in the Deep, Still Places* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 21.

engages the text for special revelation then moves to life application. Both forms of meditation have value, and though biblical meditation has primacy, creational meditation should play an important role in Christians' lives. Undergirding this conviction of the important role of creational meditation is how integrally wedded both forms of meditation are to one another in many places in Scripture, particularly in Psalm 19.

## **Psalm 19**

An exegesis of Psalm 19:1-14 shows the complementarity and interdependence between creational meditation and biblical meditation.<sup>53</sup> As biblical commentator John Goldingay argues, "Ps. 19 simply juxtaposes [creational revelation and special revelation] without telling readers how to relate them."<sup>54</sup> However, this juxtaposition may have been the psalmist's way of encouraging deeper meditation. The two distinct forms of meditation, creational (vv. 1-6) and scriptural (vv. 7-10) do require even deeper thinking in order to understand them as an integrated whole.<sup>55</sup> Exegetical meditation on both forms proves fruitful for revealing the nature of their union. The psalm climaxes by drawing together both forms of meditation (vv. 11-14). Three points of emphasis carried throughout all three sections of the psalm reveals the union between creational and

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<sup>53</sup> Ps 19:1-14: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat. The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer."

<sup>54</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 284.

<sup>55</sup> James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation Bible Commentary Series (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 96. Mays suggests, "One must meditate on all three parts and make the whole the words of the heart in order to understand the devotion and trust expressed in the concluding confession."

biblical meditation: (1) the use of created elements, (2) the use of light imagery, and (3) the theme of a growing and flourishing relationship with God.

All three sections of the psalm include a created element: the heavens, sky, and sun appear in the creational meditation (vv. 1, 4b [sect. 1]); gold and honey are incorporated into the meditation on Torah (v. 10 [sect. 2]), and rock features in the psalm's close (v. 14 [sect. 3]). Additionally, there are links that tie the three sections together. The example of creational meditation on the sun provided in verses 4b-6 (sect. 1) is integrated with the gold and honey mentioned in verse 10 (sect. 2) by the obvious commonality of their golden color, accentuating the radiant quality of both sun and Torah.<sup>56</sup> Less obvious, but still discernable, are the ties between gold, honey, and rock. The psalmist would have recognized that gold was found amidst rocks, whether by mining or panning. Even honey has a discernable connection to rock for the Torah-saturated mind of the psalmist. For example, in Moses's song in Deuteronomy 32, Moses, for the first time, speaks of the Lord as "Rock" (v. 4). In verse 13, Moses writes that the Lord "suckled [Israel] with honey out of the rock"; in verses 15 and 18, he calls God the "Rock of his salvation" and the "Rock that fathered you"; finally, in verses 30-31, he refers to God as "their Rock" and "our Rock."<sup>57</sup> In sum, from the sun above his head to the honey in his mouth to the gold in his hand to the rock beneath his feet, the psalmist's mind is full of connections between God, Torah, and creation.

The use of light imagery also unifies the three sections of this psalm. As deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner note, "The motif of light occurs in each part of the psalm—the sun gives light (vv. 4-6), and the torah *enlightens* (v. 8) and *illuminates* (v. 11)."<sup>58</sup> In verse 11, the word translated "warned" (*zahar*) in many English translations

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<sup>56</sup> J. Ross Wagner, "From the Heavens to the Heart: The Dynamics of Psalm 19 as Prayer," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (1999): 255.

<sup>57</sup> See also Ps 81:16: ". . . with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

<sup>58</sup> DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 134.

carries the sense of being warned by shining a light on a dangerous object.<sup>59</sup> The other connection worth noting is the double use of the word “hidden.” As Broyles expounds, “As nothing is hidden from the sun’s heat (v. 6), so the speaker prays, Forgive my hidden faults (v. 12).”<sup>60</sup> The concept of being hidden then being enlightened epitomizes the process of Spirit-illuminated creational and biblical meditation. This concept also relates to the hard work of unearthing gold and the precise care taken in harvesting a hidden honeycomb. The meditative connections are plentiful.

From start to finish, this psalm reveals a deepening of relationship and maturity. Meditation on creational elements and the sacred text unite to draw believers into more intimate relationship with God. This deepening is first observed in the first two names of God used in the psalm. In verses 1-6, the psalmist refers to God as *El*, but in verses 7-10, he uses the personal name of the Lord (*YHWH*). According to deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, “Perhaps the point is that one can know [God] vaguely, impersonally through nature, but to know God personally, then the direct revelation of the word is required. . . . In creation, the Creator comes to us hidden, wearing nature as a [veil]. In the word, the Lord (Yahweh) comes to us personally.”<sup>61</sup>

It is not surprising then that two more personal pronouns for God appear in verse 14: “rock” and “redeemer.” The psalmist says earlier, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul” (v. 7), but he knows the law cannot rescue his soul from errors, hidden faults, presumptuous sins, and great transgressions (vv. 11-13)—he needs a redeemer. The term used for “redeemer” is related to the concept of a kinsman redeemer, that is, a family member who buys back a relative from slavery.<sup>62</sup> The psalmist who calls

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<sup>59</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 264.

<sup>60</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 96-97.

<sup>61</sup> DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 139.

<sup>62</sup> DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 139.

himself God's servant in verses 11 and 13 considers himself part of God's family in verse 14.<sup>63</sup> Again, relational movement in the psalm leads toward greater intimacy and maturity.

Psalm 19 highlights that personal relationship with God depends exclusively upon special revelation and redemption but is deepened by general revelation and creational meditation. According to Brown, in the Psalms, "the 'rock' motif . . . reflects an intensely personal relationship of the pray-er to God ('my rock')." <sup>64</sup> This reality is confirmed by the pairing of "redeemer" and "rock" by the twofold use of the personal pronoun "my." This pairing highlights the integrated whole of biblical meditation and creational meditation. Creational meditation affords believers' minds opportunities to connect and integrate life experiences in creation, with God, and to biblical analogies. The psalmist is evidently making these connections between his own life experiences with rocks and the Rock.

Verbal links between Psalms 18 and 19 also help unearth these connections. As Goldingay points out, "Psalm 18 opens with reference to Yhwh's servant and to Yhwh as 'my rock,' and Ps. 19 closes on these notes."<sup>65</sup> A closer examination of Psalm 18:2 may reveal how the psalmist's life experiences intersected rocks and his Rock. It reads, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." Another likely connection consists of the five parallel words between Psalm 19:7-10 and Deuteronomy 32:4.<sup>66</sup> The psalmist uses the following words related to Torah: "perfect," "sure," "right," "justice," and "righteous." The writer of Deuteronomy 32:4 also uses the exact same

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<sup>63</sup> DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 139.

<sup>64</sup> Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 285.

<sup>66</sup> Wagner, "From the Heavens to the Heart," 260.



words in four instances to describe the Rock: “perfect,” “right,” “justice,” and “righteous.” The fifth word “sure” is a root word of the word “faithful” in Deuteronomy 32:4.<sup>67</sup> As New Testament scholar J. Ross Wagner offers, “If Deut 32:4 [or Psalm 18] . . . lies behind ‘my rock’ in Psalm 19, the psalmist in [v. 14] directs his prayer to the One whose character, like his Torah, is completely trustworthy and dependable.”<sup>68</sup> The psalmist’s use of a created element to describe his beloved Redeemer was not only a way to speak of the strength of his relationship with God but also a way, at the end of his meditation, to reinforce the unity of the psalm from start to finish.

### **The Crucifixion Accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke**

A parallel study of similarities and differences of the three Synoptic accounts shows how significant creational revelation was to the most important act in all of history—Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. Creational revelation participated in the event. What becomes evident through study of Matthew 27:45-54, Mark 15:33-39, and Luke 23:44-49 is that creational revelation and special revelation are intertwined, interdependent, and complementary.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 52-53.

<sup>68</sup> Wagner, “From the Heavens to the Heart,” 260.

<sup>69</sup> Matt 27:45-54: “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, ‘This man is calling Elijah.’ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.’ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”

Mark 15:33-39: “And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ And some of the bystanders hearing it said, ‘Behold, he is calling Elijah.’ And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.’ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’”

All three accounts begin the same way; they describe darkness's falling over the land from the sixth to the ninth hour. Luke says in 23:45 that "the sun's light failed"—an observation made all the more significant in view of the midday setting. All three Synoptic writers reference to the darkness points to how extraordinary and striking it must have been.<sup>70</sup> In his commentary on this passage, Darrell Bock explains, "The darkness recalls an eschatological motif from the judgment imagery of the day of the Lord. . . . An eschatologically significant time of judgement is present. God is watching and signaling his presence."<sup>71</sup> In Mark 13:24, Jesus predicts that darkness would accompany the day of the Lord.<sup>72</sup> The heavens are declaring what would not otherwise have been apparent to the onlookers at the cross. They are revealing the cosmic significance of the Christ event.

The other parallel between these accounts is the centurion's experience of, and response to, creational and special revelation. All three authors include what the centurion witnesses and how he responds, but some key differences are present. In Mark's Gospel, the centurion sees and responds to how Jesus "breathed his last" with a loud cry (Mk 15:37)—special revelation exclusively. However, in Luke 23:47 the centurion responds to what he sees take place—both creational and special revelation. Matthew makes it undeniable that creational revelation was consequential. He writes in

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Luke 23:44-49: "It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent!' And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things."

<sup>70</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1973), 969.

<sup>71</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 1858.

<sup>72</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 592.

27:54, “When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” Creational revelation wedded to special revelation, combined with the centurion’s (and those with him) albeit brief creational meditation, climaxed in humble, awe-filled exaltation of Christ. Creational revelation was an essential help to the witnesses’ understanding of special revelation. As the eminent scholar of the Synoptic Gospels, Robert Stein comments, “It is probable that the Centurion’s understanding of his confession was not as rich and pregnant as that of Mark and his readers. . . . It is ironic that . . . a hated Roman soldier makes the greatest human confession in the entire Gospel.”<sup>73</sup> The entirety of the Synoptics’ witness elucidates that creational revelation was intertwined with and complemented special revelation in a spiritually meaningful way at the cross.

Luke’s account has an additional example: “And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts” (23:48). The Greek word *theoria* has a fitting English equivalent in the word “spectacle,” which carries a sense of beholding an unusually striking display.<sup>74</sup> Luke is highlighting the combination of creational and special revelation and their combined impact on bystanders. Luke seems to indicate those who saw the event experienced more than just a fleeting, superficial emotional response. Bock affirms this conclusion:

These events produce mourning over Jesus’ death as the crowd observes the “spectacle,” . . . the array of crucifixion events. Mourning is reflected in the beating of the breast. . . . The same idiom appears in Luke 18:13, where the tax collector approached God in a mood of contrition. . . . Sorrow probably results from recognition of the divine signs, which indicate that someone of significance has died. This is not a routine mourning of death. Similar reflection comes from another

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<sup>73</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 719.

<sup>74</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “spectacle” (p. 1129).

crowd in Acts 2:37-38 . . . . The remarks suggest that this crowd has been moved by the events.<sup>75</sup>

Creational and special revelation's mutual impact resulted in a spiritually significant experience, so much so that Bock sees a connection between the bystander's experience on this day and the day of Pentecost, when three thousand souls were saved. Surely both events involve some of the same individuals. Creational revelation's influence alongside special revelation is not inconsequential. According to Bock, "[Creational revelation's] real presence is the reason some bystanders change their view of the event."<sup>76</sup> However, creational revelation on its own is limited and unable to function in a salvific manner—as discussed above.

Exegesis of the Synoptic crucifixion accounts shows that special revelation provides the effectual redemptive consummation of the wedded witness of creational and special revelation. Special revelation brings clarity and specificity to the ambiguity and generality of creation's witness. It is the primary means of communication; creational revelation is supplementary. On the other hand, creational revelation adds aesthetics, beauty, illustrations, analogies, texture, and an experiential dimension to special revelation, thereby bringing a clarity of its own that is different from—but enhances—the abstraction of propositional arguments. Moore states that for God's people, "the Spirit of God works through this general revelation and the glory revealed there, in the light of special revelation and the gospel, to mold [his people] into greater degrees of Christlikeness."<sup>77</sup> As systematic theologian Millard Erickson adds, "There is harmony between the two, and mutual reinforcement of one by the other. The biblical revelation is not totally distinct from what is known of the natural realm."<sup>78</sup> Though special revelation

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<sup>75</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 2:1865.

<sup>76</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 2:1859.

<sup>77</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 89.

<sup>78</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 199.

has primacy, both are necessary. Lovell asserts, “Natural revelation is of benefit to the believer in understanding special revelation . . . . Special revelation requires general revelation in order that man may even grasp the truths of God’s Word.”<sup>79</sup> The intertwining complementarity and interdependence of both types of revelation is plain. Therefore, creational revelation is important and ought not be overlooked or undervalued.

## **Conclusion**

Exegesis of Psalm 19 and the Synoptic crucifixion accounts illustrates how integrally important creational revelation is to special revelation, and how important creational meditation is to biblical meditation. Creational revelation is authentic and beneficial. Creational meditation approached in a biblically faithful manner and with the illumination of the Holy Spirit can produce tremendous fruit in believers’ lives. As witnessed in these texts, creational meditation can draw believers closer to their Redeemer, thereby nurturing Christian maturity.

### **An Exegesis of Passages Demonstrating the Benefits of Creational Meditation**

In Psalm 19, creational meditation clearly influences the relationship between the meditator and God. The psalmist’s meditation on creation and the sacred text beneficially draws him closer to the Lord. Likewise, significant benefits exist today for believers who biblically meditate upon creation. Hence, this section demonstrates creational meditation’s capacity for (1) enhancing believers’ understanding of God and his Word, (2) renewing and strengthening believers’ faith in God and his Word, and (3) enlivening believers’ worship of God. This list of benefits is not exhaustive, but it does reveal ample reason for practicing the spiritual discipline of creational meditation. Psalm 19 bears witness to each of these three benefits, but exegesis of three additional texts

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<sup>79</sup> Lovell, “The Heavens Declare,” 61.

confirms and expands upon deepened understanding, strengthened faith, and enlivened worship as rewarding outcomes derived from creational meditation. Job 37:14-42:6 addresses the benefit of understanding, Luke 12:22-32 highlights the benefit of faith, and Psalm 104 concerns worship. Worship, as highlighted in Psalm 104, is the culmination of deepened understanding and strengthened faith.

### **Deepened Understanding (Job 37:14-42:5)**

This portion of Job encompasses the final words of Elihu, two theophanies in which God speaks to Job, and Job's two responses to God. Looking first at Elihu's call to meditate (37:14-24), then at each section of God's speeches (38:2-39:30; 40:7-34), and lastly at the final statement of Job (42:2-6) helps illumine how God's two spoken meditations on creation benefitted Job.

Elihu's final words are a renewed call for Job to meditate (37:14-24). They emphasize that God speaks through his creation—that is, there is knowledge to be gained via God's created works. According to Alden, Elihu's call to stop and consider God's wondrous works “is perhaps the most important statement that Elihu made and the one thing that Job was forced eventually to do. It was ultimately the solution to his problem and the cure for his ills, physical, emotional, and attitudinal.”<sup>80</sup> At the very least, Alden's strong statement shows that Elihu anticipates God's answer to Job, and it gives credence to the argument that creational meditation is beneficial. Elihu's final words also prepare Job—as well as readers—for God's appearance.<sup>81</sup> Elihu uses storm imagery in 37:15-20 to anticipate God's speaking from a stormy whirlwind in 38:1. The imagery of the sun in 37:21-22 provides the perfect introduction for God's arriving in “golden splendor” and “clothed with awesome majesty.” Elihu concludes by declaring the only appropriate

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<sup>80</sup> Alden, *Job*, 328.

<sup>81</sup> Estes, *Job*, 224.

response to God’s awesome majesty is to fear him, and he implies that Job has yet to fear God as he should, thereby anticipating the growth in deeper reverence that Job is about to experience.

In the next four chapters (38-41), Job receives a unique personal experience. The Creator of the universe leads him through a meditation upon creation. According to Lindsay Wilson, “Job has been described as ‘a God’s-eye view of creation in all its complexity and beauty,’ and is best pictured as a leisurely guided tour through the creation.”<sup>82</sup> This nature walk allows God’s creation to speak on his behalf, resulting in Job’s increased knowledge of creation and God.<sup>83</sup> However, the word “leisurely” may be misplaced because God arrives in a stormy whirlwind, hurling a whirlwind of questions at Job: “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said” (38:1). God meets Job in creation using a windstorm, which was the element that killed Job’s children (1:19).<sup>84</sup> The use of *YHWH* in 38:1 is the first use of God’s divine name since 12:9, and it softens the initial interaction that is marked by a degree of severity. In his commentary on Job, Gerald Wilson declares,

There is simply no more effective way for the poet-author to depict a God who is so powerfully other than humans, who exceeds the bounds of complete human comprehension . . . than to bombard Job with an overwhelming array of unanswerable questions that threaten to submerge him. This is not rebuke or even ridicule, but it is simply the author’s attempt to demonstrate experientially what it is like for humans . . . to enter into the presence of the sovereign God of the universe and of all time!<sup>85</sup>

The questions of God stop Job’s mouth—he covers it with his hand in his first response (40:3-5)—and cause him to meditate. As Estes explains, “As the master teacher,

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<sup>82</sup> Lindsay Wilson, *Job*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 181; quotation from Kathryn Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job*, Harvard Theological Studies 61 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Divinity School, 2008), 65.

<sup>83</sup> Lindsay Wilson, *Job*, 181.

<sup>84</sup> Alden, *Job*, 344.

<sup>85</sup> Gerald Wilson, *Job*, 600.

Yahweh poses more than seventy unanswerable questions to Job. These questions are meant . . . to disclose to him the many inexplicable wonders of God’s workings in the world.”<sup>86</sup> Job’s nature walk involves some familiar created elements, and it likely exposes him to many creatures he knows nothing about.

God’s first speech (38:2-39:30) is split into two sections addressing God’s design and control over creation. The first section (38:4-38) pertains to the physical universe, and the second section (38:39-39:30) concerns animals in creation.<sup>87</sup> After meditating upon morning stars and nighttime constellations, snow and hail, grass and dew, lions and ravens, wild oxen and donkeys, horses and eagles, and other elements and creatures, God pauses to challenge Job to answer. Job admits his limited perspective. Yet, as Lindsay Wilson states, “The description of creation given in the Yahweh speeches acts as an invitation to study it more carefully and to learn from it. There is a clear hint that such study yields greater understanding of God, his purposes, and his world.”<sup>88</sup> God’s natural world yields more than just scientific facts; it is the soulmate of spiritual realities.<sup>89</sup> Jonathan Edwards believed that all of creation was “full of images of divine things.”<sup>90</sup> Though believers’ perspectives are indeed limited, much knowledge and spiritual meaning are available to explore and discover in such an emblematic creation.

God’s second speech (40:7-41:34) is about two specific creatures—Behemoth (40:15-24) and Leviathan (41:1-34). Much ink has been spilt attempting to link these two creatures to specific recognizable earthly animals. Often, Behemoth is linked to the hippopotamus, and Leviathan to the crocodile. Clearly, there are many traits that match.

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<sup>86</sup> Estes, *Job*, 230.

<sup>87</sup> David J. A. Clines, *Job 38-42*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 18B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1085.

<sup>88</sup> Lindsay Wilson, *Job*, 182.

<sup>89</sup> David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 17A (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 293.

<sup>90</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:152.



Yet, “Behemoth” is a general term for an enormous beast, so it belies being identified—perhaps purposefully.<sup>91</sup> The same is true of Leviathan, which possesses characteristics offered by Job that do not match any known animal. For example, the text describes Leviathan as an armored gigantic sea creature who sneezes fire from its mouth (41:15-21, 25). Old Testament professor and pastor Robert Fyall explains that “the Hebrews had a profound knowledge of the mythological language of their day and they used it in a powerful and creative way to express . . . [God’s] providence and his battle with evil at both a cosmic and an earthly level.”<sup>92</sup> In agreement with Fyall, Longman proposes a shift in God’s second speech to more figurative language in order to poetically address Job’s struggles in a more substantive way.<sup>93</sup> If, as Fyall and Longman propose, Behemoth and Leviathan are representative of Satan, death, chaotic natural disasters, and evil, then God has forcefully claimed—albeit in a poetic manner—his absolute sovereign reign over not only every known creature but also evil and death. From the perspective of biblical meditation on creation, this apparent figurative move by God serves to provide an extensive web of meditative connections between scriptural truth about God and real experiences that generate fear, as well as fearsome circumstances conjured up in one’s mind. The Lord’s words about Behemoth and Leviathan metaphorically communicate his omnipotent control over all fearsome earthly creatures, cataclysmic natural disasters, worldwide pandemics, and all manner of other evil events and created beings throughout creation. God is sovereign over one’s most fearsome current realities and over one’s scariest fears of the future. Such a poignant truth is helpful fodder for meditation, not only for Job but for all of God’s people.

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<sup>91</sup> Clines, *Job 38-42*, 1149.

<sup>92</sup> Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 12 (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2002), 137.

<sup>93</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Job*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 455.

After God's epic speeches, Job gives his final response to God in 42:2-6. Job's words are a climactic encapsulation of the meaning of the book of Job and a summation of how Job has grown in understanding. He has benefitted from a personal meditative encounter with God in his creation (the whirlwind) and on creation. The first benefit is not only a reaffirmation of his knowledge of God's sovereign power and design but also a deeper implied recognition that even if he never understands why, Job can continue to revere God.<sup>94</sup> Job's direct personal encounter with the Lord, complemented by his experience and contemplation of creation, has opened his eyes to his own limited perspective. Terms that refer to knowledge appear five times in verses 2-3, proving that knowledge is the primary theme.<sup>95</sup> Verses 5-6 exhibit Job's growth toward greater knowledge of, and a closer relationship with, God. Many different interpretations of these two verses appear in commentaries. Despite some nuances, a general agreement exists among a good number of recent studies.<sup>96</sup> Longman summarizes verse 5, stating, "In essence, Job is saying 'I saw you, I experienced you.'"<sup>97</sup> Job comes to a place of humble repentance in verse 6. As Fyall proposes, "[Job] now recognizes that, while he has not committed sins which have led to his afflictions, he has been guilty of presumption and he wishes to turn from that."<sup>98</sup> Job's richer understanding of God produced a more humble attitude toward, and closer relationship with, his Lord.

Job's faithfulness in suffering, his refusal to curse or forsake God, and his repentant attitude at the end result in God's commendation in 42:8, where he commands

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<sup>94</sup> Gerald Wilson, *Job*, 661.

<sup>95</sup> Estes, *Job*, 255.

<sup>96</sup> Estes (*Job*, 255-56), Longman (*Job*, 449-50), Gerald Wilson (*Job*, 662-64), Lindsay Wilson (*Job*, 124-25), and Fyall (*Now My Eyes Have Seen*, 179-80) all affirm that Job is not repenting for a sin that caused his suffering but for his attitude toward God that needed to be amended.

<sup>97</sup> Longman, *Job*, 449.

<sup>98</sup> Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen*, 180.

Job to intercede for his friends. God restores Job's friendships through forgiveness. Fyall explains that Job's intercessory prayer ties the prologue to the epilogue:

Not only is Job called "servant", but his intercession here recalls his similar activity in relation to his family (1:5). Job has always been a man of prayer. . . . Yet this [prayer] is not a knee-jerk reaction on Job's part but evidence of the restored and deepened relationship he has with the Lord. The fact that the Lord accepts the prayer shows that it is genuine.<sup>99</sup>

The creational meditation in Job 38-42 involves experiential wondering on a vast array of emblematic elements, it leads to deep thinking on a whole host of interconnecting truths and spiritual realities by God's spoken word to Job, and it results in Job's growth in understanding.<sup>100</sup> Job's deepened understanding was not just intellectual; it was relational, too. Creational meditation is always prayerful. Job's experience of creational meditation was a conversation with God. As Gerald Wilson comments, "God condescends, so to speak, and enters the conversations on a level of intimacy that offers Job a real opportunity for participation. . . . [And God even graciously] gives Job the final word (42:2-6)."<sup>101</sup> God speaks through his creation and his Word in different ways, but when creation and the Word are heard together, there is a richness to the prayerful conversation of the one meditating. The threefold complementary union of God's creation, God's Word, and one's personal encounter exhibited in Psalm 19 is evident in Job as well, pointing to the befitting combination of these three crucial parts of creational meditation for growing in knowledge of God.

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<sup>99</sup> Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen*, 181.

<sup>100</sup> The overwhelming number of God's questions posed to Job about creation (i.e., seventy) are God's invitation for Job to marvel at, be curious about, and inquire further so that he can gain deeper knowledge of each element of creation.

<sup>101</sup> Gerald Wilson, *Job*, 603.

### **Strengthened Faith (Luke 12:22-32)<sup>102</sup>**

Preceding Luke 12:22-32, Jesus tells a parable of a rich man who wrongly equates great wealth with ease and happiness in life. In 12:19, the man says, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” Jesus immediately calls the man foolish because he treasures earthly riches more than God. Consequently, in verses 22-32, Jesus implies that believers who are anxious about their needs in life are also acting foolishly. Anxiety does not add to life but robs God’s people of peace and joy—it exposes a lack of faith. John Carroll summarizes this passage, saying “Life oriented around trust . . . frees one from preoccupation and worries that oppose authentic and joyful living (vv. 22-32).”<sup>103</sup> In order to grow in faith and experience joyful living, Jesus exhorts his disciples to meditate upon creation, specifically ravens and lilies. His exhortation reminds the disciples of, and renews their enjoyment in, God and his provision.

Jesus prescribes creational meditation in this passage as a means for believers to fend off anxiety and to strengthen faith in their Father as a gracious provider. In verse 22, Jesus warns the disciples not to be anxious about life, but then he narrows in on two aspects of life that they may be tempted to worry about: what they will eat and what they will wear. Jesus then proceeds to say that believers’ lives and bodies are about more than food or clothing. According the context of this passage, life is about being rich toward

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<sup>102</sup> Luke 12:22-32: “And he said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.’”

<sup>103</sup> John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Presbyterian, 2012), 271.

God (v. 21) and about seeking his kingdom (v. 31). Ironically, being rich toward God means not striving after lots of stuff but having faith in a caring God (v. 28). Additionally, seeking God's kingdom does not involve striving but receiving his kingdom as a gracious gift (v. 32). Jesus teaches meditation on creation as a beneficial means of enjoying this richer kingdom-oriented faith.

In verses 24-26, Jesus exhorts the disciples to meditate upon ravens. God reminds his people, by considering ravens' lack of striving or accumulating, that anxious striving and accumulating accomplishes nothing. Also, as Bock explains, "the point is not to be as careless as ravens, but to show how comprehensive God's care is."<sup>104</sup> According to God's ceremonial law, ravens were unclean birds and regarded as detestable.<sup>105</sup> So, if God cares for detestable ravens, how much more will he care for his people. Furthermore, anxiety robs believers of appreciating how much God cares for them. Meditating upon ravens renews believers' perspective, reminding them that God loves and values them more than birds. Creational meditation restores peace and joy as God's people are able to rightly partake of the Lord's provision.

Jesus also tells the disciples to meditate upon lilies (vv. 27-28). In his commentary on Luke, James Edwards explains that "the Greek for 'wild flowers,' *krina*, is normally translated 'lilies,' but it may include the autumn crocus, anemone, gladiolus, or simply the happy flowers of Galilee."<sup>106</sup> Jesus directs the disciples' attention to how wild flowers grow. Lilies do not anxiously toil; thus, neither should believers have anxiety about how they will clothe themselves. Also, lilies do not spin their own clothing

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<sup>104</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 2:1160.

<sup>105</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 670.

<sup>106</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 249.

but simply wear what God gave them.<sup>107</sup> The lilies' glory is in how God provides their beauty for them. Presbyterian pastor and Wheaton College president Philip Graham Ryken points out, in his commentary, that "here Jesus was taking pleasure in the beauty of his own creation."<sup>108</sup> Jesus's moment of delight in considering the lilies is a reminder of the pleasures of creational meditation. Lilies declare God's glory with their beauty. Likewise, believers' lives glorify God by trust and enjoyment of his provision for them.

Anxiety robs believers from gratefully expressing the praise to God that he deserves. Meditating upon the lilies and how they grow is a means for believers to grow in faith, gratefulness, and exultation of God as provider. God delights in providing for his flock (v. 32). Further, as Bock notes, "Jesus casts God as a caring great shepherd who cares for his own and gives them what they need in order to do what he has called them to do (Ps. 23)."<sup>109</sup> Creational meditation orients believers' thoughts around God's kingdom purposes and orients their hearts to enjoy their Shepherd's gracious provision. Edwards encapsulates one of Jesus's and creation's "valuable lessons" in this passage by stating, "Happiness is not a product of human striving, but of learning to surrender all of life into the faithful and caring hands of the Father."<sup>110</sup> Believers can experience the joy of learning to surrender as they consider the example of ravens and lilies.

The pattern found in Luke 12:22-32 is that God delights in giving to his people and that his people are to delight in the God who gives. In his well-known work, *Desiring God*, pastor John Piper says it this way: "God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in him."<sup>111</sup> The opposite of an anxious life of toil is a faith-filled life of joyful

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<sup>107</sup> Ryken, *Luke*, 672.

<sup>108</sup> Ryken, *Luke*, 672.

<sup>109</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 350.

<sup>110</sup> Edwards, *Luke*, 249.

<sup>111</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2003), 288.

worship. Jesus teaches that creational meditation is a means of growing in this Godward life of exultation.

### **Enlivened Worship (Ps 104)**

Psalm 104 is a creational meditation of praise exalting the glory of the Lord as Creator, Provider, and Sustainer of all creation. The pattern from Luke 12 is unmistakable in Psalm 104—God’s delight-filled giving inspires believers’ delight-filled worship. God’s pleasure as divine giver is evident throughout the psalm in his work of creating, in the innumerable ways he provides for all of his creatures, and in his ongoing sovereign work of sustaining creation. The psalmist’s creational meditation on a vast array of creatures and created elements enlivens his worship of God. Psalm 104 exhorts believers to renew their joy in worshipping their Lord by meditating upon God’s work in creation. Joyful worship is the inevitable culminating human response of deepened understanding and strengthened faith.

The psalmist begins his meditation by praising God as creator (vv. 2-9). He outlines how from the heavens (v. 2) to the valleys (v. 8), God mightily and intricately made the earth. God is also worthy of praise for his infinite wisdom and creativity (vv. 24-25) and his power to create by breathing life and taking away breath (vv. 29-30). The psalmist’s most extensive praise is for God’s provision. Verse 27 summarizes many other examples: “These all look to you, to give them their food in due season.” As Estes comments on verse 15, humankind is not excluded from God’s provision:

The Lord provides for the biological necessities of his creatures, but he also provides for the emotional enjoyment of humans. The Lord desires that humans enjoy life, not just endure it, so it supports, sustains, and satisfies them far beyond their essential physiological needs. As the perfect host . . . the Lord provides wine, oil, and bread to add celebration to life.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms 73-150*, New American Commentary, vol. 13B (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2019), 140.

Meditation on such generosity engenders even greater praise to God. The Lord is intimately involved in his creation; he not only created it, but he also actively sustains what he made. The most poignant image for God as Sustainer is the many ways Psalm 104 describes how the Lord waters the earth. Verses 10 and 13 are illustrative: “From your lofty abode you water the mountains”; and “You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills.”

The psalmist’s invitation for all believers to invigorate their praise by creational meditation is evident in the examples provided above as well as the closing prayer that resembles Psalm 19. The psalmist prays that his meditation would be pleasing to the Lord (Ps 104:34). Equally important to the psalmist is that his meditation results in joyous praise (vv. 33-34). The priority of praise is evident in how the psalm begins and ends: “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” (vv. 1, 35). All of the verses in between reinforce the psalmist’s call to worship. Unlike Psalm 19, however, the psalmist’s use of “my” twice in Psalm 104:1 reveals an established intimate relationship with God at the outset. Also, the psalmist uses the Hebrew name *El* only once, whereas he uses God’s personal name *YHWH* ten times.<sup>113</sup> However, this creational meditation is not just a personal worship experience. As Longman points out, “The very final word is a call to the congregation to join him in his worship of God (*Praise the LORD*; Heb. [Hallelujah], the first time this familiar expression occurs in the Psalms).”<sup>114</sup>

Similar to Psalm 19’s combination of “rock” and “redeemer,” Psalm 104’s close parallels with Psalm 103 combine to praise God as both Creator and Redeemer. As Geoffrey Grogan states, “[Psalm 104] begins and ends just like 103 and was probably

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<sup>113</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, *Psalms 90-150*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 181.

<sup>114</sup> Longman, *Psalms*, 363.



deliberately written as its complement, to show [God being] praised in both roles.”<sup>115</sup> Psalm 103’s focus on redemption and 104’s focus on creation together emphasize creational meditation’s complementary role in believers’ spiritual growth.

Psalm 104 makes abundantly clear the primary object of worship is God, not his works. Though the fruit of God’s work is immensely satisfying (v. 13), though his works are too numerous to count (vv. 24-25), though they express his glory (v. 31), though they are worthy of meditation (v. 34), and though the Lord himself rejoices in his works (v. 31), the psalmist unequivocally proclaims, “I rejoice in the LORD” (v. 34). Consequently, believers are encouraged—particularly by way of creational meditation—to join God in rejoicing *over what he has made*, but the point of believers’ lives is to “glorify God and enjoy *him* forever.”<sup>116</sup> Creational meditation offers Christians a means of joy in worship. The Lord uses creational meditation in believers’ minds and hearts to put in motion waves of joy that swell into worshipful songs.<sup>117</sup> At the end of Psalm 104, the psalmist bursts forth in song, singing, “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being” (v. 33). Creational meditation enlivens worship of the Lord.

### Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that Scripture prescribes creational meditation as an integrally important discipline for the spiritual life of believers. The discipline of meditating on creation is a form of biblical meditation requiring deep scriptural thinking in combination with rich experiences outdoors. If approached in a godly way, creational meditation grows believers’ love for creation, love of Scripture, and love of the Lord.

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<sup>115</sup> Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 113.

<sup>116</sup> Piper, *Desiring God*, 17.

<sup>117</sup> Estes, *Psalms 73-150*, 142.

Exegesis of key texts from Psalms, Job, Romans, and the Synoptic gospels revealed the biblical basis for, and value of, meditating upon elements in creation. The texts also provided clear examples of, guidelines for, and benefits of creational meditation. Biblical meditation on creation enhances believers' understanding of God, growing them in informational knowledge about God and relational knowledge of him. It is a means of drawing closer to God and his Word. Creational meditation also strengthens believers' faith in and enjoyment of, God, ultimately resulting in praise to God. Authentic worship is the end goal of creational meditation—that the words of believers' mouths and the meditations of their hearts might be pleasing to God (see Ps 19:14).

### CHAPTER 3

#### THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

No reasonable person, having heard about an unmarked and difficult path to a beautiful, remote mountain lake, would venture into the wilderness in search of the lake without a map and compass—and, likely, a guide. In many ways, this remote lake scenario is an apt description of the current situation of evangelicals regarding creation meditation. At one time, during the Puritan era, the meditative path to the crystal waters was well worn and the beautiful lake frequently enjoyed, but that path has since become largely neglected. In current evangelicalism, the means of meditating on creation are almost completely forgotten. In chapter 2, the Bible was clearly shown as the meditational map and compass for meditation on creation. Though the Bible is a more-than-sufficient map and compass, today's Christians who pursue meditation on creation will likely need a guide also to lead them to the lakeshore and to inspire them to delight in the refreshing waters of creation meditation. There is no better guide than the eighteenth-century pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards.

Creation meditation is faithfully practiced and most effective when grounded in biblical and historical emblematic theology and methodology, guided by a master of this type of meditation, and appropriately integrated into believers' lives. After introducing Jonathan Edwards, providing a brief overview of the Puritan roots of his emblematic worldview, and explaining the philosophical upheaval he experienced, this chapter presents three sections that (1) spell out why Edwards's unique emblematic worldview and practice of creation meditation make him such an exemplary guide for the contemporary context, (2) argue for the need to recover the practice of creation

meditation, and (3) provide an Edwards-inspired model for integrating this discipline into the lives of modern evangelicals.

### **Jonathan Edwards, His Puritan Roots, and a Changing World**

This first section begins by introducing Jonathan Edwards as a remarkable man whose extraordinary giftedness was displayed in his work as a theologian and philosopher. Specifically, Edwards's giftedness in biblical thinking was uniquely applied to developing a comprehensive emblematic worldview of the created world. This section shows how his worldview and practice of creation meditation were the fruit stemming ultimately from his deep roots in Puritanism. The section concludes by describing the massive philosophical shifts Edwards encountered in his own day.

#### **Jonathan Edwards: An Extraordinary Man**

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), by any standard, must be considered an uncommonly gifted man. He often receives high praise as the premier philosopher-theologian in American history. Biographer George Marsden asserts, "By many estimates, he was the most acute early American philosopher and the most brilliant of all American theologians."<sup>1</sup> Edwards is appropriately praised for these abilities, but what is even more pertinent to creation meditation is the depth of his relationship with God and his love for God's created world. Among Edwards's contemporaries, there were few other theologians who were seeking to grasp reality in terms of the integration of God

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<sup>1</sup> George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.

and his relationship with the natural world.<sup>2</sup> Creation theologian T. M. Moore calls Edwards “one of the greatest creational theologians of all time.”<sup>3</sup>

Edwards’s love for God and love for creation grew symbiotically when he was a youth in the Connecticut River Valley. His personal communion with Christ in creation began as a young boy when he and his schoolmates built themselves “a booth in a swamp, in a very secret and retired place, for a place for prayer.” He “had particular secret places of [his] own in the woods, where [he] used to retire . . . and used to be from time to time much affected . . . when engaged in religious duties.”<sup>4</sup> Edwards’s extraordinary experiences in creation early in life were formative.<sup>5</sup> Renowned philosopher and scholar George S. Claghorn writes that as an adult, Edwards’s “daily rides to the woods and meditations there were a direct outgrowth of these refreshing moments in his youth . . . , [and] they contributed to a philosophical theology that included the ‘book of nature’ as well as the ‘book of grace’ as a source of divine truth.”<sup>6</sup> It is essential to get a foretaste of the intensity of Edwards’s spiritually rich experiences with Christ in creation. He writes,

I walked abroad alone, in a solitary place in my father’s pasture, for contemplation. And as I was walking there, and looked up on the sky and clouds; there came into my mind, a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction: majesty and

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<sup>2</sup> Ahivu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’ Philosophy of History: The Re-Enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 87.

<sup>3</sup> T. M. Moore, *Consider the Lilies: A Plea for Creational Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, WJE, 16:791.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, WJE, 16:793. Though Edwards’s own perspective was to look back on his faith as a young boy with skepticism, I would assert that, as was his tendency, he was being too hard on himself. The religious affections he experienced as a youth, though they may have had mixed motives at times, appear to be indicative of a budding faith that had yet to come to full bloom. This full bloom is best expressed in Edwards’s “Personal Narrative” where he describes a time when he began to pray differently and experience a new and different level of affection for God (WJE, 16:793). He later refers to these types of experiences with God as his “sense of divine things” (WJE, 16:793). It is not clear exactly what age Edwards is during this time-period of increased affections.

<sup>6</sup> George S. Claghorn, ed., introduction to “Personal Writings,” in Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, WJE, 16:745.

meekness joined together: it was a sweet and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness. . . . My mind was greatly fixed on divine things; I was almost perpetually in the contemplation of them. Spent most of my time thinking of divine things, year after year. And used to spend abundance of my time, in walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy and prayer, and converse with God. And it was always my manner, at such times, to sing forth my contemplations. And was almost constantly in [spontaneous] prayer, wherever I was. Prayer seemed to be natural to me; as the breath, by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent.<sup>7</sup>

Scholar Clyde Holbrook is correct in his analysis when he says, “I have come to believe that nature contributed far more to Edwards’s philosophy, theology, and ethics than has usually been allowed by his interpreters.”<sup>8</sup> Nature also contributed to his passionate love for Christ Jesus and the Scriptures.

What Edwards experienced in creation was, according to Edward’s scholar Robert Boss, “a God-haunted place, where behind every bush and under every rock and within every tree, [and] creature . . . [was] a voice of wisdom crying out to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.”<sup>9</sup> For those who can see, “Edwards unveils a God-haunted world in which we are surrounded by signs, symbols, and emblems that serve as windows to spiritual reality.”<sup>10</sup> He had an emblematic worldview—a theologically informed practice of seeking to understand and enjoy the revelatory connections between elements in creation and their Creator. For twenty-eight years, Edwards documented in a notebook his biblical meditations on elements in creation.<sup>11</sup> He named his notebook *Images of Divine Things*. He believed that

the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of the holy Scriptures, be full of images of divine things, as full as a

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<sup>7</sup> Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, *WJE*, 16:793-94. This quote about the influence of God’s creation falls between the aforementioned changes in Edwards’s affections as discussed in footnote 5 above (see p. 57).

<sup>8</sup> Clyde A. Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, the Valley and Nature: An Interpretative Essay* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1987), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Robert L. Boss, *God-Haunted World: The Elemental Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Middletown, DE: JE Society Press, 2019), 215.

<sup>10</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 1.

language is of words; and that the multitude of those things that I have mentioned [in the notebook] are but a very small part of what is really intended to be signified and typified by these things: but that there is room for persons to be learning more and more of this language and seeing more of that which is declared in it to the end of the world without discovering all.<sup>12</sup>

After listening intently and looking closely at creation, Edwards mastered the language as well as any other theologian.<sup>13</sup> The development of his giftedness with the language of creational revelation was owing in large part to his theological roots in Puritanism. J. I. Packer, late distinguished professor of theology at Regent College, asserts that “Edwards was a Puritan born out of due time . . . . Puritanism is what Edwards was.”<sup>14</sup> Edwards’s worldview was almost exclusively shaped by Puritan writers like Hooker, Shephard, Cotton, and Davenport.<sup>15</sup> His work was steeped in the Puritan tradition of interpretation. His prolific use of commentators like Matthew Poole (1624-1679) and Matthew Henry (1662-1714) evidences his reliance upon Puritan theology.<sup>16</sup> Edwards was most directly influenced by his father, Timothy, and especially by his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. Both Timothy and Solomon were of New England Puritan stock. According to Marsden, “Jonathan had been reading at least some of his grandfather’s works since his youth and had heard his powerful preaching on occasion. In Stoddard, [Jonathan] could find themes that resonated with or helped to shape what became his most characteristic views.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE, 11:152.

<sup>13</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 126.

<sup>14</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 310.

<sup>15</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 310.

<sup>16</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 474.

<sup>17</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 118.

## The Puritans and Creation Meditation

The Puritans (ca. 1550-1700) were spiritual giants who possessed a rich biblical spirituality.<sup>18</sup> Their spirituality was the full flowering of Reformation theology. The Puritans were post-Reformation Christians in England and New England who, during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, refused to conform to some of the dictates of the church of England. Their goal was to bring a more fully realized reformation to Anglican worship, church discipline, and all other affairs of the Anglican church.<sup>19</sup> Essentially, Puritanism was a spiritual revival movement of wholly committed Christians dedicated to understanding and integrating biblical godliness into all aspects of life.

One of the precious blossoms of Puritan spirituality was their emblematic worldview. The essence of this worldview was that every element created by God was created with emblematic intention to communicate, in a hidden or overt way, knowledge of spiritual realities. This worldview was sourced in medieval allegorical theology. According to Wallace E. Anderson, an editor of Edwards's *Typological Writings*, "Allegory came to dominate Christian hermeneutics at an early stage and remained dominant through the medieval period."<sup>20</sup> Anderson explains that this allegorical hermeneutic "provided an expansion of exegetical possibilities beyond that afforded by the prophetic scheme of scriptural typology . . . [such that in] all cases, the 'truth' of the text was found in the invisible, spiritual, and eternal things signified by the text."<sup>21</sup> Often, the interpretation was driven by a determination to unearth a spiritual application from every sentence, and sometimes every individual word, in Scripture, seeking its relevance to one's life circumstances or personal issues. The Puritans were repulsed by the

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<sup>18</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Wallace E. Anderson, ed., introduction to "Images of Divine Things" and "Types," in Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:5.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, introduction to "Images of Divine Things" and "Types," *WJE*, 11:4-5.



unrestrained imagination used to interpret Scripture and elements in creation in the medieval period, but they accepted the premise of emblematic interpretation when restrained by reasonable and scriptural hermeneutic principles.

The Puritans were suspicious of blurring the distinctions between the concrete and the abstract. However, as scholar Conrad Cherry points out, “when cautions were properly observed, the visible creation could offer a host of images of the spiritual realm . . . , [and the Puritans’] imaginative, fairly cautious, approach to nature’s spiritual meaning was the task inspiring much Puritan poetry.”<sup>22</sup> Their revival of the emblematic tradition took shape in the advent of poetic books devoted to emblems. Boss writes, “Emblem books with associative thinking and observational and meditative practices they encouraged, were enormously popular during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”<sup>23</sup> Among those who wrote emblem books were famous Puritans such as John Bunyan and John Flavel.<sup>24</sup> The books were intentionally written to inspire devotional exercises, particularly the Puritan disciplines of deliberate and occasional meditation. Joel R. Beeke, president of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, explains that “[Puritan] Joseph Hall . . . led the way in developing literature on meditation among the Puritans through his work, *Art of Divine Meditation*, first published in 1606.”<sup>25</sup>

Joseph Hall advocated for and described the practices of both occasional and deliberate meditation. Occasional meditation was spontaneous biblical contemplation, often arising because of an interaction with a person, event, or element in creation, whereas deliberate meditation was a specific setting aside of time for the purpose of

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<sup>22</sup> Conrad Cherry, *Nature and Religious Imagination: From Edwards to Bushnell* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 21.

<sup>23</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Bunyan wrote *Solomon’s Temple Spiritualized* and *A Book for Boys and Girls*. Flavel wrote *Husbandry Spiritualized*.

<sup>25</sup> Joel R. Beeke, “The Puritan Practice of Meditation,” *Restoring the Core*, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.restoringthecore.com/wp-content/restored/BeekeMeditation.pdf>, 88.

biblical contemplation. Hall described the value of meditating upon elements of God's created world: "God made all these for man, and man for his own sake. Both these purposes were lost, if man should let the creatures pass carelessly by him; only seen, not thought upon."<sup>26</sup> Hall blazed a trail that many Puritans would tread. Puritans like Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Ralph Austen, Anne Bradstreet, and Cotton Mather followed in Hall's footsteps. By the mid-to-late seventeenth century, the trail became a well-worn Puritan pathway to the beautiful and refreshing pleasures of creation meditation. The elements Puritans encountered in God's creation were, for many of them, the impetus for joy-filled occasional meditation. St. Louis University professor of theological studies Belden C. Lane contends,

Puritans made their livelihood as farmers, sea-faring fisherman, carpenters, smiths, and tanners—holding occupations that kept them in close contact with the natural world. A delight in creation came naturally to them. They viewed a meditative attentiveness to the heavens and the earth as an appropriate way of celebrating God as Creator.<sup>27</sup>

When Edwards began filling his own notebook with creation meditations in the year of 1728, he, too, was following in Hall's footsteps.<sup>28</sup> Cherry states, "The [emblematic] consciousness of the Puritans was Jonathan Edwards's deepest heritage. . . . The Puritan extension of typology to nature, and the concreteness and Christocentrism of that process of drawing analogies, characterized Edwards's reflections on the natural world."<sup>29</sup> However, by the early eighteenth century, the landscape of the world had changed dramatically.

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<sup>26</sup> Phillip Winter, *The Works of the Right Reverend Joseph, Hall D.D.*, vol. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1813), 49.

<sup>27</sup> Belden C. Lane, *Ravished by Beauty: The Surprising Legacy of Reformed Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 102.

<sup>28</sup> Gordon Miller, "Jonathan Edwards' Sublime Book of Nature," *History Today* 7, no. 46 (July 1996): 33.

<sup>29</sup> Cherry, *Nature and Religious Imagination*, 23.

## Edwards's Changing World

During the middle of Edwards's undergraduate years at Yale, a massive shift in the curriculum was taking place based upon a flood of revolutionary Enlightenment ideas in connection with the scientific revolution.<sup>30</sup> The writings of Isaac Newton and John Locke were transforming the philosophical and scientific world. Avihu Zakai, professor emeritus at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, details the impact of Newtonian metaphysical philosophy of the time, stating, "The world of nature in mechanical philosophy was transformed into a huge machine, an engine or a clockwork, based upon cold mechanical principles [mathematical concepts] and operating according to abstract laws. As such, of course, it could not play any part in the mystery of divine providence."<sup>31</sup>

It is difficult to quantify the earth-shattering effects of this scientific revolution and the resulting disenchantment of the world.<sup>32</sup> The reign of natural laws meant that scientific reason began to undermine the validity of an emblematic worldview in many people's minds. If, as the Deists proposed, the God of creation built the world like a clock and then set it to run by natural processes without need of a divine hand's sustaining and guiding it, then the only worthy pursuit of elemental knowledge is what scientific observation discovers. A disenchanted world ultimately meant that the pursuit of the spiritual meaning of elements in creation was relegated to fantasy. In today's culture, disenchantment is present and amplified by a rejection of or indifference toward all divine revelation. The issue of Edwards's day was Deistic disenchantment, but in contemporary culture, the issue is Darwinian disenchantment. Boss proposes that "clever books such as Richard Dawkins's *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder* attempt to debunk a spiritual view of the universe. . . . [T]he dispute

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<sup>30</sup> Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards' Philosophy of History*, 86-87.

<sup>31</sup> Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards' Philosophy of History*, 121.

<sup>32</sup> Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards' Philosophy of History*, 92.

over the nature of Nature has not been resolved.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, Edwards rehabilitated and adapted the Puritan practice of creation meditation in his own day. His voice, theology, philosophy, and God-besotted emblematic worldview spoke powerfully in the eighteenth century, and they can speak again in the twenty-first century. His keen eye for eternal truth can once again guide believers along the path of creation meditation.

### **Jonathan Edwards: The Exemplary Guide**

For the reasons given above, Jonathan Edwards is a worthy guide for reestablishing an emblematic worldview and rejuvenating the practice of creation meditation among evangelicals today. He deftly navigated the theological upheaval of his own time and rehabilitated an emblematic worldview, applying it to his own cultural context with great effect. His profound work can help lead believers to a more robust biblical worldview that integrates a restored vision of the majesty of Christ inherent in the created world with the everyday experiences of vocational and recreational activities in the outdoors. The resplendent beauty of Christ Jesus in which Edwards exulted through his biblical creational meditations as he walked in the woods of the Connecticut River Valley should not be an exclusive experience. This section will unfold thus: (1) how Edwards philosophically, theologically, and biblically dealt with the unsettling ideas of the Enlightenment, (2) how his conclusions enhanced his aesthetic appreciation and experiential apprehension of emblems in creation, and (3) how his emblematic worldview provided practical applications for his life and work.

### **Edwards, the Enlightenment, and His Emblematic Worldview**

Edwards was confronted with Enlightenment ideas that, in their most undiluted form, deified human reason and scientific observation to a degree that made the Puritan

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<sup>33</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 8.

emblem books and creation meditation seem laughably outdated.<sup>34</sup> The growing passion for empirical knowledge diminished people's desire for discerning the spiritual and scriptural meaning of elements in the created world. This situation deeply concerned Edwards. Zakai explains Edwards's response: "[He] strove to provide a philosophical and theological alternative to mechanical philosophy that would take into account his profound religious and theological persuasions regarding God's sovereignty and the divine presence in the world."<sup>35</sup> As a pastor-theologian, Edwards recognized the spiritually detrimental effects that a disenchanting world would have on his people and the world at large.

The genius of Edwards was that by his associative logic, he was able to integrate his relationship with Christ, his fidelity to Scripture, his theological roots in the Puritan tradition, and his own spiritual experiences with the new Enlightenment and scientific ideas that were thrust upon him. Instead of rejecting any of them outright, he waded into the muddy waters and was able to think his way through, exiting with a biblically and philosophically consistent emblematic worldview. According to scholar Janice Knight, Edwards is sometimes misconceived "as a thinker divided against himself" because he is perceived as a conservative theologian attempting to liberalize his typology to fit with Enlightenment ideas.<sup>36</sup> However, Knight asserts that these misconceptions derive from an inability to fully appreciate the "internal coherence of his theories" and the "harmony of Edwards's thoughts."<sup>37</sup> Edwards's coherence was a byproduct of his biblically sourced and saturated theology of typology. Professor of literature and hermeneutics Tibor Fabiny contends that "from biblical times onward,

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<sup>34</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards' Philosophy of History*, 118.

<sup>36</sup> Janice Knight, "Learning the Language of God: Jonathan Edwards and the Typology of Nature," *William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1991): 536.

<sup>37</sup> Knight, "Learning the Language of God," 536-37.

typology has been used to understand the ‘new’ in terms of the ‘old.’”<sup>38</sup> Edwards applied his exhaustive intellect to satisfactorily deal with the new ideas of the Enlightenment in terms of the “old.” Zakai states, “Rather than detaching God from the world, [he] attempted to heal the growing breach between the order of grace and the order of nature by restating, as in classical and medieval theology, the natural world as a special mode of reality ontologically subordinated and inferior to a higher divine reality.”<sup>39</sup> Edwards explains this concept in his own words in entry no. 8 of *Images of Divine Things*, writing,

Why should we not suppose that [God] makes the inferior [world] in imitation of the superior, the material of the spiritual, on purpose to have a resemblance and shadow of them? We see that even in the material world God makes one part of it strangely to agree with another; and why is it not reasonable to suppose he makes the whole as a shadow of the spiritual world.<sup>40</sup>

Edwards was not willing to demote the spiritual world.

Edwards embraced an adapted version of the hierarchical conception of the world that saw all material and spiritual existence in terms of a classification of value. The classical conception saw every element’s or being’s value based upon how close it was in its likeness with God as the highest being. If, as the Enlightenment mechanical philosophy proposed, all of nature is of a common material substance and that substance should no longer be considered in a hierarchical or spiritual sense, then nature was unable to communicate spiritually in any vibrant manner—God’s created world was truly passive. Furthermore, and most concerning to Edwards, a total rejection of the classical view exempts God from intimate involvement in every part and every moment in the natural world. A total rejection of the classical conception did not fit Edwards’s Christocentric understanding of the created world based upon the witness of Scripture.

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<sup>38</sup> Tibor Fabiny, “Edwards and Biblical Typology,” in *Understanding Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America’s Theologian*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 106.

<sup>39</sup> Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’ Philosophy of History*, 105.

<sup>40</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:53. Edwards used the word “shadow” to mean a dim reflection, such as the reflection of an image off of the water of a lake.

Hebrews 1:3 makes clear not only that Christ created but also that he is immanently sustaining all of creation and has redeemed it in his work on the cross: “[Christ] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Edwards concludes “that God’s upholding created substance, or causing its existence in each successive moment, is altogether equivalent to an immediate production out of nothing, at each moment.”<sup>41</sup> The word of God’s power is sustaining and creating—as well as communicating—at all times.

Edwards reconsidered the classical conception of reality. He accepted the prevailing Enlightenment idea that God’s natural world was materially passive in its ability to communicate, but he kept a form of classical hierarchy and explained a different way that material bodies communicated. As Edwards scholar Paul Ramsey explains,

Edwards believed that “perceiving being only, is properly being”; minds, spirits only, are properly beings; to speak of material things as “beings” is to speak improperly. God “communicates himself properly only to spirits; and they only are capable of being proper images of his excellency, for they only are properly beings . . . . Yet he communicates a sort of shadow or glimpse of his excellence to bodies which . . . are but the shadows of being, and *not real beings*.”<sup>42</sup>

What Edwards meant is that all existence is a matter of consciousness because “the substance of all bodies is the infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea in God’s mind.”<sup>43</sup> Edwards showed that elements in creation (bodies) are not ontologically capable of communicating, nor do they have any inherent meaning, yet they communicate by way of reflection. They are, indeed, shadows of divine ideas. In Edwards’s mind, the issue was solved. He concluded, “It follows from hence, that those

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<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE, 3:402.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., introduction to *Ethical Writings*, by Jonathan Edwards, WJE, 8:21.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, WJE, 6:110.

beings which have knowledge and consciousness are the only proper and real and substantial beings, inasmuch as the being of other things is only by these. From hence we may see the gross mistake of those who think material things the most substantial beings, and spirits more like a shadow.”<sup>44</sup> For Edwards, it was quite the opposite—“spirits only are properly substance,” and material things the shadows.<sup>45</sup>

God’s purpose for all of creation is that it might shadow forth a representation of the glory and beauty of Christ. Marsden indicates that “typology, long a staple of [classical] Christian thought, was central to Edwards’ conception of the universe. God had created lower things to be [shadows of] higher spiritual realities.”<sup>46</sup> Consequently, the creation is structured hierarchically according to the concept of excellency, meaning an element’s or being’s status is in accordance with its consent to the supreme excellency of the Lord Jesus.<sup>47</sup> Zakai summarizes by stating,

[Edwards’s] return to the notion of the great [Classical] chain of being signified a radical departure from current scientific thought. Constructing the hierarchical order of the universe as a chain of created spirits, based upon the concept of excellency, which defined these spirits’ relation to God, enabled Edwards to claim that “God created the world for the shining forth of his excellency.” World phenomena were thus established as a mode of reality in which “the beauties of nature are really emanations, or shadows, of the excellence of the Son of God.”<sup>48</sup>

As Edwards concluded, the entire creation is an intricate and beautiful language of God. All things are emblems of Christ’s redemptive work, the need for Christ’s redemption, or the beauty of Christ. Therefore, it is no surprise Edwards deduced that in order for humans to hear the language (i.e., perceiving divine excellencies), their minds must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and informed by Scripture. Edwards stated,

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<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The “Miscellanies,” Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500, WJE*, 13:46.

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”*, WJE, 13:46.

<sup>46</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 77.

<sup>47</sup> Edwards uses the words “excellency” and “beauty” interchangeably when referring to the excellency of Christ.

<sup>48</sup> Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’ Philosophy of History*, 120.



“The Book of Scripture is the interpreter of the book of nature . . . , declaring to us those spiritual mysteries that are indeed signified or typified in the constitution of the natural world.”<sup>49</sup>

To overstate Edwards’s reliance upon and devotion to Scripture would be extremely difficult. He lived in the Bible. Marsden asserts that “in his daily life and work, biblical study had a priority for Edwards that is difficult . . . to convey.”<sup>50</sup> Edwards’s creation meditations were almost always also biblical meditations. In his *Images of Divine Things* notebook, he wrote 212 different entries. Throughout the notebook are many Scripture references. He also indexed the references at the end. According to Cherry,

[Edwards] went to the [emblematic] displays of Deity in physical nature not in order to find alternatives to Scriptural revelation but in order to discover epiphanies complementary, yet subordinate, to those of Scripture. Nature was beautiful not in itself, but only to the extent that it reflected the harmony of the human mind and the glory of the Creator.<sup>51</sup>

Nonetheless, Edwards included at least three emblems in his notebook that are clearly outside of the bounds of biblical justification.<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting that his notebook was unpublished, so it is impossible to know how vociferously Edwards may have argued for their validity.

The notebook appears to be just a random collection of creation meditations. Any doctrinal constitution of Edwards’s notebook is not readily apparent. However, as Boss points out, “when reorganized and summarized into theological categories, ‘Images

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<sup>49</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE, 11:106.

<sup>50</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 473.

<sup>51</sup> Cherry, *Nature and Religious Imagination*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 84. Boss notes that Edwards’s emblem of birds and squirrels charmed by snakes represents the devil’s tempting believers, his use of the invention of the telescope is emblematic of increased knowledge in later times as the Parousia approaches, and water in man-made waterworks failing to rise higher than its original source is emblematic of human limitations. All are examples of Edwards’s coloring outside biblical lines.

of Divine Things’ reveals a comprehensive theological vision of the world, with the major divisions of a systematic theology present.”<sup>53</sup> Displaying the extensive and cohesive network of doctrinal connections present in the notebook only further spotlights the consistency of Edward’s emblematic theology with Scripture and the harmony between the books of Scripture and nature.<sup>54</sup> Edwards knew instinctively, deductively, and experientially of the validity of this beautiful harmony. He had lived it, studied it, and enjoyed it. He declared in his notebook, “Wherever we are and whatever we are about, we may see divine things excellently represented and held forth, and it will abundantly tend to confirm the Scriptures, for there is an excellent agreement between these things and the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>55</sup> There can be no doubt that the Bible was Edwards’s map and compass for creation meditation. Yet, in his work, Edwards was at times prone to speculative conclusions, such as his aforementioned emblematic thoughts on snakes, telescopes, and waterworks.<sup>56</sup>

Edwards’s extension of typology beyond Old and New Testament connections would have disturbed some of his contemporaries had they read his private journals.<sup>57</sup> Samuel Mather, Edwards’s contemporary in New England, for example, wrote authoritatively about the subject of figures and types in the Scriptures—limiting spiritual types only to those found in and connected by the two Testaments.<sup>58</sup> Likely, Mather and other New Englanders in the Reformed tradition would have found many of Edwards’s private emblematic writings problematic because his thoughts extended outside the bounds of their view of appropriate scriptural typology. Edwards’s conception of

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<sup>53</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 218.

<sup>54</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 136. See figure A1 in appendix 4.

<sup>55</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:74.

<sup>56</sup> See footnote 52 on page 69.

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, *WJE*, 8:633.

<sup>58</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:27.

typology was based not only upon his scriptural hermeneutic but also upon his metaphysical understanding of God's created world. Edwards was conscious of those who would object to his conceptions.

As Edwards's writings, both public and private, became more available, it is not surprising that his views drew heavy criticism in the nineteenth century and continue to draw a critical eye today. His typological writings and his writings on metaphysics were innovative and prone to some speculative conclusions as well as a passionate use of language. These seeming excesses have resulted in labels for Edwards such as "pantheist" or "panentheist."<sup>59</sup> If, as Edwards stated, "the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. . . . [T]he beams of glory come from God, and are something of God, and are refunded back again. . . . [S]o that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God," then for some critics, Edwards was essentially a pantheist, or at least a panentheist.<sup>60</sup> Others defend Edwards's orthodoxy. Professor emeritus Walter J. Schultz of the University of Northwestern St. Paul believes that most critics who label Edwards with these terms have failed to make proper distinctions between "a *spiritual* claim regarding the Holy Spirit" and "a *metaphysical* claim regarding the constitution of creation itself."<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, such robust analysis and criticism are helpful guardrails against taking Edward's unique conclusions too far, especially for those seeking to follow in his footsteps of creation meditation.

In sum, what Edwards accomplished philosophically, theologically and biblically was remarkable. He reopened the trail of creation meditation not only in his day but also for today. By so skillfully clearing the trailhead of the debris from the

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<sup>59</sup> Oliver Crisp, "On the Orthodoxy of Jonathan Edwards," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67, no. 3 (2014): 320.

<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, WJE, 8:531.

<sup>61</sup> Walter J. Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist? The Concept of Emanation in End of Creation," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 8, no. 1 (2018): 35.

Deistic disenchantment of his day, Edwards can guide others in dealing with future issues, such as the current Darwinian disenchantment of the created world. However, there will still be detractors. Boss writes, “The possibility that particulars of this world are endowed with meaning through layers of associations and significances not immediately accessible to scientific instruments [will appear to many] decidedly strange.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, Edwards’s emblematic worldview is biblically, theologically, and philosophically compelling. His twenty-eight-year endeavor of notating what he discovered in nature was not just a scriptural or spiritual practice but also an empirical exercise demonstrated by the independent and discoverable facts that uncovered correspondences between natural elements and spiritual meaning.<sup>63</sup> Edwards moved from intense elemental observation to typological deductions based upon what he said was “wonderful agreement in thousands of things, much of the same kind as is between the types of the Old Testament and their antitypes, and by spiritual things being so often and continually compared with them in the Word of God.”<sup>64</sup> He was eminently reasonable and logical. Even so, he anticipated people’s balking at some of his emblematic conclusions. He wrote in his notebook, “I expect by very ridicule and contempt to be called a man of a very fruitful brain and copious fancy, but they are welcome to it. I am not ashamed to own that I believe that the whole universe . . . be full of images of divine things.”<sup>65</sup> In addition, he inquired, “Why should we not think that [God] would teach and instruct by his works in this way . . . by representing divine things by his works, and so pointing them forth, especially since we know that God hath so much delighted in this way of instruction?” Edwards believed heartily in his emblematic vision of reality.

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<sup>62</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 27.

<sup>63</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:7.

<sup>64</sup> Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”*, *WJE*, 13:434.

<sup>65</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:152.

However, as Marsden points out, “Jonathan’s contemplative joys were of a piece with his philosophy and theology. His ineffable experiences as he walked alone in the fields were of the beauties of God’s love communicated in nature.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Edwards’s Aesthetic Appreciation and Experiential Apprehension**

What has been shown thus far is that Edwards’s development of a rehabilitated and robust emblematic worldview, combined with his relationship with Christ and proficiency with the books of Scripture and nature, reopened the mountain pathway of creation meditation. Having opened the trail, this section involves hiking with Edwards—observing how his emblematic worldview enhanced his aesthetic appreciation and experiential apprehension of elements in creation.

In the prior philosophical and theological explanation of Edwards’s emblematic worldview, it was proposed that the purpose for all creation was to shadow forth Christ’s beauty. As Edwards put it, “the things of the world are ordered [and] designed to shadow forth spiritual things.”<sup>67</sup> It is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of this conclusion and to see in Edwards how this conclusion enhanced his capacity for aesthetic appreciation. Beauty, for Edwards, was central to his understanding not just of God’s character but also of God’s essence. Edwards explains,

God is God, and distinguished from all other beings, and exalted above [them], chiefly by his divine beauty, which is infinitely diverse from all other beauty. They therefore that see the stamp of this [beauty] in divine things, they see divinity in them, they see God in them, and so see [them] to be divine; because they see that in them wherein the truest idea of divinity does consist.<sup>68</sup>

Beauty was also the centerpiece of human relationship with God. Lane summarizes Edwards’s viewpoint, stating, “In the mystery of God’s own being as Holy

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<sup>66</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 77.

<sup>67</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:53.

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:298.

Trinity there is an eternal imaging forth of the Father's perfect beauty in his love of the Son, and (in turn) their mutual delight issuing still further in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. God's disposition as Trinity is to delight endlessly in the shared splendor of this intimate relationship."<sup>69</sup> Believers' experience of relationship with God is an overflow of God's essence as he shares his beauty with them through the person of Christ Jesus.

Beauty was also the principal means by which God communicated about himself in creation and therefore crucial to creation meditation. Natural beauty images forth divine beauty. Edwards elucidates,

The beauty of the world consists wholly of sweet mutual consents, either within itself, or with the Supreme Being. As to the corporeal world, though there are many other sorts of consents, yet the sweetest and most charming beauty of it is its resemblance of spiritual beauties. The reason is that spiritual beauties are infinitely the greatest, and bodies being but the shadows of beings, they must be so much the more charming as they shadow forth spiritual beauties. This beauty is peculiar to natural things, it [surpasses] the art of man.<sup>70</sup>

So, when a believer, in the midst of one of life's tragedies, stands upon an immovable boulder in the woods, he or she might behold the beauty of God's sturdiness. Or when a Christian, having trudged up a mountain to a remote lake, cools one's feet and sees the sparkle of the afternoon sun dance upon the waves, the eyes of his or her heart may be sensing the splendor of Christ's refreshing loveliness. It is worth quoting Edwards in full on this point:

When we are delighted with flowery meadows and gentle breezes of wind, we may consider that we only see the emanations of the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ; when we behold the fragrant rose and lily, we see his love and purity. So the green trees and fields, and singing of birds, are the emanations of his infinite joy and benignity . . . the crystal rivers and murmuring streams have the footsteps of his sweet grace and bounty. When we behold the light and brightness of the sun, the golden edges of an evening cloud, or the beauteous [rainbow], we behold the [reflections] of his glory and goodness. . . . That beauteous light with which the

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<sup>69</sup> Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 174.

<sup>70</sup> Edwards, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, WJE, 6:305.

world is filled in a clear day is a lively shadow of his spotless holiness and happiness, and delight in communicating himself.<sup>71</sup>

Gerald McDermott encapsulates Edwards's interactions with nature, writing, "All of these earthly beauties are but refractions of the beauty of the self-denying, servant love of the three persons of the Trinity."<sup>72</sup> Few could argue so cogently as Edwards about the theology of beauty, but what is so evident is that for him, it was not just theoretical but experiential—he had a stunning capacity for appreciating Christ's beauty in elements of creation. It is no wonder that Edwards consistently retreated to the woods, or rode his horse into the countryside, or climbed his beloved blue mountains.<sup>73</sup> His aesthetic experiences were filled with pleasure and relational communication. Edwards's meditation on creation was heartfelt communion with his Savior.

Edwards's experiences of beauty in creation described above must be understood now in light of his understanding of spiritual perception. Lane indicates that for Edwards, "the universe [was] an explosion of God's glory. But what for him was a blatant reality written across the cosmos was not so apparent to others. . . . His way of accounting for this difference in perception was to posit the notion of a new spiritual sense given to believers."<sup>74</sup> For the unregenerate, Edwards describes their experience of perceiving spiritual beauty as looking upon flowery meadows, trees, and crystal rivers at nighttime when no vision of their beauty is perceptible.<sup>75</sup> Lane continues, "Sin had distorted the full sensory apparatus of the human person. Responding to God's self-communication in nature, therefore, requires the exercise of a particular sense of the

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<sup>71</sup> Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"*, *WJE*, 13:279.

<sup>72</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Everyday Glory: The Revelation of God in All of Reality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 9.

<sup>73</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 135.

<sup>74</sup> Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 179.

<sup>75</sup> Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"*, *WJE*, 13:470.

heart, something received in the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>76</sup> This “new sense,” according to Edwards from his famous sermon *A Divine and Spiritual Light*, is

a true sense of the divine and superlative excellency of the things of religion. . . . He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees [excellency], or has a sense of [beauty]. He don’t merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. . . . There is not only a speculative judging that God is gracious, but a sense how amiable God is upon that account; or a sense of the beauty of this divine attribute.<sup>77</sup>

Edwards likens the difference between speculative knowledge and sensible knowledge as the difference between knowing rationally that honey is sweet versus knowing the sweet taste of honey on one’s tongue.<sup>78</sup> The same can be true of God. A person can have speculative knowledge about God but have no sense of his beauty. What does this mean for elements in creation? Certainly, both a regenerate and unregenerate person can have speculative knowledge that light reflecting off a mountain lake would be pretty as well as deeply appreciate that beauty. However, their experiences are different.

The difference between the regenerate and unregenerate person is a distinction between natural and sanctified sense.<sup>79</sup> Both person’s natural faculty of sensible knowledge must be active in order to appreciate natural beauty. They both have the capacity to apprehend such beauty. Edwards scholar Harold P. Simonson asserts also that with active sensible knowledge, an unregenerate person can still understand a lot about God, but without the Spirit “he still lacks the sensible apprehension of the spiritual excellency of divine things” necessary for salvation.<sup>80</sup> Without a sanctified sensible knowledge, there will be no true delight in the beauty of Christ nor delight in the spiritual

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<sup>76</sup> Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 185.

<sup>77</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, WJE, 17:413.

<sup>78</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, WJE, 17:414.

<sup>79</sup> Harold P. Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Heart* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 69.

<sup>80</sup> Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards*, 70.



beauties reflected in the elements of creation. In addition, Edwards understood that just because a person was regenerate does not mean she would automatically delight in creation's natural or spiritual beauties. She still must exercise her sanctified mind and will, in order to perceive, understand, and appreciate the spiritual excellencies shadowed in creation.<sup>81</sup>

Alongside sanctified speculative and sensible knowledge, Edwards also recognized the need for a sanctified imagination. Former Princeton professor and Edwards scholar Sang Hyun Lee contends that Edwards defined imagination as “the mind’s activity of ordering sense ideas in a meaningful way.”<sup>82</sup> Sanctified imagination wedded to the spectacles of Scripture allowed for the fruitful ordering of sense ideas that led to meaningful discoveries regarding emblems.<sup>83</sup>

Edwards’s sermons and writings—particularly his *Images of Divine Things* notebook—are full of these imaginative discoveries. According to Simonson, “Edwards thought of the [sanctified] imagination as the capacity to discover what already exists and, in the end, to apprehend the full beauty and glory of the Creator.”<sup>84</sup> So, all of his imaginative connections in his notebook were, in his mind, spiritual discoveries of Christ’s beauty in creation. He was ever mindful of wanting to tether his imagination to the Bible. As a pastor who ministered during the Great Awakening, Edwards was acutely aware of the dangers of unbridled imaginative enthusiasm. Simonson states,

[Edwards] never denied the importance of an active imagination. But its true activity originates in response to God who is the origin of all creative activity. Therefore, only as human imagination . . . envisions and creates from with the context of Christian revelation . . . can it be trusted. Outside this context it is self-

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<sup>81</sup> Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards*, 71.

<sup>82</sup> Sang Hyun Lee, “Edwards and Beauty,” in McDermott, *Understanding Jonathan Edwards*, 125.

<sup>83</sup> Diana Butler, “God’s Visible Glory: The Beauty of Nature in the Thought of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 52, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 23.

<sup>84</sup> Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards*, 80.

initiating, self-creating, and, therefore, by definition, arrogant, proud, sinful. Its visions and creations are only delusions of grandeur.<sup>85</sup>

Natural imagination masquerading as sanctified imagination was a great danger to believers. Believers could often be blind to their own delusions, unable to recognize that their minds were merely operating naturally. Additionally, Edwards was concerned for believers being led astray by other people's delusions, be they natural or even demonic. According to Boss, this is why "Edwards's emblematic worldview is largely devoid of an attention to prodigies and remarkable providences. Instead of listening for the voice of God in exceptions and aberrations of the natural order, Edwards is attuned to the symphonic harmony of all creation."<sup>86</sup> He was keyed in on how the created world harmonized with the melody of Scripture. Edwards was not inclined to look for God to give him a providential sign or to somehow speak to him in a direct or personal way that revealed the divine will through creation. However, Edwards's passion was applying all of his Spirit-empowered faculties to knowing and delighting in Christ as he biblically meditated on elements in creation.

### **Practical Applications for Edwards's Life and Work**

Soaring visions of God's beauty and glory were a delight not to be hoarded for one's own pleasure but to overflow in love for God and others. Lane writes, "The saints, [Edwards] knew, were expected to manifest this beauty in their lives, becoming 'proportioned Christians' who express the beauty of proportioned affections in their relationships with others."<sup>87</sup> Edwards's emblematic worldview and creational meditations provided practical application for his life and work. Creation meditations were a means of personal refreshment and rejuvenation—as well as his chief tactic for effectual preaching.

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<sup>85</sup> Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards*, 82.

<sup>86</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 102.

<sup>87</sup> Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 193.

One of the primary ways that Edwards sought personal renewal was getting outdoors. Edwards's love of nature is evident in the many quotes pertaining to his time outside. Once, when in a poor frame of mind for enjoying the Scriptures, he wrote the following words to remind himself of God's goodness: "Observe to remember the meditations which I had at Westchester, as I was coming from New York: and those which I had in the orchard; and those under the oak tree."<sup>88</sup> He also wrote more broadly about his enjoyment of God's creation soon after leaving his interim pastorate in New York: "I very frequently used to retire into a solitary place, on the banks of Hudson's River, at some distance from the city, for contemplation on divine things, and secret converse with God; and had many sweet hours there."<sup>89</sup> Shortly afterward, he wrote similarly: "At Saybrook we went ashore to lodge on Saturday, and there kept sabbath; where I had a sweet and refreshing season, walking alone in the fields."<sup>90</sup> Another example, from a well-known passage in his "Personal Narrative," indicates that meditation while walking outdoors was a common practice for Edwards during his pastoral ministry at Northampton: "Once, as I [rode] out into the woods for my health . . . and having lit from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer; I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God."<sup>91</sup> In this instance, Edwards reports that he wept for an hour because of his view of Christ's beauty.

Edwards's recreation and meditation affected his work. His writings, sermons, and conversations overflowed with typological insights from his time in God's created world. Stephen J. Nichols, a research professor of Christianity and culture, affirms this

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<sup>88</sup> Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, WJE, 16:769.

<sup>89</sup> Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, WJE, 16:797.

<sup>90</sup> Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, WJE, 16:798.

<sup>91</sup> Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, WJE, 16:801.

observation: “Edwards floods his sermons with nature allusions and references.”<sup>92</sup> At least in part, these insights were responsible for his effectual preaching, and the effect was remarkable. Edwards’s preaching contributed to a religious revival. In his work *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, Edwards details how Abigail Hutchinson inadvertently evidences the contagious effects of his emblematic worldview on others. He writes of her creation meditation, “She then thought of that expression, *It is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun*; which . . . seemed to her to be very applicable to Jesus Christ. By these things her mind was led into such contemplations and views of Christ, as filled her exceeding full of joy.”<sup>93</sup>

The example of Abigail Hutchison is just one among many. According to Cherry, in his preaching, “Edwards aimed at more than frightening [people] out of a hell of the future; he tried to give them in the present a foretaste [via lively experiential emblems] of its frights. He intended to lure men to heaven not so much by pointing to its future rewards as by giving them a current vision of its excellency.”<sup>94</sup> The most famous example of Edwards’s emblematic worldview leveraged to touch the minds and hearts of others is his sermonic use of the emblematic image of a spider in *Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God*. Whether as a young boy or perhaps as an adult watching curious children, he had evidently experienced watching a spider thrown into a fire to see what would happen. In one of his *Miscellanies*, he remarks on the experience and his own emblematic reflections: “I have sometimes thought of it when a worm or spider have been thrown into the fire, when they have retained their shape after burned to a coal, and looked white with the fierceness of the heat: how great pain would that insect endure, if every part

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<sup>92</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, “More Than Metaphors: Jonathan Edwards and the Beauty of Nature,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 49.

<sup>93</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards on Revival: A Narrative of Surprising Conversions* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1999), 57.

<sup>94</sup> Cherry, *Nature and Religious Imagination*, 35.

were now as sensible as when first thrown into the fire!”<sup>95</sup> This creation meditation on spiders and fire, dated to his journaling in 1722, found its way into his infamous *Sinners* sermon delivered in the summer of 1741.<sup>96</sup> Edwards preached,

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.<sup>97</sup>

Christ Jesus, who conceptualized and created the spider and serpent by the word of his power, used his Word, Edwards’s voice, and the spider to communicate sensuously about God’s holiness and human sinfulness.

It would be easy to misconstrue Edwards’s understanding and use of typology as merely illustrations that evoke feelings. However, for Edwards, emblems were of greater spiritual significance than just rhetorical or poetic devices. The emblem of a spider participated in the Spirit’s work of communicating hell to the person in a spiritually edifying way. The distinction between God and the emblem is never blurred, despite the Spirit’s using the emblem so intimately in the process of spiritual perception.<sup>98</sup> The point is that Edwards believed that the wedded witness of Word and emblem in his sermons was especially efficacious for the lives of his hearers. This effectiveness is why he devoted so much time to his *Images of Divine Things* notebook and why Christians today should take Edwards’s notebook and emblematic worldview so seriously. It is well past time for contemporary Christians to reengage the beauty of creation because it enhances perception and appreciation of the beauties of Christ. It is time for Christians to hike the mountain trail of creation meditation with Edwards—to let

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<sup>95</sup> Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”*, WJE, 13:350.

<sup>96</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1739-1742*, WJE, 22:403.

<sup>97</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1739-1742*, WJE, 22:411.

<sup>98</sup> Michael J. McClymond, “Spiritual Perception in Jonathan Edwards,” *Journal of Religion* 77, no. 2 (April 1997): 201.

him guide them. Those Christians who walk the mountain trail with Edwards, if they perceive and appreciate the glories of Christ through their creation meditation, will have truly arrived at and enjoyed the waters of the remote mountain lake. They will have tasted the refreshing excellencies of Christ Jesus.

### **The Contemporary Need to Recover Creation Meditation**

Sadly, one cannot help but at least wonder whether the door of opportunity has closed for modern evangelicals to regain the practice of creation meditation. Has the current culture quit the outdoors to such an extent, becoming so indoor-oriented, that the opportunity to be a church who revels in the beauty of Christ through the creation has been lost? Would Edwards's emblematic preaching miss the mark because people today can no longer relate meaningfully to the emblems of creation? Cultural critic and theologian Dale Allison would answer affirmatively. He writes, "Our withdrawal to the great indoors has altered the face of our society. People in the Western world, although they may enjoy public parks, are now and forever indoor creatures, with all the psychological [and spiritual] changes that brings."<sup>99</sup> This section will respond to Allison's assertion and propose that all hope is not lost.

There can be little doubt that there is a widening gap between Americans and meaningful time spent in the natural world. Furthermore, it is apparent that this gap has had a deleterious effect on people, particularly Christians. This section argues that the lack of meaningful exposure to the natural world has resulted in a diminished capacity for believers to perceive and appreciate the Scriptures, the beauty of God, the terror of hell, and the horror of sin. These current realities make Edwards's emblematic worldview increasingly more relevant.

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<sup>99</sup> Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Luminous Dusk: Finding God in the Deep, Still Places* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 19.

Over the last two decades, secular writers Richard Louv and Florence Williams have been cataloguing the negative impact of declining time spent outdoors—what Louv calls “Nature Deficit Disorder.”<sup>100</sup> Louv cites a number of studies and trends displaying this decline. As an example, he writes,

In the United States, children are spending less time playing outdoors—or in any unstructured way. From 1997 to 2003, there was a decline of 50 percent in the proportion of children nine to twelve who spent time in such outside activities as hiking, walking, fishing, beach play, and gardening, according to a study by Sandra Hofferth at the University of Maryland.<sup>101</sup>

Williams, addressing adults, cites research by the Harvard School of Public Health that concluded, “American adults spend less time outdoors than they do inside vehicles—less than 5 percent of their day.”<sup>102</sup> The trends are troubling.

Louv’s and Williams’s arguments are pertinent to Christian faith and creation meditation. Louv says, “For a whole generation of kids, direct experiences . . . in the fields and woods, has been replaced by indirect learning, through machines.”<sup>103</sup> Lack of intimate contact with nature dramatically alters how people perceive and experience the natural world. Louv’s final conclusion is that “quite simply, when we deny our children nature, we deny them beauty.”<sup>104</sup> As a secular person, Louv cannot fully appreciate how devastating this conclusion is for all people but most especially for Christians.

From Edwards’s emblematic perspective, one can quickly infer that the less believers have direct and sanctified experiences with natural beauty, the more impaired their capacity will be for perception and appreciation of the beauty of Christ. Without a

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<sup>100</sup> Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2008), 10.

<sup>101</sup> Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*, 34.

<sup>102</sup> Florence Williams, “This Is Your Brain on Nature,” *National Geographic* 229, no. 1 (January 2016): 58. Williams does not supply bibliographic information for Harvard’s research findings.

<sup>103</sup> Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*, 67.

<sup>104</sup> Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*, 188.

healthy view of Christ's beauty, Christians' apprehension of the awfulness of their own sin is obscured. Allison explains,

An increasing distance from [God's creation] . . . has also cut us off from certain feelings of terror and replaced them with nurtured feelings of self-sufficiency. . . . [By] increasing physical security, our withdrawal from storms and from "Nature, red in tooth and claw," has altered our feelings about the world, thereby altering our feelings about ourselves and, in line with that, our feelings about God. Surely, the modern dismissal of hell stems partly from an increasing lack of direct contact with Nature's indifference and darkness.<sup>105</sup>

Many Christians today do not have a healthy fear of God and of hell or a horror of their own sin at least in part because of their distance from direct experiences with thunder, lightning, flash floods, microbursts, and the like.<sup>106</sup>

An antagonist might quickly remark that the graver issue is distance from Scripture. Pastor John MacArthur makes this point when he says, "Christians today are Biblically malnourished—severely so. A dearth of Biblical preaching is the No. 1 reason the evangelical movement is so spiritually anemic."<sup>107</sup> MacArthur is correct but perhaps blind, too. Ironically, he likens the malnourishment to the biblical emblem of a famine found in Amos 8:11. However, the vast majority of modern Americans have no direct experience with famine, and little to no experience of going hungry. So, perhaps MacArthur should also be concerned by the lack of direct experiences in creation with the emblems of Scripture. Allison expresses this concern so vividly:

Urbanization and our move indoors have even brought about a distancing of ourselves from Scripture, although most of us are oblivious to this fact. Just as high schoolers who read Chaucer no longer laugh at Chanticleer because they no longer know anything about the behavior of roosters, so too is the Bible becoming foreign to us, who now pass most of our time in artificial environments. The fact is hermeneutically relevant. One wonders: Is the story of Adam and Eve not less memorable for people who have spent almost no time in real gardens? . . . Can those

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<sup>105</sup> Allison, *Luminous Dusk*, 11.

<sup>106</sup> One cannot help but think of Martin Luther's conversion experience. A direct experience with thunder and lightning changed his life.

<sup>107</sup> John MacArthur, "A Famine of the Word of God," *Decision* 60, no. 10 (October 2019): 18. The famine MacArthur speaks of is not only a famine of God's special revelation but also a famine of God's general revelation. It is essential that we recognize that both are current issues.



who run to sturdy shelters when tornado sirens sound fully appreciate the terror of the disciples on the waves of a stormy Sea of Galilee? Can people who do not know the difference between a sparrow and a starling have any deep emotional response to Jesus' command to "look at the birds of the air" . . . ? It is hard enough—or rather, close to impossible—to cross the chronological and geographical spaces; but when we have also quitted the natural world, is it not harder to [understand and appreciate the Scriptures]?<sup>108</sup>

The fabric of modern people's spiritual disposition has been altered such that the reception of biblical truth is less intuitive and less experiential. The famine MacArthur speaks of is sourced not only in a dearth of biblical preaching but also in a distancing of believers from direct contact with general revelation.

Another current concern is that a Darwinian disenchantment of the world combined with a postmodern epistemology has left too many unregenerate churchgoers and, at times, believers, swimming in relativistic waters that deafen their ears to the powerful wedded witness of Scripture and elements in creation. In writer Adam Boyd's estimation, the end result is that "each person speaks a language that only he can understand, simply because he is the only one who has lived his life. Transferable objective information is removed . . . , so each person is left to cobble together their own inconsistent, though to them preferable, view of the world, as they dig through their box of available ideas and preferences."<sup>109</sup> The experiential trumps the logical, but Edwards's biblical emblematic worldview is helpful.

Edwards marries heart and head, experience and logic, appreciation and perception. His integrated, fully embodied, and Spirit-sourced worldview guides believers to a more substantive knowledge of Christ Jesus and truth. His worldview may also help guide unregenerate churchgoers. Moore asserts, "Edwards believed [creational meditation] could accomplish purposes in harmony with the ministry of the Word and the proclamation of the gospel . . . awakening God's elect and strengthening His

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<sup>108</sup> Allison, *Luminous Dusk*, 15.

<sup>109</sup> Adam Newcomb Boyd, *Jonathan Edwards, Beauty, & Younger Evangelicals* (Middletown, DE: JE Society Press, 2019), 126-27.

redeemed.”<sup>110</sup> Edwards believed emblems, employed in the proclamation of the gospel, were a way of providing the Spirit as much to work with as possible in order to awaken the unregenerate among his congregation.<sup>111</sup> Moore concludes, “This wooing [and strengthening] of God, Edwards insisted, has been both from the preaching of the Word and from the revelation of God in creation.”<sup>112</sup> Edwards’s emblematic worldview is extremely relevant for today. His theology and methodology are necessary in order to recover the path to meditation on elements in creation. Edwards’s emblems and creation meditation practices are comprehensively foundational for building a model for contemporary creational meditation.

### **An Integrated Creation Meditation Model**

The chief concern of this section is to integrate what was gleaned from Scripture about creation meditation from chapter 2 and what was learned from Jonathan Edwards thus far in chapter 3 in order to distill a contemporary model for creation meditation. As a reference point, creation meditation was defined in the previous chapter as “an experiential wondering on emblematic elements in creation—leading to deep thinking on the interconnecting truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture—for the purpose of deepened understanding, strengthened faith, and enlivened worship.”<sup>113</sup>

Adding Edwards’s influence results in an integrated model of creation meditation that encompasses six dimensions. The following dimensions are ordered according to the process in which creation meditation is best practiced. Creation meditation should involve (1) a fully embodied experience of elements in creation,

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<sup>110</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 148.

<sup>111</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 149-50.

<sup>112</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 151.

<sup>113</sup> See p. 27 of this project. This creation meditation definition was based both on Donald S. Whitney’s definition and on exegesis of Pss 19; 104.

(2) integration with either recreation or vocation, (3) disciplined intellectual engagement, (4) relational affection and conversation, (5) scriptural confirmation, and (6) creational evocation.

Before embarking on an exploration of each dimension of this model, it is essential to frame the context for creation meditation. This model of creation meditation is for believers—for those who know and love Jesus Christ. They must have an authentic relationship with him and must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Additionally, the meditator should know Scripture and be a committed reader of Scripture. All of the associative thinking requires some prior familiarity with the Bible. Scripture is what makes creation meditation Christian rather than idolatrous. However, every dimension is important. The six dimensions are an integrated whole, each dimension regularly interacting with the others. Creation meditation is also a discipline. Lane writes, “Creation functions as a school of desire, [and creation meditation is] training regenerate human beings in the intimate sensory apprehension of God’s glory mirrored in the beauty of the world.”<sup>114</sup> Adapting Lane’s description to the wilderness, creation provides a mountain trail of desire, creation meditation is the uphill journey, the beauty of Christ is the destination, and Edwards is the guide.

### **First Dimension: Experiential**

The first dimension is experiential. In creation meditation, nature and Scripture are combined in a wonderfully optimal way for regenerate human experience.<sup>115</sup> Using what Edwards described as their “new sense,” believers, according to Lane, “experience spiritual realities with all the vividness of a sense impression, whether visual, auditory, palatal, tactile, or olfactory.”<sup>116</sup> Edwards said that wherever a person finds himself and

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<sup>114</sup> Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 172.

<sup>115</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 78.

<sup>116</sup> Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 183.

whatever he is doing, he may sense (with all five of his senses) divine things beautifully represented.<sup>117</sup> However, for creation meditation to be full-bodied, it requires going outside! The distance between contemporary Christians and the elements of creation and the between Christians and Scripture must be closed. As noted earlier, these two issues are not mutually exclusive. Louv comments about the directness of the experience in creation, an experience of seeing, feeling, tasting, hearing, and smelling “for ourselves unmediated to us via a screen or any other technology.”<sup>118</sup> In the outdoors, the potential emblems for meditation are seemingly endless and the discoveries numerous.

Furthermore, emblems are enjoyable. McDermott states that emblems “use sensory experience to appeal to us sensory creatures . . . in ways that are enjoyable and memorable, and they communicate depth that cannot be expressed in abstract propositions.”<sup>119</sup> However, not all emblems are enjoyable. Emblems may also be horrific and cause great discomfort. Christians need to train their senses prayerfully, with Scripture, cultivating a hunger and thirst for the beauty of Christ, rather than just information. The culmination of creation meditation is not that the meditator finds God but that he finds God beautiful.<sup>120</sup> It is important that creation meditators also experience, at times, the horrors of creation that speak of sin and separation from God. Creation meditation must experience the whole witness of creation. Nonetheless, in the end, creation meditation will always arrive back at Christ and his beauty. Therefore, creation meditation is ultimately an experience of joy. A Christian’s innate desire for joy should compel her to embark on the trail of creation meditation.

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<sup>117</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE, 11:74.

<sup>118</sup> Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*, 65.

<sup>119</sup> McDermott, *Everyday Glory*, 27.

<sup>120</sup> Boyd, *Jonathan Edwards*, 152.

## **Second Dimension: Recreational or Vocational**

The second dimension of creation meditation is integration with either recreation or vocation. For Edwards, it was integrated with recreation, mainly hiking or horseback riding. Recreation can be a way of maintaining and enhancing interest in creation meditation. Connecting meditation with an outdoor activity a person already enjoys not only enhances an activity but also makes meditation more likely to happen. Jogging on a trail may be enjoyable, but jogging while communing with and contemplating the most interesting Being in all of the cosmos is even better. If a person is fortunate enough to have a vocation that requires them to work outdoors, then creation meditation will also enhance his experience of the workday. Creation meditation is a means of seeking and enjoying God's presence wherever one finds oneself in God's creation.

## **Third Dimension: Intellectual**

The third dimension of creation meditation is disciplined intellectual engagement. The mind is first engaged in wondering. In chapter 2, wondering was defined as an intellectual exercise sparked by rapt attention, astonishment, novelty, curiosity, uncertainty, or admiration in creation that ignites conjecture and proactive reflection. Edwards saw this exercise as discovery. Wondering begins with identifying what is already known about the element as a baseline. Educational experts Kurtis S. Meredith and Jeannie L. Steele, in their book on experiential education, explain that "learning is essentially a process of building bridges between what we know and the new we encounter."<sup>121</sup> After establishing a baseline, there is, at least initially, an unstructured freedom to conjecture. Curiosity and conjecture are fun; they reflect a childlike wonder as a believer engages creation. This conjecture may lead to a search to discover answers by

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<sup>121</sup> Kurtis S. Meredith and Jeannie L. Steele, *Classrooms of Wonder and Wisdom: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking for the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2011), 22.

empirical observation or research. It is helpful to have some accurate data about the element before meditating spiritually upon the element. For example, rightly identifying a bird as a mourning dove makes a difference for further meditation. Identifying the name of an element is an important aspect of knowing it and valuing it.<sup>122</sup> The curiosity and conjecture are more than just empirical; they are also an act of wondering on a spiritual plane—asking questions like “What did God intend to communicate when he created doves?” and “What do doves communicate about God or the things of God?”

It is evident that the firsthand encounter of experiential wondering intermixes, often quickly, with secondhand more-focused thinking, called meditation. Deep thinking is speculative; it forms hypotheses and tests those hypotheses with the grammar of Scripture. The sanctified imagination is hard at work, but it is also subjugated to the associative process of correspondence and similitude within the scope of Scripture to discover meaning in the elements of creation.<sup>123</sup> The hard work is rewarded by the Spirit-illuminated “Aha!” moments of discovery. Edwards-like experiences exulting in the beauty of Christ and exalting the Lord Christ are accessible to all regenerate believers. Spirit-empowered experiential wonder and deep thinking on the interconnecting truths and spiritual realities of Scripture and elements in creation will lead to deepened understanding, strengthened faith, and enlivened worship of Christ. Moore adds that “we can find our reading and study of Scripture . . . come to greater brilliance and intensity as our experience of God in creation reinforces His revelation of Himself in his Word.”<sup>124</sup> Like all disciplines, creation meditation requires time and practice for spiritual growth to occur.

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<sup>122</sup> Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*, 41.

<sup>123</sup> Boss, *God-Haunted World*, 78

<sup>124</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 10.

Meditation does provide a context for making creative connections between elements in creation and Scripture, as well as personal applications to one's life circumstances. Edwards would advise great caution and reserve in the process. Marsden notes, "He was too well trained in the hermeneutics of self-suspicion to ever rest easy in his own experience, no matter how profound. Even contemplating the beauties of nature could be a temptation."<sup>125</sup> An unbridled imagination quickly turns to misinterpretations and delusions. All contemplation on elements of creation must be held up to the light of Scripture. Only those conclusions that are consistent with Scripture can be considered authoritative. Furthermore, looking for, or discerning, God's revealed will in providences and prodigies in creation is never advisable. Additionally, revering the elements themselves and equating God too closely with the elements is idolatry.

#### **Fourth Dimension: Relational**

The fourth dimension of creation meditation is relational affection and conversation. The late Westminster Theological Seminary president and professor of practical theology Edmund Clowney, in his book on meditation, reminds meditators that "for the Christian . . . knowledge has the dimension of personal relationship."<sup>126</sup> Deepened understanding is connected to strengthened faith—meaning stronger trust, obedience, and affection. Creation meditation is about loving communion with God in prayer. Conversation with God is integrated into every portion of the meditative journey. Prayer is integral to the whole experience. Creation meditation can involve relationship with other Christians, too. When Edwards was on the banks of the Hudson "for contemplation on divine things, and secret converse with God," he recounts, "sometimes

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<sup>125</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 100.

<sup>126</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1979), 46.

Mr. Smith and I walked there together, to converse of the things of God.”<sup>127</sup> Clowney also suggests the value of group meditation combined with corporate prayer.<sup>128</sup> Meditating together on an element in creation expands the potential of seeing more correspondences and making more associative connections with Scripture. Group creation meditation also allows the process of scriptural confirmation to happen collectively.

### **Fifth Dimension: Scriptural**

The fifth dimension of creation meditation is scriptural confirmation. In the process of thinking about an element in creation, the following questions must be asked: (1) “Is this element an emblem found in Scripture?” (2) “Is this interpretation of an emblem scriptural?” Edwards’s *Images of Divine Things* notebook is a guidebook for associative thinking and confirmation. In his corollary *Types* notebook, Edwards advises,

Persons ought to be exceeding careful in interpreting of [emblems], that they don’t give way to a wild fancy; not to fix an interpretation unless warranted by some hint in the New Testament of its being the true interpretation, or a lively figure and representation contained or warranted by an analogy to other types that we interpret on sure grounds.<sup>129</sup>

Unless an emblem is confirmed explicitly by Scripture or is scriptural, it must be said to be a speculative conclusion. In speaking about meditation on creation, Moore states,

While all theology will necessarily reflect the biases, experiences, and inclinations of individual theologians, any theological work can be only partial and incomplete, and runs the risk of being downright wrong, apart from grounding in the Word of God. All of our theological views, opinions, and conclusions must . . . be compared with the Scriptures in order to determine the degree of truthfulness.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, WJE, 16:797.

<sup>128</sup> Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 96.

<sup>129</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE, 11:148.

<sup>130</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 20.



The spectacles of Scripture over the eyes of a regenerate believer using their sanctified faculties to discover what emblems mean is the only way to rightly parse the emblematic language of God’s creation.<sup>131</sup>

The other crucial part of the confirmation process is communal accountability. Moore explains, “Theology is not a matter of merely private interpretation or opinion. Theology will be most useful for achieving its overarching purpose to the degree that it is both grounded in Scripture and carried out in dialogue with the entire Christian community.”<sup>132</sup> As Christians meditate upon creation and discover emblems, their conversations with other creation meditators are an opportunity for communal reflection, confirmation, and—at times—correction. Additionally, spiritual growth will best happen as Christians sharpen one another and apply their conclusions together.

### **Sixth Dimension: Evocational**

The sixth dimension is an important application of creational meditation. It is called creational evocation. As stated in chapter 1, this term is a way to define elements of creation serving as ongoing mental prompts to evoke further meditation, prayer, life application, or Godward conversation.<sup>133</sup> For example, once an emblem is confirmed by Scripture, it may incite the believer to pray more often as a result of frequently encountering that element in creation. Edwards says that emblems “help the memory.”<sup>134</sup> To use elements in an evocative manner is the discipline of designating a confirmed emblem for the purpose of remembering some unique way that the element speaks of God’s truth. Taking notes is a great aid to this discipline. Creation meditation is enhanced as believers write down their experiential wonderings, contemplations, prayers, and

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<sup>131</sup> McDermott, *Everyday Glory*, 193.

<sup>132</sup> Moore, *Consider the Lilies*, 21.

<sup>133</sup> See definition of “creational evocation” on p. 9 of this project.

<sup>134</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, *WJE*, 11:191.

scriptural confirmations. Modern Christians' propensity to have their phones with them is a potential help to their notetaking. Their notes may even include a photo or two.

Edwards had a unique way of remembering his meditations. As Marsden describes,

[He] carried with him pen and ink to write down his thoughts. . . . For longer horseback rides, he used a memory device. For each insight he wished to remember, he would pin a small piece of paper on a particular part of his clothes, which he would associate with the thought. When he returned home he would unpin these and write down each idea.<sup>135</sup>

Remembering and applying his meditations was important for Edwards. Taking notes will assist believers in practicing creational evocation, which, in turn, will attune their senses even more to the beauty of God's creation, the excellency of God's Word, and the glory of Christ.

Apprehension of the beauty of Christ results in life application. As Christians perceive and appreciate the glories of Christ in creation, they will be compelled to live in light of that beauty. Lane states, "The natural world, in other words, enlarges the [believer's] capacity to sense the fullness of God's beauty, and the appreciation of that beauty subsequently leads to ethical action."<sup>136</sup> Love for God, love for others, and loving stewardship of all God's creation are the fruit of creation meditation. This growth does not happen apart from Spirit-empowered actions. Taking ownership of emblems and moving these spiritual experiences in creation to application and long-term memory result from pursuing intentional steps. Turning emblems into long-term prompts is an important means of continuing the process of deepened understanding, strengthened faith, and enlivened worship.

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<sup>135</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 135-36.

<sup>136</sup> Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 172.

## **Conclusion**

Edwards regularly enjoyed the remote mountain lake-waters of creation meditation. The path there was familiar to him. However, it is not a familiar path for most believers today. Edwards's emblematic worldview is an inspiration to begin the discipline of creation meditation—for personal rest and rejuvenation, for more efficacious understanding and preaching of the Word, and for growing in awe of the beautiful majesty of the Lord Jesus. The principles gleaned from chapters 2 and 3 will be very helpful to those who desire to walk in the woods with Edwards, letting the Scriptures and Edwards guide the way. The benefits are too valuable to ignore this biblical and historical discipline of creation meditation. The heavens are declaring! The skies are proclaiming! The only believers who will hear their voice and see God's glory are those who go outside and hike the mountain trail with their ears open and their spectacles on.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTING CREATION MEDITATION

This chapter details the background, development, promotion, and implementation of this creation meditation ministry project. The purpose of this project was to engage participants from St. Paul's EPC in meditation on the elements of God's creation as they enjoyed their favorite outdoor activities in order to equip and inspire them to meditate on Scripture and, ultimately, on God. The project had three key goals:

1. The first goal was to develop a biblically informed meditation resource to equip and guide people in the practice of meditation on God's creation.
2. The second goal was to assess a group of twenty participants regarding their knowledge of biblical meditation and their current practices of meditation on creation and Scripture.
3. The third goal was to equip the participants to use the resource on their own to integrate their favorite outdoor activities with creation meditation, thereby increasing their knowledge of and enriching their practice of creation meditation.

The development of the creation meditation resource began on February 19, 2020. The resource consisted of a mobile app and a website for participants to use while they were in the outdoors. The name of the resource and the project was called "Thinking Outdoors." The completion of the implementation of the ministry project took place on November 6, 2021.

#### **The Thinking Outdoors Project Background**

For twenty-three years, I have been privileged to serve as a wilderness director of a summer camp that takes 1400 campers on overnight trips into the wilderness each

season.<sup>1</sup> It was apparent over these years that an increasing number of campers and counselors had little to no familiarity with or competence in the wilderness setting. Our society is an increasingly indoors-oriented culture.<sup>2</sup> These trends concerned me greatly because separation from God's creation constitutes diminishing engagement with general revelation, and lack of engagement with general revelation negatively impacts believers' interactions with Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

When I became a local pastor in 2018, I started to direct my interests concerning the impact of general revelation on people's interactions with special revelation to those at the church. Additionally, the providential encounter I had with Jonathan Edwards's journal *The Images of Divine Things* fueled an already growing knowledge of, practice of, and passion for creation meditation. As a pastor of a church in the Laurel Highlands of Pennsylvania full of other outdoors-oriented people, my mind was filled with research questions that I desired to explore. This Thinking Outdoors project was the opportunity to try to answer these questions. The three project goals listed above were undergirded by the following primary research questions:

1. To what extent are St. Paul's people already engaging general revelation, and to what extent is that engagement guided by solid biblical theology?
2. To what extent is the discipline of creation meditation, especially integrated with outdoor recreation, an effective bridge to deeper engagement with and knowledge of the Scriptures and also a closer relationship with God?
3. To what extent can a creation meditation resource effectively equip and inspire participants to practice creation meditation and enrich their practice of this spiritual discipline?

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<sup>1</sup> Summer's Best Two Weeks is a residential sports and recreation camp. There are two properties with two camps. Between the two camps, over 2600 campers are taken on overnight wilderness trips.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 82 for an explanation of these trends.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 83-85 for the argument behind the premise that diminishing general revelation negatively impacts believers' interactions with special revelation.

The crystallization of these questions in my mind and the desire to answer these questions guided my development of the pre- and post-project surveys.<sup>4</sup> My interest in the most transformative experience possible for participants led me to the conclusion that a mobile app would be the most effective tool for inspiring, equipping, and implementing creation meditation. I was also interested in doing a doctoral project that could extend beyond the implementation with just St. Paul's EPC participants.

### **Development of the Thinking Outdoors Mobile App**

The first goal of the project, the development of a creation meditation resource (i.e., mobile app), was the lengthiest and hardest goal to achieve. This stage of the project began on February 19, 2020. I researched and found a company to host the app, but I crafted and developed the app's format using the company's template and populated all the content myself.<sup>5</sup> The mobile app, and accompanying website, continued to be developed and augmented throughout the eight-week-long project as a way of enhancing the participants' experience. However, the app and website were ready for implementation on September 10, 2021.

Developing a resource to be used outdoors was crucially important for this project because I wanted to spend as little time indoors with participants as possible. Participants had to spend the majority of time outdoors meditating while recreating in order to fruitfully learn the practice of creation meditation. So, the emphasis of this project from the start was contingent upon creating a quality resource that could both inspire and equip participants to meditate on creation as well as guide them through each meditation. Initially, from February 2020 to August 2020, I began to plan a book resource that participants could take with them into the wilderness, but by September 2020, I

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<sup>4</sup> See appendices 2 and 3.

<sup>5</sup> Further details on the development process are outlined on p. 99.

realized that a mobile app was better suited for this project and my long-term goals for the advancement of the spiritual discipline of creation meditation.

Appreciating a beautiful sunset, lake, mountain, or any element in the outdoors is not unique. People usually respond by snapping a picture because they desire to engage and enjoy the moment on a deeper level by capturing it—and they always have their phones with them! Therefore, in the interest of inspiring and encouraging creation meditation, a mobile app was the obvious choice for a useable resource at people’s fingertips when they are out enjoying God’s creation. I began to storyboard what the app could look like and how it might function as I explored the feasibility of this idea.

It took six months to research how to create, finance, and populate the content of an app for this project. By March 2021, I had raised the monies necessary to purchase a subscription with an app development company as well as the domain name “Thinking Outdoors.” I enlisted help with developing and digitizing the artwork that became the logo and app icon.<sup>6</sup> Once the mobile app was up and running, the next stage of development was crafting it to meet the criteria for guiding participants in meditation and populating it with the content that fit with the project curriculum.

### **Development of the App Content and Class Curriculum**

The plan all along was to implement the project during the fall of 2021 to coincide with hunting season. Attracting hunters to creation meditation was a goal because of how well hunting fits with meditation. I also desired to attract at least as many men as women to this project. I planned to begin the first week with a lengthy introductory training (i.e., 2.5 hours) and then release people to use the resource to practice creation meditation on seven different elements (e.g., trees, leaves, thorns, grass) over the next seven weeks in September, October, and November. The final session

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 5 for the Thinking Outdoors logo and app icon.

would take place in the first week of November after participants had completed their meditations. This last session would give them the opportunity to review and reflect together. I also intended to offer opportunities for group meditations throughout the seven weeks that I would facilitate while doing some type of recreational activity. These group sessions offered opportunities for participants to ask questions and express concerns along the way.

Originally, I had planned to create forty-nine guided meditations to choose from. However, as I continued to get deeper into developing the app and producing the content, it became obvious that there was no way I would get even close to that number of meditations. By July 2021, I knew I needed to get the app and its content into the hands of expert reviewers, and I had only ten fully developed meditations, although an additional two were in process.<sup>7</sup> Virtually all of the material that I planned to teach in the training session I included in the app. So, when the expert panel was reviewing the app's content, they were positioned to give feedback not only on the meditations but also on all of the training material.

### **Expert Review of the Thinking Outdoors App**

Recognizing the need for a thorough review of theological and methodological content as well as all of the technological and aesthetic portions of the app, I reached out to a diverse and plentiful number of reviewers. After getting responses back, I had a diverse group of thirteen reviewers. I was fortunate to have reviewers of different genders, ages, and theological, technological, and outdoors experience. The reviewers included one seminary professor, one headmaster, two pastors, two medical doctors, three teachers, one former wilderness director, one current wilderness camp director, and two

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<sup>7</sup> By the time the project was implemented, twelve total meditations were fully developed for participants to choose from for their seven required creation meditations.



avid outdoorsmen. I also received incredibly valuable feedback from the college-aged camp staff at Summer's Best Two Weeks.

I reached out to the reviewers in mid-July and gave them a month to review the app. I requested that they each look over the app as a whole as well as complete two meditations. By late August, all ten meditations had been critiqued—many by multiple reviewers. The reviewers analyzed the app and its content using a rubric.<sup>8</sup> A good number of the reviewers gave exhaustive feedback in addition to filling out the rubric. I had many follow-up phone conversations and emails. As a result of the constructive criticism, I made a significant number of changes. In hindsight, it was a blessing that I had not written more meditations. There would not have been enough time to rewrite and edit more than twelve meditations, certainly not forty-nine, in addition to all of the reworking of and improvements needed for the app itself.

Achieving the first goal required that the app met a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria at the level of sufficient or higher. After getting the rubric back from all thirteen reviewers, six of them had portions that they marked “requires attention.” I made all of the necessary changes, and I was able to follow up with four of them. These four reviewers got back to me again, affirming that the areas of concern I had addressed were sufficient or exemplary. One of the other two reviewers got back to me on the last day, and his two areas requiring attention had already been addressed. The other reviewer had three areas requiring attention, and I had already addressed one of these areas. His other two areas that required attention were in the categories of the app's inspiring prayer and stimulating focused and intense thinking. I had limited time to make any substantial adjustments, but I made what adjustments I could based on his input. Even with the last two reviewers' areas requiring attention, the app still received a total score of 98 percent sufficient. Those three specific questions with deficient marks still

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix 1.

had an overall per-question score of 93 percent sufficient. By September 10, 2021, all of the changes had been made, and the app was ready for implementation.

### **Implementation-Ready Version of the Thinking Outdoors App and Website**

When completed, the Thinking Outdoors app had five sections that were pertinent to inspiring, equipping, and guiding participants in the discipline of creation meditation: (1) “Overview of the Thinking Outdoors App,” (2) “Purpose of the Thinking Outdoors App,” (3) “Practice of Creation Meditation,” (4) “Doctoral Project,” and (5) “Meditations.” These five sections also were the general outline I used for conducting the initial training session for the project.<sup>9</sup>

**Overview of the Thinking Outdoors App.** The overview section of the app gave a broad-brush picture of why the app exists and provided links to direct first-time users to the most important items to begin their journey of creation meditation.

**Purpose of Thinking Outdoors.** This section of the app was an introduction to the app and to the concept of creation meditation. It was meant to inspire biblical meditation in God’s great outdoors and introduced the idea of integrating meditation and recreation (or vocation). The section included an eight-minute video featuring teaching, music, outdoor scenery, and object lessons.

**Practice of Creation Meditation.** This section of the app instructed people on how to biblically meditate on creation. This section featured both a PowerPoint presentation and an eighteen-minute teaching video concerning how to meditate on the elements of God’s created world.

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<sup>9</sup> All five sections are available at [www.thinkingoutdoors.org](http://www.thinkingoutdoors.org) and on the “Thinking Outdoors” app (available at no cost wherever one downloads apps onto one’s smartphone).

**Doctoral Project.** This section of the app provided all of the dates and details for doctoral project participants. It was a means of communicating all of the necessary information to participants, including updates as the training was happening over eight weeks. After the initial two-and-a-half-hour training session, I posted a video of that session for those who wanted to review the material. I also posted the sermon I gave on May 23, 2021, on Psalm 19, which served as an invitation to participate in the doctoral project.

**Meditations.** The meditation section of the app was split into four subsections: (1) “Read This before You Meditate,” (2) “September,” (3) “October,” and (4) “November.” The “Read This before You Meditate” subsection made eight suggestions to app users before they began creation meditation. This section also communicated eight reminders about what the process of creation meditation was and was not. Within each of the subsections labeled by month were meditations on a variety of elements. Each meditation I developed included an introduction to the created element, a guided “Do Your Own” meditation, and a devotional based upon my own meditations that could be read or listened to. I narrated each devotion that I wrote.

**Accompanying website.** During early July 2021 as I was making improvements to the app, I was also promoting the project at St. Paul’s EPC and recruiting participants. Several older members of our congregation expressed interest in participating. To accommodate these members who did not own smart phones, I needed to develop a website that paralleled the app. Fortunately, I had already planned at some point to include a website with the Thinking Outdoors app, so I already had the domain name [www.thinkingoutdoors.org](http://www.thinkingoutdoors.org). The company that hosted the app also was able to host the website. By early September, the website was also up and running for anyone who could not download or use the app. As it turned out, having the website was helpful to many participants for whom it was easier to enter data by keyboard rather than via their

smartphones. I have included samples of portions of the app/website in the appendices (see below).

The ethics forms were approved on August 27, 2021. Final preparations were made over the next two and a half weeks to train the participants for creation meditation. The opening training session curriculum was taken almost entirely from the work that had already been done in developing and populating the app. The only significant additions were a small number of theological and methodological quotes and ideas taken from chapters 2 and 3 of this project. The heavy reliance on the app was intentional because I desired to know how effectively the app conveyed the concepts of and guided people into biblical creation meditation.

### **Promoting the Thinking Outdoors Project**

I began promoting and recruiting participants for the project on May 23, 2021. I preached an introductory sermon that Sunday on Psalm 19. Then, during the Sunday school closing breakfast, I was able to spend fifteen minutes introducing the project to those in attendance. A congregation-wide email invitation was sent out that same week. I requested that people sign up on a clipboard I placed in the church's great hall. Throughout the summer months, I continued to invite people personally.

As of late August, I had sixty-five people who said they wanted to come to the class. Considering the numbers, I decided to split the opening training into three different times, which allowed for smaller class sizes and prevented conflicts with people's busy schedules. I sent out an RSVP email on September 7 asking people to choose one of the three opening training sessions.

### **Implementation of the Thinking Outdoors Project**

The opening training sessions commenced on September 15, 17, and 18. Between the three sessions, a total of fifty-five people attended. After welcoming participants but before teaching any material, I administered the pre-project survey in

accordance with goal 2 of the project.<sup>10</sup> Goal 2 was to administer the pre-project survey to twenty adult participants who habitually engage in outdoor recreation or vocation. Based upon RSVPs, I knew that I had well over twenty people who fit into that category. Ideally, the pre-project survey is given before the final development of the curriculum so that the curriculum can be tailored to the specific needs of the participants. Initially, this method did not appear as workable for my situation because of the exhaustive nature of creating and building an app and because I did not want to ask people to show up for two separate introductory sessions. However, in retrospect, it would have been possible to deliver and collect the survey digitally and then have a week or so to tailor the class material itself, even if I could not do much to change the app at that point.

After the administration of the survey, the rest of the training session involved introducing the concept of creation meditation, seeking to inspire participants with the multifaceted beauty of God's creation, teaching on the biblical basis for creation meditation, instructing on methods of biblical meditation and creation meditation, introducing the mobile app and website, explaining how to download and use the app, and outlining the expectations and plans for the seven weeks ahead. As participants left the training, they were expected to explore the app thoroughly and then begin to engage the meditations. I asked them to complete one meditation per week over the next seven weeks and then attend one of the three closing classes. I instructed them to complete the "Do Your Own" meditation first and then read or listen to the devotional provided. Once the meditations were completed, the participants were expected to email me a copy of each meditation. I also asked them to stay current with the doctoral project section of the app and website in order to keep up with the scheduled adventures. I had arranged for six special adventures to which participants could come where I would facilitate a group

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<sup>10</sup> See appendix 2.

creation meditation. This plan was a means of providing accountability and fostering increased enjoyment of the project.

The third goal of increasing participants' knowledge of and enriching their practice of creation meditation using the Thinking Outdoors app began the night of the opening training session. Participants were equipped to use the resource on their own as they engaged in their favorite recreational activities. The ensuing weeks involved opportunities for participants to do the meditations on their own and in groups as a part of the pre-planned adventures.

Over the next seven weeks, I was able to lead five of the six planned adventures.<sup>11</sup> The first adventure was a stargazing event on September 24. I arranged for three astronomers to set up high-powered telescopes for participants to experience the glory of the night sky. Participants enjoyed seeing the ring around Saturn, the bands around Jupiter, the great red spot on Jupiter, Venus, the surface of the Moon, and many stars.<sup>12</sup> This event was coupled with the "Moon and Planets" meditation on the app.<sup>13</sup> The second adventure was a group meditation on lakes. It was held at Lake Gloria on September 26. Participants were given a "Do Your Own" meditation guide on lakes and then given time to meditate by themselves. The evening wrapped up with group sharing and reflection. The third adventure was a nature hike on October 2 at Kimberly Run Nature Preserve with project participant and naturalist Scott Bastian. Those who attended were taught about trees, birds, and plants. This event was coupled with the "Trees" meditation.<sup>14</sup> The fourth adventure was a mid-point gathering on October 13 at the church. This event was a group meditation on autumn leaves and was coupled with the

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<sup>11</sup> The final adventure, a group meditation on oak trees and acorns, was canceled because of weather.

<sup>12</sup> See appendix 6 for a written reflection on the "Stargazing Adventure."

<sup>13</sup> See appendix 7 for a sample of the "Moon and Planets" meditation and devotional.

<sup>14</sup> See appendix 8 for a sample of the "Trees" meditation and devotional.

“Autumn Leaves” meditation.<sup>15</sup> The fifth adventure was a sunrise hike on October 16 at Beams Rock. This event was a group meditation on the sunrise and was coupled with the “Sunrise” meditation.<sup>16</sup> Half of the participants took advantage of the adventures.

During these seven weeks between the opening training and the final class sessions, I provided weekly email updates and reminders about the adventures. I also added material to the app that was intended to continue to instruct participants as well as keep them engaged and inspired. Participants were emailing me their completed meditations, and I was corresponding with them as I read and evaluated their meditations to get a sense of how they were engaging the material on the app or website. A few of the participants, particularly those who were older, struggled to get the hang of the material or the technology. I had to take a number of phone calls and make a house visit in order to help several people. By the final class, it appeared that participants had engaged the app and its content sufficiently enough to provide good qualitative feedback and good quantitative results. Twenty-six participants had completed all seven meditations, and eight participants had completed between three and six meditations. Combined, these thirty-four participants also read 164 of the devotional meditations and listened to 131 narrated devotional meditations.

The final class sessions took place on November 3, 5, and 6. Of the fifty-five people who were at the first training classes, forty-four were at the final classes. The post-project survey was administered immediately upon people’s arrival.<sup>17</sup> This post-project survey included a questionnaire that replaced my original plan for post-project interviews. A questionnaire allowed me to collect qualitative data from every participant. After the survey was completed and collected, we reviewed the key aspects of creation

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<sup>15</sup> See appendix 9 for a sample of the “Autumn Leaves” meditation and devotional.

<sup>16</sup> See appendix 10 for a sample of the “Sunrise” meditation.

<sup>17</sup> See appendix 3.

meditation and reflected on the experience together. Participants also gave feedback on their experience. I reported back to them some of the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the meditations they had emailed to me. I thanked all of the participants and key contributors to the implementation of the project. Several weeks after the final class, my thank you gifts arrived, and I gave each participant a Thinking Outdoors t-shirt and sticker.<sup>18</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This chapter described in detail the background, development, promotion, and implementation of the Thinking Outdoors project. The majority of participants faithfully journeyed with me on the seldom-traveled path of thinking outdoors. It was intuitively evident to me from all the time we spent together on adventures and the meditations they emailed to me that participants had enjoyed the remote mountain lake-waters of creation meditation. By the end of the project, I had collected and waded through 228 completed meditations totaling 234 hours of creation meditation by all the participants. It was clear that the participants had tasted the refreshing excellencies of Christ Jesus as experienced through the integration of special and general revelation. Additionally, much of their experience had happened as they were integrating meditation and outdoor recreation. Each stage of the project described above, though difficult and time-consuming, was a true joy for me. However, the greatest joy was seeing God move people's hearts to delight more deeply in him, his Word, and his creation. The next chapter will demonstrate quantitatively and qualitatively what I just asserted anecdotally.

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<sup>18</sup> See appendix 11.



## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter evaluates all of the collected data as well as reflects upon the project as a whole. The first section evaluates the purpose of the project. The second section addresses each of the project's three goals. The third section reflects upon the strengths and weaknesses of the project. The fourth section considers what I would have done differently. The fifth section details theological reflections. The sixth section shares personal reflections on the project. The chapter finishes with a conclusion of these evaluations of the results and reflections on the Thinking Outdoors project.

#### **Evaluation of the Purpose of the Thinking Outdoors Project**

The purpose of the project was to engage participants from St. Paul's EPC in meditation on God's creation as they enjoyed their favorite outdoor activities in order to equip and inspire them to meditate on Scripture and, ultimately, on God. The components of this purpose statement are as follows: (1) Who?—St. Paul's EPC participants, (2) What?—meditation on God's creation, (3) When and Where?—time spent enjoying their favorite recreational activities outdoors, and (4) Why?—to equip and inspire meditation on Scripture and, ultimately, on God.

#### **St. Paul's EPC Thinking Outdoors Participants**

Initially, the goal was to recruit twenty participants who habitually engage in outdoor recreation or have outdoor vocations. However, during the promotion process, many people from St. Paul's expressed their enthusiastic desire to participate. While not all of them were avid outdoor recreators, I did not want to turn anyone away. Fifty-five

people came to the first class. Nine of those people could not participate in the project because they either were not a part of the St. Paul's congregation or were not cognitively able to participate or had already been so involved with creation meditation that their input would skew the data. So, forty-six people who took the pre-project survey were eligible for analysis. By the final class session, seven people had not continued to participate and did not show up for the post-project survey. Of the thirty-nine remaining people, six participants did not complete a sufficient number of meditations.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, three additional participants missed filling out one of the survey statements. As a result of the above factors, thirty pre- and post-project surveys were useable for final analysis. It is worth noting that the majority of the twenty-five people excluded from the final analysis emailed me meditations, listened to and read many devotionals, and showed up at adventure opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

Originally, I set out to recruit twenty adult participants who habitually engage in outdoor recreation or vocations. However, of the thirty participants remaining, only eighteen were habitually engaged in outdoor recreation or worked in outdoor vocations. Nonetheless, I was thankful for a diverse group of participants. The presence of twelve participants who did not consider themselves outdoors people was ultimately helpful for a comparative analysis. There was some degree of age diversity among participants. Most participants were between forty-six and fifty-nine years old. The breakdown of ages can be seen in figure 1 below. Ultimately, I was pleased with the group of thirty participants' data to analyze, and this number was sufficient to accomplish the project's purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> These individuals completed between zero and two meditations.

<sup>2</sup> It would be interesting to fully analyze the impact the research project had on those who did not participate enough to be included in the final results, though doing so is beyond the scope of this project.

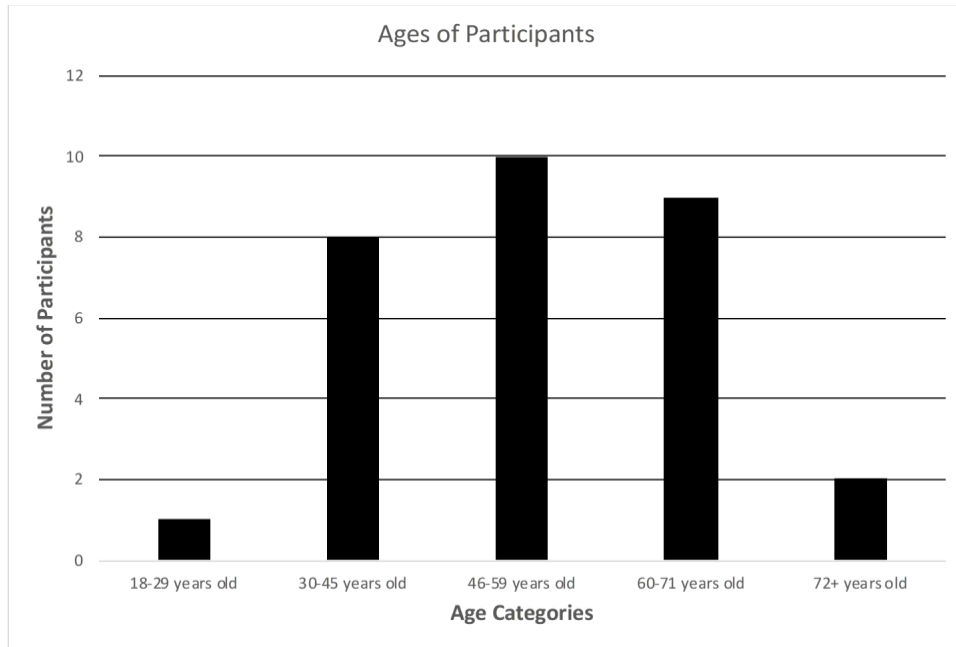


Figure 1. Age of project participants

### **Meditation on God’s Creation**

The purpose of the project centered around meditation on God’s creation, and appropriately, the thirty participants completed many meditations (203 total). They meditated upon twenty different created elements (e.g., trees, leaves, thorns). The majority of the meditations were done using the twelve guided meditations on elements provided in the app. However, several participants took my suggestion to choose an element on their own to meditate upon. The breakdown of all of the meditations is shown in figure 2 below. Participants reported 218 hours of total time spent meditating.

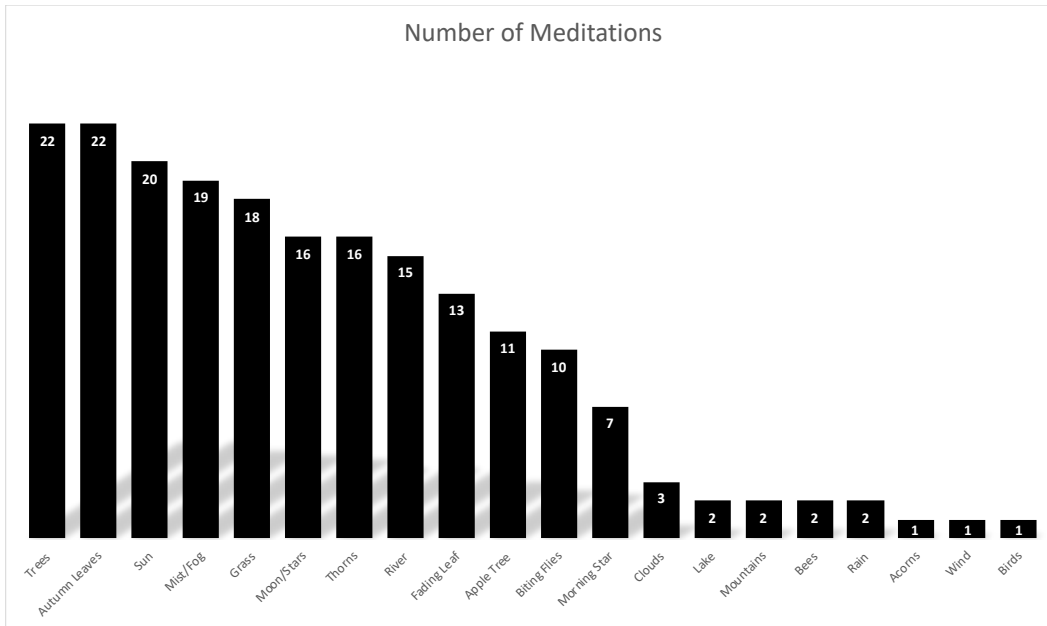


Figure 2. Number and type of meditations completed by participants

The breakdown of these hours spent meditating is shown in figure 3.

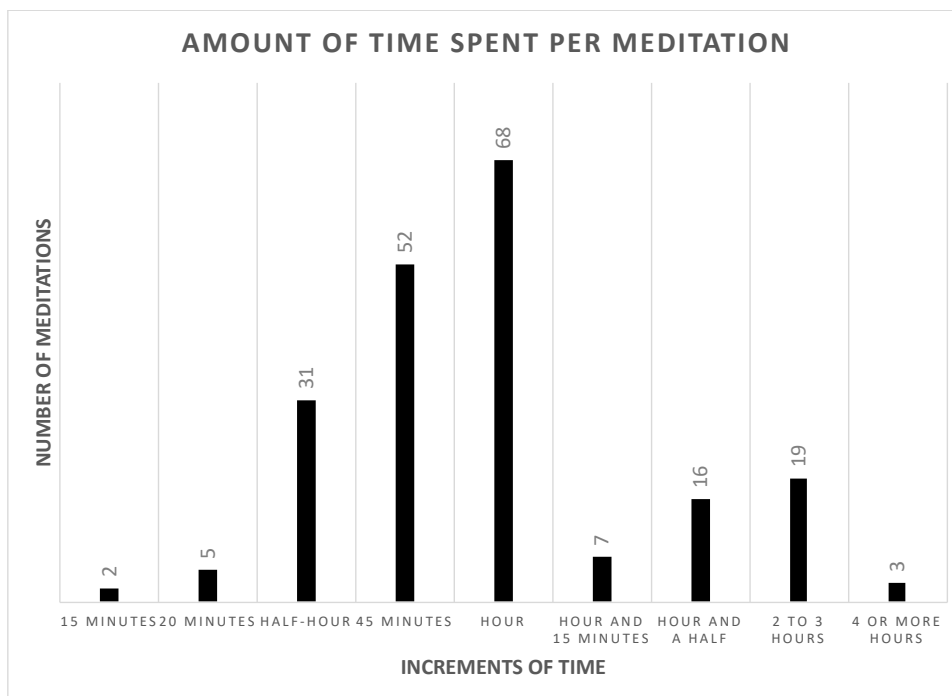


Figure 3. Time spent in meditation

## Integration with Outdoor Recreation

The objective was for participants to, as much as possible, integrate their meditation with their favorite outdoor recreational activities. The participants made a significant effort to do their meditations outdoors, connected to their recreational activities, and integrated with real-time experiences with the created elements. Integrated outdoor recreation happened 61 percent of the time. Certain elements were better for integration than others. Figure 4 below displays the participants efforts at integration. Additionally, a lot was learned about which outdoor activities were most easily paired with meditation. Hiking, walking, experiential observation, and hunting were the best activities for meditation.<sup>3</sup> Figure 5 below shows a breakdown of recreational activities.

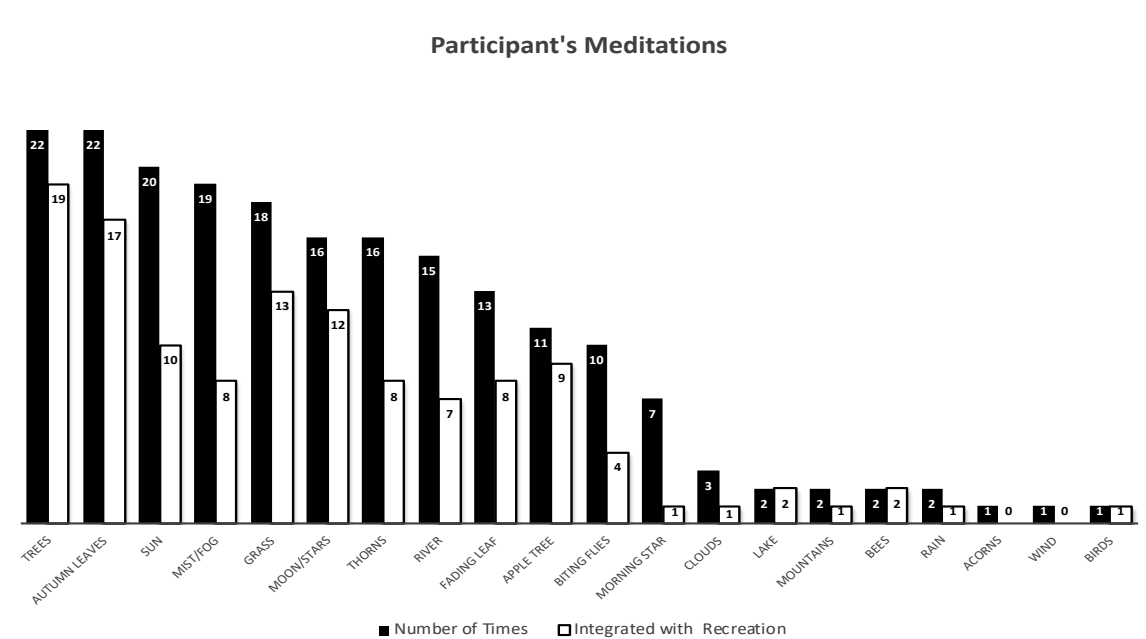


Figure 4. Integration of meditation and recreation

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<sup>3</sup> Experiential observation means taking time to sit, observe, experience, and enjoy the created element.

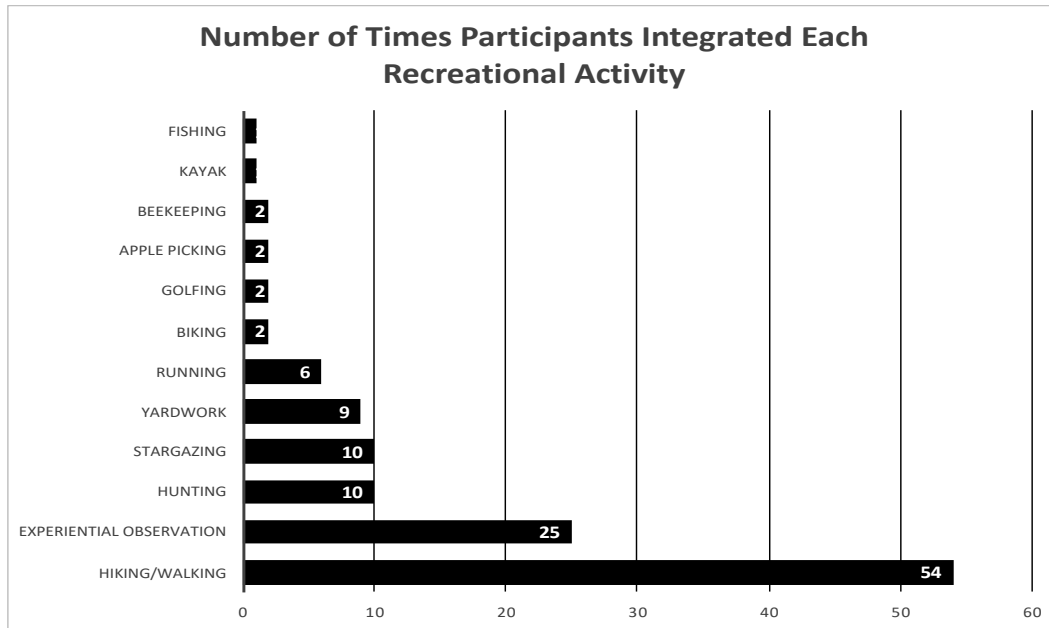


Figure 5. Participant’s recreational activities

### **Equipping and Inspiring Meditation on Scripture and God**

The underlying purpose for creation meditation is closer communion with Jesus Christ through God’s Word. If approached appropriately, meditation on the elements of creation stirs a believer’s heart to deeper exultation of the glories of Christ as those glories are seen and appreciated in the created world. The two steps of contemplation and confirmation are Word-oriented portions of creation meditation. If the person meditating is not drawing the associative connections between the world and the Word or seeking to confirm those connections by searching the Scriptures, then creation meditation has not achieved its Word-oriented purpose.

Participants were adequately equipped through the introductory class, the use of the mobile app, and the adventures. The participants’ greatest inspiration to seek the Scriptures and communion with God came not from anything I did but through their experience of general revelation. Thankfully, the participants displayed a hunger to engage the Scriptures in their meditations and saw evidential growth in knowledge and

practice vis-à-vis God's Word. This evidence was observed through both the quantitative and qualitative data.

As a result of using a convergent mixed-methods research approach, there was a lot of both quantitative and qualitative data collected. The quantitative data came almost exclusively from the pre- and post-project surveys. The only additional quantitative data collected was from the completed meditations emailed to me, including the number of hours each person meditated and whether his or her meditations were integrated with outdoor recreational activities. The immense amount of qualitative data was collected from both the surveys and the 203 completed meditations emailed to me by the thirty participants. Each meditation emailed to me contained an average of fourteen responses to questions that tended to total roughly three to four pages. Having reviewed all that was sent to me, I was impressed with the level of seriousness and the comprehensiveness of participants' responses.

Overall, the Thinking Outdoors project was successful in achieving its stated purpose. The project successfully engaged the people of St. Paul's EPC in creation meditation as they recreated outdoors, and it equipped and inspired them to meditate on the Lord and his Word.

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

This section evaluates the three goals of the Thinking Outdoors project. The first goal was to develop a biblically informed resource (i.e., mobile app) for creation meditation. The second goal was to assess participants regarding their knowledge and practice of biblical meditation on creation and Scripture. And the third goal was to equip the participants to use the resource (i.e., mobile app) on their own to integrate their favorite outdoor activities with creation meditation, thereby increasing their knowledge of and enriching their practice of creation meditation.

## **Goal 1: Developing a Mobile App for Creation Meditation**

The first goal of developing a creation meditation resource was successfully accomplished when the Thinking Outdoors mobile app was completed prior to beginning the eight-week creation meditation project. A corresponding website was also developed to meet the various needs of all participants. Based upon evaluation by an expert panel, the participants themselves, and my own evaluation, the mobile app and website were biblically informed and were successful in equipping, inspiring, and guiding participants in the practice of creation meditation.

The expert panel's evaluation returned a total score of 98 percent sufficient. Before launching the project, I addressed areas where the expert panel indicated a need for improvement. However, because I desire to continue to improve, promote, and use the Thinking Outdoors mobile app beyond this doctoral project, I will continue to heed the input of the reviewers as future changes are made to the resources. In a number of situations, reviewers noted that their suggestions were dependent upon the intended use of the mobile app. There are some significant differences between what I created for project participants and what I believe will be best for day-to-day users of the app.

I also gave the participants an opportunity to evaluate the app. I altered the expert panel's rubric, pairing it down from twenty to fourteen areas for assessment. The participants' evaluation also returned a total score of 98 percent sufficient. While I am grateful for such high scores, I think there is a tendency for evaluators in a situation such as this to be too hesitant to give low marks. Therefore, I took seriously any areas where the expert panel or the participants gave a mark less than exemplary.

Participants' feedback was clear on four areas for continued development and improvement. First, continuing to simplify the app will improve user experience. Second, though the length of the meditations and devotionals was intentionally more extensive for doctoral participants, the app will be improved by shortening all of the content for day-to-day users. Third, participants commented several times on areas of content redundancy.



Fourth, though the app had its highest marks in the area of relevancy to those inclined to recreate outdoors, many participants critiqued the feasibility of integrating creation meditation with recreational activities and questioned whether the app was applicable to the full range of outdoor recreational activities. It was apparent that certain activities were much easier to integrate with meditation than others and that some activities were not a good fit for integrated meditation with the app. However, one of the key takeaways was a clarification that integration does not always have to mean simultaneous meditation and recreational activity. For many high-intensity recreational activities, integration might mean meditation as spiritual preparation prior to the activity, or at a transition point (e.g., rest break), or immediately after the activity is over. Ultimately, the project participants were extremely positive and encouraging about the mobile app as a resource for creation meditation.

My own assessment of the app determined that it was adequate for running the project with the participants but could have been better in two areas. First, I would have preferred to provide more than twelve meditations. Second, in my estimation, the “Do Your Own” meditations displayed some deficiencies. The participants’ comments about redundancy were aimed at the redundant questions asked in the “Do Your Own” meditation fill-in notes. Admittedly, I could have spent more time developing these fill-in notes—applying greater creativity. The app would have been improved if I had spent more time developing the content. I do believe it was an innovative, unique, and impressive resource. To the best of my knowledge, nothing quite like it exists, which was part of the fun I had in developing it. The app and website were effective in achieving their designed purpose.

## **Goal 2: Meditation Knowledge and Practice Assessment**

The second goal of assessing participants' knowledge and practice of creation meditation was successfully accomplished by using the pre-project survey.<sup>4</sup> The survey included three sections. The first section was an outdoor recreational and vocational activity inventory. The second section was a spiritual inventory. The third section was the Likert-scale survey. This third section was split between assessing the outdoor experiences, biblical meditation experiences, and creation meditation experiences of participants. The pre-project survey was designed to provide a detailed picture of the participants in four areas: (1) outdoor knowledge and recreational or vocational practices, (2) knowledge and practices of spiritual disciplines, (3) knowledge and practices of biblical meditation, and (4) knowledge and practices of creation meditation. The mobile app, website, and curriculum were created and prepared prior to administering the pre-project survey. In retrospect, I see the wisdom and benefits of establishing the content of the app, website, and—particularly—the curriculum based on the results from the survey. Intentionally addressing the weaknesses of the participants is helpful in attaining the best outcome and the greatest amount of growth in knowledge and practice.

**The outdoor recreational and vocational activity inventory.** The second project goal had a specific interest in assessing those who habitually engage in outdoor recreation or vocations. While the original goal was to assess twenty outdoor enthusiasts, in hindsight, my change to include others allowed me to compare the impact of the project on outdoors-oriented people versus those who would not call themselves outdoors people. The data collected in this inventory allowed me to differentiate these two groups of people not only by their own perceptions of whether they were outdoors people but also by their level of engagement in outdoor recreation or vocation. Only 20 percent of

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix 2.

the participants had outdoor-oriented vocations, but 60 percent of the participants habitually recreated outdoors. The most common favorite outdoor recreation activities were hiking, winter skiing, biking, and hunting. The participants reported that for 70 percent of them, prayer was already a discipline they integrated into their outdoor recreational activities.

I was not significantly surprised by the data from this inventory. I knew that the majority of people at St. Paul's recreate outdoors and that a good number of people have outdoor vocations. I was also not surprised by the data regarding the participants' integration of prayer; however, what exactly their prayers look like was of more interest to me. I was encouraged by seeing hiking and hunting as some of the most frequent and favorite activities because I had planned the project for the fall season when these activities were most likely to happen.

**Knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines inventory.** The results from the spiritual disciplines inventory disclosed that the group of participants represented a spiritually mature sampling from the St. Paul's EPC congregation. Over 60 percent of them had led someone to pray to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord, had intentionally disciplined another person, were in the practice of reading their Bible devotionally four or more times a week, and were in the practice of praying ten or more minutes a day. The participants reported that 83 percent of them had been exposed to teaching on the spiritual disciplines. While I was grateful for a fairly mature group of participants, I had hoped to draw in and keep a larger number of less mature outdoorsmen and -women for the project. Four people, whom I consider to be in this latter category, dropped out or did not complete the project. In hindsight, the academic and spiritual demands of this project were rigorous for this group of people.

Assessing the participants' level of spiritual maturity and discipline allowed me to differentiate between a group of more disciplined versus less disciplined members

of the group. I was able to complete a comparative analysis of these two groups using the pre- and post-project survey data.

**Outdoor, biblical meditation, and creation meditation experiences.** The Likert-scale portion of the survey had three sections: outdoor experiences, biblical meditation experiences, and creation meditation experiences. Before evaluating the mean scores, I reversed the scores of survey statements that were framed negatively to convey the data accurately when all the mean scores were averaged together.<sup>5</sup> The participants' knowledge mean score ( $M_k$ ) on the pre-project survey was 3.76, and the practice mean score ( $M_p$ ) was 3.95. I was initially surprised that the practice mean score was almost two-tenths of a point higher than the knowledge mean score, especially since only 13 percent of participants reported having any exposure to teaching on creation meditation. However, table 1 below displays how the participants' high scores on statements 6, 11, 13, and 17 were the key influencers of the higher practice mean score. The participants were often thinking about God in creation, and some perceived themselves as generally faithful meditators upon Scripture, but as is seen by statement 30, they were not as confident in their ability to faithfully practice biblical creation meditation. Overall, the pre-project survey mean scores reflected that creation meditation was a new spiritual discipline to the vast majority of participants.

Table 1. Mean scores of select practice pre-project survey statements

Survey Statements	Mean Score
6. I often find myself thinking about why God created a certain element in creation.	4.33
11. I am prone to think about elements of nature (trees, birds, rivers) in relation to how they teach me something about God.	4.00

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<sup>5</sup> Survey statements 2, 3, 4, 5, 25, 28, and 32 were framed negatively.

Survey Statements	Mean Score
13. The elements of creation are constant reminders to me to think about God.	5.00
17. I faithfully meditate on Scripture.	3.97
30. I am confident in my ability to faithfully practice biblical creation meditation.	3.43

In the outdoor experience section of the pre-project survey, participants were asked whether their closest relations consider them outdoorsmen or -women. For 40 percent of the participants, they agreed or strongly agreed. An additional 20 percent somewhat agreed. It was easy to delineate and confirm who the true outdoor recreation-oriented people were by cross-referencing their responses with the inventory questions that inquired about their outdoor recreational habits. The other pre-project survey statements that measured the degree to which participants were truly outdoor-oriented were about identifying Western Pennsylvania wildlife. While 52 percent of participants had some level of confidence in familiarity with the trees, birds, and plants of Western Pennsylvania, those who were truly confident were slim.<sup>6</sup> Only 13 percent were confident with tree identification, 17 percent with bird identification, and 7 percent with plant identification. I was surprised that participants did not score higher in this area because so many of them grew up in Western Pennsylvania, express such affection for the surroundings of the Laurel Highlands where we all live, and—according to statements 6, 11, and 13 (see table 1)—spend so much time thinking about these elements.

The biblical meditation portion of the pre-project survey revealed a significant need for training among participants.<sup>7</sup> While 80 percent of the participants affirmed that

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<sup>6</sup> See table A1 in appendix 12 for results from statements 7, 8, and 9.

<sup>7</sup> The following statistical percentages pertaining to participants' knowledge and practice of biblical meditation are based upon a delineation between those who agreed or strongly agreed versus the overall number of participants (30).

they were passionate about God’s Word, only 37 percent said they faithfully practice biblical meditation. Additionally, the data showed that 27 percent were confident that their understanding of meditation was biblical, and even less (17 percent) were confident that they could define biblical meditation or open their Bibles to a passage about meditation. The trend continues downward: only 3 percent possessed the confidence to outline the key principles of biblical meditation. The data disclosed that most participants do not faithfully practice biblical meditation. While a portion of participants say they practice biblical meditation, they do not yet understand how to practice it faithfully.

I anticipated that the creation meditation portion of the pre-project survey would reveal that participants had even less knowledge and practice in creation meditation than biblical meditation because 37 percent more people reported exposure to biblical meditation training than to creation meditation training.<sup>8</sup> The data showed that 37 percent were confident that their thoughts regarding how God speaks through creation were thoroughly biblical, yet only 27 percent could confidently open their Bibles to a passage about the subject of general revelation. Confidence in their ability to faithfully practice creation meditation or to give an explanation from the Bible of what God intended to communicate through two natural elements scored 13 percent. Only 10 percent of participants said they knew how to meditate on the elements of creation. The data appears to indicate that regarding creation meditation, the participants had a higher confidence in their faithfulness to Scripture than was warranted. Ultimately, their level of knowledge and practice of biblical meditation and creation meditation were about the same.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, training in creation meditation and biblical meditation was a definite need among the people of St. Paul’s EPC.

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<sup>8</sup> The same method for calculating percentages was used with respect to both creation meditation and biblical meditation.

<sup>9</sup> The mean score of knowledge and practice for biblical meditation was 3.57 and for creation meditation was 3.48.

The pre-project survey showed that while the participants were already engaged in thinking about general revelation to a significant degree, for many, their engagement was not necessarily grounded in biblical theology. They also lacked a methodology for creation meditation. I was heartened by the participants' high level of passion for God's Word and for God's created world as indicated in the survey responses; however, the participants' apparent lack of theological grounding was unsettling.

One of my greatest concerns was that mysticism played a significant role in participants' experiences in the outdoors.<sup>10</sup> This concern was not relieved by the survey responses to statements 3 ("I feel God speaks to me personally when I am outdoors") and 28 ("I believe God communicates to me personally through creation giving me signs that guide me"). On the pre-project survey, these statements were recalibrated so that a higher score of 6 on the Likert scale would reflect a better response than 1. I believed statement 3 was ambiguous enough that a person could make an argument for agreeing with the statement without holding errant beliefs. However, I believed statement 28 was unambiguous. The mean score for statement 3 was 2.43 with a standard deviation of .97, which is solidly between agree somewhat and agree. The mean score for statement 28 was 2.9 with a standard deviation of 1.18, meaning that people basically agreed somewhat. That data seemed to indicate that I was right to be concerned about mysticism's influencing participants' engagement with general revelation.

The other area of concern from the pre-project survey was the lack of value placed on memorizing Scripture. The mean score was 3.47, with a median of 3. This score revealed that for most participants, memorizing Scripture was not a priority in their spiritual disciplines.

There were three comparative analyses that I was interested in conducting with the data. Using the inventories of sections I and II in the pre-project survey, I

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<sup>10</sup> See page 29 for a definition of mysticism.

differentiated outdoors people from non-outdoors people and more spiritually disciplined people from less spiritually disciplined people. The other subgroups I compared were those in church leadership positions (elders and deacons) versus those who had not yet served in one of those positions. There was a small difference (two-tenths of a point) in mean scores between leaders and those not in church leadership. There was a difference of about four-tenths of a point between outdoors people and non-outdoors people in overall mean score and in knowledge but not in practice.<sup>11</sup> It did not surprise me that outdoors people and leaders scored a little higher in knowledge, but it was harder to account for no difference in practice.<sup>12</sup> The fact that less spiritually disciplined people had significantly lower mean scores in the area of practice further indicates that actual discipline and confidence in the practice of meditation was evenly distributed among leaders and non-leaders as well as among outdoors people and non-outdoors people. The newness of the practice was likely a significant factor as well. It was not a surprise that the less spiritually disciplined had lower mean scores overall and lower scores in knowledge and practice.

### **Goal 3: Increase of Knowledge and Enrichment of Practice**

The third goal of the project was to equip participants to use the resource (i.e., mobile app) on their own to integrate their favorite outdoor activities with creation meditation, thereby increasing their knowledge of and enriching their practice of creation

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<sup>11</sup> See table A7 in appendix 17.

<sup>12</sup> As a result of the post-project survey, I noticed that one outlier was negatively affecting the data. The person's overall mean score dropped eleven points from the pre-project survey to the post-project survey. This person's data made no significant difference when analyzing all thirty participants. However, because this person was in the smaller categories of leaders, non-outdoors people, and less spiritually disciplined people, the data was greatly skewed by his or her inclusion in a smaller sample size. So, for the subgroup analysis, I pulled the person out to have a more accurate picture of each group's tendencies. This person's data is not a part of any of the subgroup analyses.



meditation.<sup>13</sup> This goal was met by conducting an introductory class to prepare participants for creation meditation and then giving them seven weeks to do seven meditations. Surveys were given at the start and end of the project in order to measure the level of impact that the project had on participants. The third goal was considered successfully achieved as measured by both quantitative and qualitative data. A t-test for dependent samples was performed, and the results showed a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-project survey scores in both increased knowledge and enriched practice. Additionally, the qualitative data gathered from the surveys and from the meditations confirmed a significant positive impact of the project on participants.

**Quantitative data.** The t-test results of knowledge and practice combined were  $t_{(29)} = -9.99, p < .0001$ . The t-test results of the knowledge statements were  $t_{(29)} = -10.67, p < .0001$ . The t-test results of the practice statements were  $t_{(29)} = -6.43, p < .0001$ .<sup>14</sup> In all three cases, the results confirmed a positive statistically significant difference, allowing for the conclusion that the null hypothesis is void.<sup>15</sup>

An analysis of the pre- and post-project surveys revealed the survey statements that saw the most significant change in knowledge (see table 2 below).<sup>16</sup> The table shows that participants learned a lot and grew in confidence in their understanding of biblical meditation and creation meditation. The total increase in mean score for knowledge statements was 13 points. I was particularly pleased to see such an increased confidence

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<sup>13</sup> The other portion of the third project goal that was in chapter 1 was evocation. Evocation is a way to define elements of creation serving as ongoing mental prompts to cue contemplation and prayer (see p. 9). This idea of evocation became less of a focus during the project due to limited time to teach on this subject. Under the explanation of qualitative data, I will reference what I accomplished with participants regarding evocation.

<sup>14</sup> See appendix 16.

<sup>15</sup> See figure A2 in appendix 13 for the mean scores for knowledge and practice.

<sup>16</sup> See table A2 in appendix 14 for the results related to knowledge.

in participants’ understanding of biblical meditation (see statements 15 and 20). I also was grateful for such a significant increase in knowledge of Jonathan Edwards’s creation theology since I taught about him and because his work was prominent in the app itself. The most encouraging was statement 29. Participants began the course with very little formal knowledge of creation meditation. For some members of the group, the entire concept was new to them. Therefore, I was so delighted to see how classroom instruction, use of the mobile app, and—most of all—lots of practice meditating on creational elements resulted in participants’ scoring highest in this category.

Table 2. Post-project survey areas of strength in knowledge

Survey Statements	Pre-Project Mean	Post-Project Mean	Change
15. I can confidently define biblical meditation.	3.6	5.1	+1.5
20. I can confidently outline key principles of biblical meditation.	3.1	4.6	+1.5
26. I am familiar with Jonathan Edwards and his creation theology.	2.3	4.2	+1.9
29. I know how to meditate on the elements of creation (birds, trees, etc.)	3.2	5.3	+2.1
34. I can confidently name two elements and explain from the Bible what God intended to communicate through them.	3.0	4.9	+1.9

There were two statements that were areas of concern. One of the statements saw no change, and the other saw negative change. Statement 21 (“It is important for all believers to practice biblical meditation”) saw no change in mean score between the pre- and post-project surveys. I attribute this result to the statement’s high score on the pre-project survey. With a score 4.9 and a median of 5, statement 21 had the second-highest score in the knowledge category on the pre-project survey. Therefore, this statement’s lack of change was not of great concern. The other statement worth noting for its

decrease in point value is statement 32 (“Discerning God’s revelation of Himself via creation is a common practice among believers today”). This statement dropped two-tenths of a point. I believe this drop is directly related to my not having adequate time to teach about this topic in my opening class. The current crisis of believers’ separation from exposure to and familiarity with the created world was never addressed.<sup>17</sup>

The results of the analysis of post-project survey data relating to the practice of creation meditation revealed less of a change than the data relating to knowledge of creation meditation, but there still was a notable change. The total increase in mean score for practice statements was 8 points. Table 3 reveals the statements that showed the greatest increase in enriched practice of creation meditation.<sup>18</sup>

Table 3. Post-project survey areas of strength in practice

Survey Statements	Pre-Project Mean	Post-Project Mean	Change
4. I struggle to pray while doing my recreational activities.	3.63	4.23	+0.6
5. I struggle to meditate upon God in a fruitful way during my recreational activities.	3.37	4.33	+0.9
6. I often find myself thinking about why God created a certain element in creation.	4.33	4.90	+0.6
11. I am prone to think about elements of nature (trees, birds, rivers) in relation to how they teach me something about God.	4.00	4.83	+0.8
14. I am regularly thinking about God’s natural world multiple times a day.	3.70	4.67	+0.9
30. I am confident in my ability to faithfully practice biblical creation meditation.	3.43	5.03	+1.6

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<sup>17</sup> The other statements that were not sufficiently addressed were statements 7, 8, 9, and 10. These statements related to participants’ ability to identify birds, trees, and plants as well as their identification as outdoorsmen or -women. I excluded these statements in the data analysis because while I was interested in this information to better understand participants, the statements were not significant to what I was trying to achieve with this research project.

<sup>18</sup> See table A3 in appendix 15 for the results related to practice.

I was pleased to see, based upon the increase in statements 4 and 5, that people grew in their ability to integrate creation meditation with their recreational activities. I was not surprised to see some growth in this category based upon the concerted effort people made to practice integration over the course of the seven weeks. For most participants, it was the first time they had ever attempted this type of challenge. It was also exciting to observe participants' increased awareness of and attentiveness to general revelation, according to the results concerning statements 11 and 14. The noteworthy change in participants' confidence in their ability to faithfully practice biblical creation meditation was extremely heartening. This enrichment of faithful and biblical creation meditation practice was at the core of what I intended to see accomplished in people's spiritual lives.

Five statements about enriched practice were excluded from the data analysis.<sup>19</sup> This decision was made because these survey statements were either poorly worded and therefore confusing to participants or they were peripheral to the purpose of the project. Of these five statements, numbers 3 and 28 were intended to discover to what degree participants were influenced by mysticism. Unfortunately, these two statements were confusing to participants, which prevented accurate discernment of participants' level of mystical beliefs. I made a concentrated effort in the first class to explain mysticism and to warn against falling into that trap. I was therefore surprised that the post-project survey results exhibited a negative score for statements 3 and 28.

To better understand what participants were thinking as they answered these two survey statements, I reached out to ten participants via email and invited them to answer four questions designed to make sense of their initial responses to the statements. I heard back from eight of the ten. What became obvious was that participants were interpreting these statements differently than I intended. Their negative scores did not

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<sup>19</sup> The five statements are statements 1, 2, 3, 19, and 28.

necessarily reflect an influence of mysticism but rather a poorly worded statement on the survey. Four of the eight respondents had solid theological answers that reflected a clear understanding of the limits of general revelation and the dangers of mysticism. Three of the respondents did not write anything of grave concern, but they did not appear to understand the topic well enough. One respondent wrote some concerning statements that, based on my knowledge of her, do not reflect serious theological error but, more likely, poor word choice. Because half of the respondents displayed some degree of confusion, I concluded that further in-depth teaching on the subjects of general revelation and mysticism would have been helpful.

The pre-project survey had indicated an obvious need for training on biblical meditation and creation meditation. The training proved effective. Participants' confidence in defining biblical meditation increased from 17 percent to 73 percent, and their confidence in outlining the key principles of biblical meditation increased from 3 percent to 57 percent. As for creation meditation, participants' confidence in their ability to faithfully practice creation meditation increased from 13 percent to 70 percent, and their confidence in giving an explanation from the Bible for what God intended to communicate through two natural elements increased from 13 percent to 73 percent. Participants' knowledge of how to meditate on the elements of creation increased from just 10 percent to an impressive 87 percent. The training and experience of meditating was fruitful for growth in both biblical and creation meditation. This harmony between both types of meditation was further evidenced by the mean score results. A comparison of the pre- and post-project survey mean scores for five key statements from the sections on biblical meditation and creation meditation revealed a similar level of growth in each category. Biblical meditation went from 3.57 to 4.76 (change of +1.19), and creation meditation went from 3.48 to 4.84 (change of +1.36). The differences between the two categories were insignificant; both showed relatively equal amounts of change. My concern was the possibility that creation meditation would fail to engage participants in

or distract them from the Scriptures. However, the data revealed that creation meditation was an effective bridge to deeper engagement with, knowledge of, and focus upon the Scriptures.

The comparative analyses uncovered some fascinating conclusions. In mean scores, the outdoors people, leaders, and more spiritually disciplined outperformed their counterparts in knowledge and practice with one exception—church leaders and non-leaders had an almost even match (.07 difference) in the pre-project survey for practice.<sup>20</sup> What was noteworthy was the significant differences in growth. Leaders saw a 5.7 percent greater increase in the mean score relating to practice than those not in church leadership. Even more impressive was that less spiritually disciplined people saw an 8.4 percent greater growth in knowledge and an 11.6 percent greater growth in practice than more spiritually disciplined people. This data changed my viewpoint from earlier speculations based upon the pre-project survey data alone. It is now apparent that the church leaders group showed a slightly greater degree of focused discipline on the project, resulting in solid growth in practice. The less disciplined group was the real surprise. Their significant increases also indicate a focused discipline on the project. My conclusion is that those who tended toward being less spiritually disciplined were greatly influenced by the forced discipline that was required by the project. Accountability is healthy. When less disciplined believers make real effort at spiritual discipline, they see significant spiritual fruitfulness in their lives. In contrast, those who are already spiritually disciplined will still grow but may show a smaller degree of growth, especially when it comes to the category of practice.

The quantitative data revealed that the third goal of increased knowledge of and enriched practice of creation meditation was successfully achieved by the Thinking Outdoors project. The participants grew in biblical meditation, creation meditation, and

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<sup>20</sup> See table A7 in appendix 17.

integration of meditation into their recreational activities. This growth seen in the quantitative data was also evident in and confirmed by the qualitative data.

**Qualitative data.** The qualitative data was collected from three sources: (1) a post-project questionnaire with twenty-five questions, (2) the evaluation rubric for the app, and (3) the 203 completed meditations that participants emailed to me. The data revealed significant growth in six specific areas among participants: (1) a deeper connection to God's Word, (2) a richer communion with God through understanding and reminders of his character, (3) a different perspective on and fuller appreciation of God's creation, (4) a learned method for and confidence in creation meditation, (5) a stronger ability to focus their minds and a stronger commitment to designate elements of creation as ongoing mental prompts, and (6) a greater understanding of and proficiency with integrating creation meditation into recreational activities.

One of the primary research questions was to what degree is the discipline of creation meditation, especially integrated into outdoor recreation, an effective bridge to deeper engagement with and knowledge of the Scriptures and also a closer relationship with God? The responses of participants, both in the questionnaire and in the confirmation portion of the meditations, demonstrated that the creation meditations drew people deeper into God's Word. Many people specifically used the words "dug deeper" to describe their experience of seeking to confirm if, where, and how an element was mentioned in the Scriptures. A good many others stated that their frequency of time spent in the Word increased as a result of the project. People found meditation transformative as they were challenged to relate their thoughts to the Bible and learned to make associative connections between their experiences of elements in creation and Scripture.

A closer relationship with God also resulted from the project. The participants expressed that their communion with God was richer because of creation meditation. One participant shared, "Meditation on creation 'tunes my heart' to be more aware of and

sensitive to his presence.” Many others wrote about their enriched connection to their Creator, writing about a greater hunger and desire for God. Another participant wrote, “My interactions with God are more common now. Walking to work, not just walking in the woods, leads me to meditate on God.” An important part of this enriched experience of connection was all of the ways that participants saw aspects of God’s character expressed in and through his creation. Another participant spoke of prayer becoming a reflexive part of his experiences with the elements of creation. This relational aspect of people’s experience with creation meditation was evident from the way their relationships with God poured out onto the pages of their completed meditations. There were many cases where the reminders of God’s character through creation bolstered participants’ faith as they were walking through difficult circumstances. As participants learned of ways that certain elements of creation express aspects of God’s character, they reflected on how seeing those elements again immediately brought them back to their former contemplations. For example, two of the most common elements that evoked memories of past contemplation were the moon and autumn leaves. One participant wrote the simple prayers that he was reminded to pray by these two elements: (1) “Moon – Lord, help me to be light in the world!” (Phil 2:15) and (2) “Leaves – Lord, help me to remain connected with you” (Isa 64:6).<sup>21</sup> This example is one among seemingly countless ways in which people were brought closer to their Lord and reminded of him through creation meditation and evocation.

Not only did participants relationship with God grow, but so did their perspective on God’s creation. Participants expressed statements about increased wonder, a greater appreciation of God’s beauty and glory, reinvigorated enjoyment, a new and

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<sup>21</sup> Phil 2:15: “that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” Isa 64:6: “We have all become like one who is unclean . . . . We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”



broader outlook, and a more meaningful perspective through the experience of creation meditation. One participant described the project's impact this way: "I had retreated to a place of 'general appreciation' for God as he reveals himself in creation rather than the better place of experiential learning. This dive into creation meditation and intentional attempts to connect the dots between his world and his Word has enriched my soul." Similarly, another participant wrote, "I always appreciated the beauty of God's creation, but in a general way. Now I see more detail of God's revelation of himself through creation." The experience of this creation meditation project brought fresh perspective on God's created world for many participants, helping them perceive God's invisible attributes through what he created.

Along with a fresh and different perspective, participants learned a method for creation meditation. For virtually all participants, this was their first exposure to a method for creation meditation. My teaching this method to participants and all of the practice they had using the method resulted in participants' gaining personal confidence in their faithful engagement of general revelation. Participants became competent in making associative connections between Scripture and created elements as they contemplated their experiences of those elements (e.g., trees, thorns, grass, the moon). A couple of participants noted that confirmation became an increasingly important priority as they walked through the four-part process of creation meditation. What began as a conscious effort to use the method became, for some participants, like second nature. Creation meditation became a habit. One person shared, "I found myself looking at and meditating on my surroundings on a regular basis now." Many people appreciated how easy the method was to remember.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The mnemonic ECPC (Experience, Contemplation, Prayer, and Confirmation) was easy to remember because of the connected phrase "easy-peasy."

The experience of creation meditation also helped participants with increased and focused thought. Participants used phrases like “deliberate thinking,” “deeper thinking,” “more productive thinking,” “maintained focus,” and “more commitment to focus” to describe their experiences. People explained how pausing for reflection and slowing down served as a significant part of this increased focus. Creating space to think was a primary contributing factor to people’s positive feedback on focus. Even though many participants wrote about increased focus, they also reported honestly about the challenges and difficulties they had in disciplining their minds. The consensus was that contemplation requires a committed effort. Concerted effort was also necessary for evocation, the process of intentionally using elements of creation as ongoing mental prompts for meditation and prayer. The participants referenced sixty-three elements that became mental prompts for them, actively reminding them of past meditations and also prodding them to pray.

Integrating meditation with recreation can also prove challenging. This integration was another aspect of the project that was completely new to almost every person. I was fascinated at the prospect of hearing about participants’ experiences at doing their meditations in the midst of their recreation. There were three key lessons learned from participants’ attempts at integration. First, integrating creation meditation with outdoor recreation is difficult, especially if the recreational activity requires a certain degree of concentration to perform the activity. Creation meditation can also be challenging if the person is actively moving. In particular, confirmation is almost impossible while recreating. Therefore, certain activities lend themselves to easier integration. Second, there was general agreement among participants that hiking, walking, experiential observation, hunting, and fishing were the easiest recreational activities in which to integrate creation meditation. For most other activities, there are some strategies that can be implemented. Third, the strategies for integrating creation meditation and outdoor recreation are as follows: (1) preparing ahead of time, (2) using

transitions (e.g., rest breaks), (3) and completing the creation meditation immediately following the activity. When believers intentionally leverage these strategies, creation meditation is applicable to any outdoor recreational activity.

### **Strengths of the Thinking Outdoors Project**

Reflection upon the project uncovered both strengths and weaknesses. The mobile app and the website resources were an obvious strength in a few ways. Many of the people who were involved are not bookish people. They would have been turned off by a workbook resource. I even had this type of person say, “I hate workbooks.” We live in an area with a large population of people whose intelligence and giftings are kinesthetic rather than academic. Engaging participants with a mobile app and website allowed for colors, creativity, and accessibility. I would not have been able to afford printing a full color workbook, yet with the website and app, every picture and video had the full spectrum of colors that are on beautiful display in God’s created world. The app and website afforded me the ability to use creativity outside of the confines of a book. For example, I was able to update the app and website during the project, adapting it as we went. I kept a current schedule of events as we went through the project. I also added articles that I ran across that were pertinent to what we were learning. For those participants who were visual and auditory learners, I increased accessibility by providing a narrated devotional as well as videos to help them engage some of the content. The ESV Bible that was embedded into the app also had a narration option, so people could listen to the relevant Scripture passages. What I appreciated is that even with all of the features and aids, participants still had to open their Bibles and engage the written Word in order to complete the meditations. The mobile app and website pointed, led, and guided people to God’s Word.

Another strength of the project was the adventure opportunities. Everyone who went on one of the adventures spoke of how wonderful it was to meditate and learn as a

group in the outdoors. The night of stargazing was such an inspiring evening together. Participants learned from one another and saw things that they would not have otherwise seen because of meditating together. Those people who struggle to be still and know, all by themselves, were greatly helped by group meditations. However, I was sorry that I was not able to put more proactive energy toward getting more people to these events. Only half of the project participants made it to the adventures. Those who skipped the adventures missed out.

The greatest strength of the project was the Holy Spirit's opening eyes and hearts to the glory of God revealed in the created world. The skies spoke, the trees sang, the river soothed, and the moon and planets shone. Going outdoors with the right mindset and the right understanding affords believers the opportunity to meet their Creator in a fresh, inspiring, and life-transforming way, drawing them ever closer to their Lord.

### **Weaknesses of the Thinking Outdoors Project**

There were many weaknesses that became apparent during the project. While I thought the introductory classes went well, they were not quite adequate to teach all that was necessary. I should have included another required class to cover all of the most important curriculum items. Specifically, the participants could have used more Bible exposition from texts like Psalm 19, Romans 1:18-21, and Job 37:14-42:5; more teaching on the limits of general revelation and the dangers of mysticism; more on the importance of memorization for meditation; and more on the principles and practice of creation evocation. Additionally, it would have been better if the giving and analysis of the pre-project survey had preceded the first class.

Another weakness was the pre-project survey; it had a few items that I never taught on, so they could have been excluded. The pre-project survey also had items that were poorly worded and confusing. Statements 3 and 28 were both related to my interest in discerning the degree to which mysticism was informing participants' interactions with

God's creation. The statements were not effective and provided little substantial information that was helpful to me. Other statements were weak because they did not define terms. Defining general revelation and explaining what was meant by a created "element" would have cleared up confusion for participants and improved their responses.

On this topic of mysticism, another weakness was my not teaching the dangers of mysticism clearly enough to the participants. My sense is that if I had been more intentional about teaching on this subject in addition to teaching a second session after the introductory class, then participants would have been better informed about the limits of general revelation and the dangers of mysticism.

The lack of eighteen to twenty-nine year olds was another weakness of the project. I should have put effort toward recruiting more individuals in this age category. The group would have benefited from younger people's perspectives. Another weakness was content redundancy in the fill-in meditations on the app. This weakness was a result of my trying to do too much. I did not take enough time to refine every question to make every meditation creatively and uniquely applicable to each element. Not crafting every meditation question for maximum impact was one of my biggest mistakes.

To have forty-six participants eligible for analysis and to come out with only thirty surveys was disappointing. This weakness was likely a result of the high level of demand required by the project. To some degree, the project was overly challenging. Additionally, I could have allotted more time for encouragement and personal follow up to get every participant over the hurdle of seven or more completed meditations. I also could have spent more intentional time pursuing those who were struggling with the project. Likely, that extra effort on my part would have reaped the dividend of more data, increased participant spiritual growth, and a better experience for all of those involved.

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

Each of the weaknesses outlined above are examples of areas where I would have approached the project differently. Having reflected upon those areas, I realize that I often fall into the trap of trying to accomplish too much, thereby attempting to bite off more than I can chew. I fell into this temptation with the Thinking Outdoors project. So, even though the project could be improved by more effort, more effort is not always healthy. Two of the primary ways I would improve this project are simplification and prioritization. Simpler and more attainable goals would have helped the project tremendously. The goal of forty-nine meditations on the app was unrealistic. Recruiting and then providing adequate care and support for forty-six participants was also unrealistic. I included a total of seventy questions or statements in my pre-project survey. Such a bloated pre-project survey made it impossible for adequate alignment between the survey and what I taught the participants. I was unable to cover every topic. A more streamlined, higher-quality survey would have benefitted the participants and me. More manageable goals may have afforded me more space to prioritize better relational engagement with participants. Greater attention to prioritization of each part of the project would have saved me time. I would have been wise to spend less time on those areas that were lower on the priority list. For example, spending less time on the devotionals and more time on the actual meditation fill-in sheets would have been a wiser use of time.

I am grateful that despite many weaknesses and areas for improvement, the project was successful in achieving its intended goals and answering the primary research questions. Though there were areas I would approach differently, overall, the project was fruitful and enjoyable. I am pleased with the mobile app resource, the participants' experiences, and the spiritually impactful end results of the project.

## Theological Reflections

I am convinced, now more than ever before, that general revelation is a neglected topic in evangelicalism. I am concerned that this neglect is having a more deleterious impact than we realize. Walking out of the door without a biblical vision for general revelation is like looking at a sunset through tissue paper. Engaging God's emblematic world with Scripture and with regenerate eyes, ears, tongues, fingers, noses, and minds is what God intends for his people—a transformative experience of his glory. Commenting on the value of general revelation, Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck states, "In determining the value of general revelation, one runs the great danger either of over-estimating or of under-estimating it."<sup>23</sup> When it comes to experiencing the elements of God's creation, believers are currently far more likely to underestimate general revelation's value. Bavinck explains, "When we have our attention fixed upon the richness of the grace which God has given in His special revelation, we sometimes become so enamored of it that the general revelation loses its whole significance and worth for us."<sup>24</sup> I am not convinced that believers are so enamored with special revelation that they have lost sight of general revelation. I am more concerned that far too many believers are not enamored with either type of God's revelation. This situation is lamentable. I have used this project as a means of exploring how effective creation meditation is at whetting the appetite of believers for Scripture. The Thinking Outdoors project indicated quantitatively and qualitatively that believers' hunger for Scripture was deepened by their meditative experiences outdoors. There is good reason to encourage believers today to stop neglecting general revelation and to start using it as a means of deeper engagement with special revelation.

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<sup>23</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 44.

<sup>24</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 44.

I believe general revelation is neglected for three reasons. First, I think our cultural move indoors and increasing separation from the natural world has deafened us to God's communication through what he created. As a result, we miss so many of the experiences and insights of our forebearers of the faith. This trend toward separation is hard to overcome since at the heart of our move indoors is the idol of comfort.

Second, the fear of inadvertently encouraging idolatry and mysticism also inhibits people from teaching on the subject of general revelation. Bavinck also addresses this danger of overestimating general revelation: "And when, at another time, we reflect on the good, and true, and beautiful that is to be found by virtue of God's general revelation in nature . . . , then it can happen that the special grace, manifested to us in the person and work of Christ, loses its glory and appeal for the eye of our soul."<sup>25</sup> This fear is not unfounded but should not cause the level of disregard that is evident in the evangelical world. I had a conversation with a church member whose viewpoint smacked of pantheism. Without solid teaching on general revelation, believers are not equipped to navigate the increasingly idolatrous culture in which we live. Additionally, it is helpful to teach believers how to engage the created world positively and faithfully rather than to exclusively take a cautionary tact.

Third, very few pastors and teachers are engaging the subject. There is a noticeable lack of books and solid teaching on the subject of general revelation at either a scholarly or a popular level. It is also rare to see any chapters written about general revelation in books that should include this important Reformed doctrine. A renewed interest in and commitment to general revelation would benefit the church. This doctrine, and the practice of creation meditation with it, can draw believers into deeper relationship with Christ and enrich their knowledge and appreciation of Scripture.

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<sup>25</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 44.



## **Personal Reflections**

In view of how new the concept of creation meditation was to so many of the project participants and their positive response to this spiritual discipline, I am eager to explore ways of continuing to lead others on this adventure. If it is true, as one participant wrote, that “the app provided a wealth of information that ‘sets the table’ for the ‘feast’ of creation meditation,” then I want to continue to invite others to the feast. I am eager to teach staff and campers this summer, to teach a Sunday school class next fall, to visit some nearby camps with nature programs, and—perhaps at some point—to provide weekend retreats at other churches, combining some adventure activities with instruction on and practice of creation meditation. I am hopeful that I will be able to begin to populate the Thinking Outdoors app once again with content. In all of these aspirations, I am even more eager for the Holy Spirit, through God’s Word and world, to refine my understanding and practice of engaging general revelation.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity I had to pursue a subject that is so in-line with my passions for Christ and his creation. I am humbled to have had the privilege of sharing that passion with so many from St. Paul’s EPC. This project deepened my relationship with many of the project participants—a benefit I had not anticipated. I made some new friends along the way who I had not known were such kindred spirits. Moreover, I am overwhelmed by the experience of God’s grace through it all, but in particular through some of the toughest parts of the trail when the hiking was most difficult. Lastly, I am filled with the joy of knowing that God’s Word does not return void—the seeds sown in the good soil of the hearts of the people at St. Paul’s EPC will inevitably bear fruit.

## **Conclusion**

The sprouting of a seed into a sapling is imperceptible in the short-term. No one sits to watch a tree grow, but the growth of a tree over the years is undeniable. Likewise, it is my hope and prayer that this project may be a means of the steady, long-

term spiritual growth of the people of St. Paul's EPC as well as others outside of our church. The Scriptures encourage meditation on the elements of God's natural world (e.g., trees, leaves, snow, mountains) as an important means of enhancing believers' understanding, faith, and worship of the Lord Jesus Christ as well as their apprehension of and delight in his Word. I long to see more followers of Jesus walking the mountain path to enjoy the crystal lake-waters of creation meditation—tasting the refreshing excellencies of Christ. I intend, by God's grace, to grow as an increasingly faithful and godly guide, inviting others to join me in the journey.

## APPENDIX 1

### CREATION MEDITATION MOBILE APP EVALUATION

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel of mature Christian outdoors men and women. This panel evaluated the mobile app to ensure its biblical and theological faithfulness, effective methodology, relevance, and coherence. Reviewers were asked to provide feedback on the app as a whole as well as on individual meditations.

Name of evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Resource Evaluation Rubric</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
<b>Biblical Theology</b>					
The app material is biblically faithful.					
The app material is theologically sound.					
<b>Meditation Methodology</b>					
This resource is effective for aiding participants in engaging content and method.					
The resource sufficiently guides participants in biblical creation meditation.					
Steps for creational meditation are clear and easy to follow.					
Meditational exercises are of reasonable length.					
Integrating meditation and recreational activity is feasible.					
Creational meditation stimulated focused & intense thinking.					
Creational meditation exercises are enjoyable.					
Creational meditation inspired prayer.					
Creational Meditation exercises inspire confirmation with Scripture.					
<b>Resource Relevance</b>					
The app is relevant to those inclined to recreate outdoors.					
The app is applicable to the full range of outdoor recreational activities.					
Likelihood of user to continue meditation upon creation.					
<b>Resource Coherency</b>					
The app is user-friendly.					
The material follows a logical progression.					
The app material is easy to understand.					
The app is aesthetically pleasing.					
The length of devotionals is appropriate.					
The overall quality of devotionals is sufficient.					

Please include any additional comments regarding the mobile app below:

## APPENDIX 2

### CREATION MEDITATION PRACTICES PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

#### **Agreement to Participate**

Thank you for considering being a participant in this research project on creation meditation. I trust that your love for God, his Word, and the outdoors will be richly rewarded. The purpose of this project is to equip and inspire the people of St. Paul's to meditate on creation as they engage in their favorite recreational activities. To practice creation meditation faithfully requires biblical training and learning to use the creation meditation process. After training, participants will have seven weeks to complete at least seven meditational exercises from the mobile app/website. The following survey will be administered before and after the seven week time period.

The purpose of this survey is to collect data for Scott Steltzer's doctoral project. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Because meditation is deeply personal, it is appropriate for you to complete the survey anonymously. Please use the last four digits of your social security number for future reference to match pre and post surveys.

**4 Digit Code (last four of SSN):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender: F M**

**Age:**

18-29 \_\_\_\_\_

30-45 \_\_\_\_\_

46-59 \_\_\_\_\_

60-71 \_\_\_\_\_

72+ \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Section I: Outdoor Recreational (Vocational) Activity Inventory**

1. My vocation requires me to work outside. Y N
2. If yes, how many days a week am I typically working outside per year?
  - a) 1-2
  - b) 3-4
  - c) 5-6

3. My favorite outdoor recreational activity is: \_\_\_\_\_
4. I spend this much time doing my favorite recreational activity:
  - a) 2 times a month
  - b) 1 time a week
  - c) 2-3 times a week
  - d) 4 times or more a week
5. My favorite **fall** outdoor recreational activity is: (You can put down the same answer as in questions 3 if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_
6. I spend this much time doing my favorite **fall** outdoor recreational activity:
  - a) 2 times a month
  - b) 1 time a week
  - c) 2-3 times a week
  - d) 4 times or more a week
7. My favorite **winter** outdoor recreational activity is? (You can repeat an answer if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_
8. I spend this much time doing my favorite **winter** outdoor recreational activity:
  - a) 2 times a month
  - b) 1 time a week
  - c) 2-3 times a week
  - d) 4 times or more a week
9. My favorite **spring** outdoor recreational activity is? (You can repeat an answer if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_
10. I spend this much time doing my favorite **spring** outdoor recreational activity:
  - a) 2 times a month
  - b) 1 time a week
  - c) 2-3 times a week
  - d) 4 times or more a week
11. My favorite **summer** outdoor recreational activity is: (You can repeat an answer if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_
12. I spend this much time doing my favorite **summer** outdoor recreational activity:
  - a) 2 times a month
  - b) 1 time a week
  - c) 2-3 times a week
  - d) 4 times or more a week

13. Prayer is a part of my time enjoying my favorite outdoor recreational activity:  
Y N

14. I typically pray for this length of time while doing my favorite outdoor recreational activity:

- a) 0-1 minutes
- b) 3-5 minutes
- c) 8-10 minutes
- d) 15+ minutes

**Section II: Spiritual Inventory:**

1. I have professed Jesus Christ as Lord of my life. Y N
2. How many years have you professed Jesus Christ as Lord of your life? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you ever served on one of St. Paul's committees/teams? Y N
4. Have you ever been a part of church leadership (staff, deacon, elder)? Y N
5. Have you ever led someone to pray to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord? Y N
6. Have you ever intentionally disciplined another person? Y N
7. I have been exposed to some teaching on the spiritual disciplines. Y N
8. I have been exposed to teaching on biblical meditation. Y N
9. Have you ever had someone spiritually mentor you in your adult life? Y N
10. I have been exposed to teaching on creation meditation. Y N
11. I have already downloaded and explored the Thinking Outdoors app. Y N
12. How many days in a week do you read your Bible devotionally?
  - a) 0-1
  - b) 2-3
  - c) 4-5
  - d) 6-7
13. I pray for this amount of time each day:
  - a. 0-2 minutes
  - b. 5-7 minutes
  - c. 10-12 minutes
  - d. 15-20 minutes
  - e. More than 20 minutes

14. How many days in a week do you read devotional material other than the Bible?
- 0-1
  - 2-3
  - 4-5
  - 6-7
15. What time of day do you typically read your Bible?
- Before breakfast
  - During/after breakfast
  - During the day
  - Before going to bed
  - N/A
16. How many times do you typically meditate upon a scripture verse or passage per week?
- It is not yet a practice of mine
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5+
17. How many times do you typically meditate for more than 1 minute upon some aspect of God's creation per week? (Examples: stars, sky, trees, flowers, etc.)
- It is not yet a practice of mine
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5+
18. I know someone who faithfully meditates on Scripture. Y N
19. I typically attend Church this many Sundays a month:
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4+
20. I am most likely to be aware of God when I am \_\_\_\_\_
21. I derive the most enjoyment in my relationship with God when I am:  
\_\_\_\_\_



### **Section III: Creation Meditation Practices Survey (CMPS)**

**Directions:** The questions in this section require you to give your opinion in one of the following ways:

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

#### **Your Experiences in Creation**

- |     |  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|-----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1.  | I feel nearer to God when I am outdoors rather than indoors.                         | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2.  | I am most aware of God's presence when I am outdoors recreating.                     | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3.  | I feel God speaks to me personally when I am outdoors.                               | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4.  | I struggle to pray while doing my recreational activities.                           | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5.  | I struggle to meditate upon God in a fruitful way during my recreational activities. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6.  | I often find myself thinking about why God created a certain element in creation.    | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7.  | I can confidently identify most Western PA trees by name.                            | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8.  | I can confidently identify most Western PA birds by name.                            | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9.  | I can confidently identify most Western PA plants by name.                           | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. | Those closest to me consider me an outdoorsman/woman.                                | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

11.	I am prone to think about elements of nature (trees, birds, rivers) in relation to how they teach me something about God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12.	I am confident that my thoughts regarding how God speaks through creation are thoroughly biblical.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	The elements of creation are constant reminders to me to think about God	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	I am regularly thinking about God's natural world multiple times a day	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
<b>Your Experiences with Biblical Meditation</b>							
15.	I can confidently define biblical meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16.	I am passionate about God's Word	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17.	I faithfully meditate on Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18.	I am confident that my understanding of meditation is biblical.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19.	I most enjoy time with God in the company of other people.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20.	I can confidently outline key principles of biblical meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21.	It is important for all believers to practice biblical meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22.	I can confidently open my Bible right now to a passage about the subject of meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

23.	Memorizing Scripture is an important practice for me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24.	I confidently remember what I read in my devotional time most days.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25.	I struggle significantly to keep my mind focused on one thing.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
26.	I am familiar with Jonathan Edwards and his creation theology.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27.	The Scriptures prescribe meditation on the elements of creation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28.	I believe God communicates to me personally through creation giving me signs that guide me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29.	I know how to meditate on the elements of creation (birds, trees, etc.).	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30.	I am confident in my ability to faithfully practice biblical creation meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
31.	It is important for all believers to listen to & learn from God's communication via creation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32.	Discerning God's revelation of Himself via creation is a common practice among believers today.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
33.	I can confidently open my Bible right now to a passage about the subject of general revelation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

34. I can confidently name two elements and explain from the Bible what God intended to communicate through them.      SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA

## APPENDIX 3

### CREATION MEDITATION PRACTICES POST-PROJECT SURVEY

#### **Agreement to Participate**

Thank you for considering being a participant in this research project on creation meditation. I trust that your love for God, his Word, and the outdoors will be richly rewarded. The purpose of this project is to equip and inspire the people of St. Paul's to meditate on creation as they engage in their favorite recreational activities. To practice creation meditation faithfully requires biblical training and learning to use the creation meditation process. After training, participants will have seven weeks to complete at least seven meditational exercises from the mobile app/website. The following survey will be administered before and after the seven week time period.

The purpose of this survey is to collect data for Scott Steltzer's doctoral project. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Because meditation is deeply personal, it is appropriate for you to complete the survey anonymously. Please use the last four digits of your social security number for future reference to match pre and post surveys.

**4 Digit Code (last four of SSN):** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Creation Meditation Inventory**

1. How many creation meditations did you complete and email to Scott?

0-2                      3-6                      7 or more

2. How many creation meditation devotionals did you listen to?

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10+

3. How many creation meditation devotionals did you read?

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10+

## Creation Meditation Practices Survey (CMPS)

**Directions:** The questions in this section require you to give your opinion in one of the following ways:

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

### Your Experiences in Creation

- |     |  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|-----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1.  | I feel nearer to God when I am outdoors rather than indoors.                         | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2.  | I am most aware of God's presence when I am outdoors recreating.                     | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3.  | I feel God speaks to me personally when I am outdoors.                               | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4.  | I struggle to pray while doing my recreational activities.                           | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5.  | I struggle to meditate upon God in a fruitful way during my recreational activities. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6.  | I often find myself thinking about why God created a certain element in creation.    | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7.  | I can confidently identify most Western PA trees by name.                            | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8.  | I can confidently identify most Western PA birds by name.                            | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9.  | I can confidently identify most Western PA plants by name.                           | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. | Those closest to me consider me an outdoorsman/woman.                                | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

11.	I am prone to think about elements of nature (trees, birds, rivers) in relation to how they teach me something about God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12.	I am confident that my thoughts regarding how God speaks through creation are thoroughly biblical.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	The elements of creation are constant reminders to me to think about God	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	I am regularly thinking about God's natural world multiple times a day	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
<b>Your Experiences with Biblical Meditation</b>							
15.	I can confidently define biblical meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16.	I am passionate about God's Word	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17.	I faithfully meditate on Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18.	I am confident that my understanding of meditation is biblical.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19.	I most enjoy time with God in the company of other people.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20.	I can confidently outline key principles of biblical meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21.	It is important for all believers to practice biblical meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

22.	I can confidently open my Bible right now to a passage about the subject of meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23.	Memorizing Scripture is an important practice for me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24.	I confidently remember what I read in my devotional time most days.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25.	I struggle significantly to keep my mind focused on one thing.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
26.	I am familiar with Jonathan Edwards and his creation theology.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27.	The Scriptures prescribe meditation on the elements of creation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28.	I believe God communicates to me personally through creation giving me signs that guide me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29.	I know how to meditate on the elements of creation (birds, trees, etc.).	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30.	I am confident in my ability to faithfully practice biblical creation meditation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
31.	It is important for all believers to listen to & learn from God's communication via creation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32.	Discerning God's revelation of Himself via creation is a common practice among believers today.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
33.	I can confidently open my Bible right now to a passage about the subject of general revelation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA



34. I can confidently name two elements and explain from the Bible what God intended to communicate through them. SD D DS AS A SA

## POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

The following survey is for post-project feedback and evaluation.

### **Project Follow-Up Questions:**

1. What are two of the most important things you learned about meditation that you did not know before this project?
2. What is the significance of the concepts of filling versus emptying in meditation?
3. What did Jonathan Edwards believe about the natural world?
4. What is the key to keeping our imaginations grounded in reality and confirming the spiritual significance of an element of creation?
5. What are the four steps of creational meditation?
  - I. \_\_\_\_\_
  - II. \_\_\_\_\_
  - III. \_\_\_\_\_
  - IV. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Which of these steps would you say was easiest for you? Hardest?
7. Why is confirmation a necessary and important step?
8. What are some pitfalls (dangers) of creational meditation?
9. Are there any elements that are now active prompts that point your mind and heart to recall spiritual truths or prompt you to pray? What are those prompts and how do they prompt you?
10. Which of the creation meditation(s) was/were most spiritually helpful to you?
11. What was your experience of trying to integrate meditation into your favorite recreational activities?
12. What went well?

13. What was a struggle?
  
14. If any, what were the differences that you can identify between your meditations that were imagined (drawing from past experiences) versus those that you actually were experiencing the element in real time?
  
15. How has this experience developed in you a deeper appreciation for God and for God's Word?
  
16. How has this experience altered your viewpoint on the elements of God's creation?
  
17. How has this experience changed your interactions with God in creation?

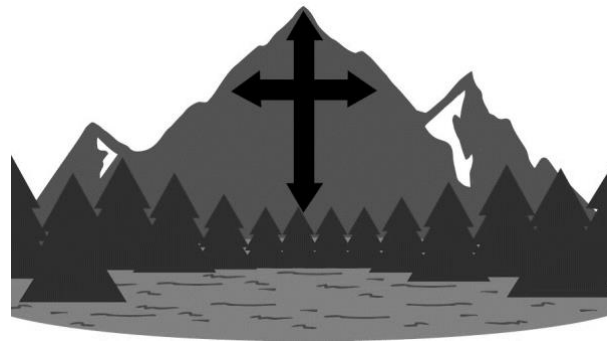
**Overall Reflections:**

1. In what ways was this project helpful to your spiritual growth?
  
2. What was difficult for you? What are ways the project might be altered to help alleviate any unnecessary difficulties?
  
3. Did you find the app user-friendly?
  
4. Easy to understand?
  
5. Applicable to your recreational activities?
  
6. What is the likelihood that you will continue to meditate upon creation? Why?
  
7. What is the likelihood that you will continue to engage the app for creation meditation?
  
8. Do you have any other feedback or comments you would like to share about the project, the resource, or your experience as a whole?



APPENDIX 5

THINKING OUTDOORS LOGO AND APP ICON



APPENDIX 6  
STARGAZING ADVENTURE

The follow is a written reflection on the “Stargazing Adventure.” The full (color) version can be found at [www.thinkingoutdoors.org](http://www.thinkingoutdoors.org).

# STARGAZING ADVENTURE

## MOON & PLANETS TOO!

### *EXPERIENCE*

I planned a night of stargazing with my friend Craig and invited all the participants in my doctoral project. The night was AWESOME, in the truest sense of the word. On this particular September night, the skies were crystal clear. The Heavens were declaring the glory of God. Our adventure began with a beautiful view of the planet Venus as it followed the Sun over the horizon— seen on the left-hand side of the picture above. After the telescopes were set up by Craig and his friends from the astronomy club, we viewed Jupiter and Saturn. The pictures we took with our phones through the telescope eyepieces give a sense of what we saw (see below). They don't do justice to the real experience. We could see the bands around Jupiter and even caught site of the great red spot (a storm visible on Jupiter).

Jupiter with Orbiting Moons



Saturn





We also saw the moon later in the evening as it rose in the eastern horizon. Other highlights of the evening were seeing the ring nebula, the Andromeda galaxy, the Milky Way, as well as the double star in the handle of the Big Dipper. Some of the group also enjoyed seeing a fantastic shooting star. The whole evening was filled with exclamations of wonder and delight at seeing so many incredible sights in the night sky.

## CONTEMPLATION



My own contemplation on our stargazing adventure that night pertained to double stars. We learned that the middle star in the handle of the big dipper is a double star. What that means is when you look at the star in a telescope you see two stars, not one. To our naked eye from earth, it looks like there is just one star, but a closer look reveals two stars.

I think this situation is a lot like life. Believers can look like they have it all together. They can appear to have an undivided heart, but upon closer examination it may be the case that their hearts are divided. A believer's heart can quickly be pulled in differing directions. A heart may secretly love both God and money. Human hearts are idol factories and idolatry are always a present temptation. The Scriptures say "no one can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Human hearts need constant accountability and scrutiny to understand what their hearts are treasuring most. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 7:21). The Apostle John calls all Christians to "keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). This advice is wise and the double star in the Big Dipper will now forever be a reminder to me to check my heart and to ask God to guard me from idols.

## APPENDIX 7

### MOON AND PLANETS MEDITATION AND DEVOTIONAL

The follow is a sample of the “Moon and Planets” meditation and devotional.

The full (color) versions can be found at [www.thinkingoutdoors.org](http://www.thinkingoutdoors.org).



## Moon and Planets

---

Part of September Notes



### DO YOUR OWN MOON & PLANETS MEDITATION

Name: \_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_

Other:

**EXPERIENCE** - Use all of your five senses that are relevant.

- What is your experience of the moon and planets? The planets are the most beautiful “stars” in the sky? As a reminder, the planets would have been considered stars by ancient peoples.
- What do you observe as you stare at them?
- Does the moon make you feel a certain way? What do planets make you think of?

**CONTEMPLATE** - What do you know and observe of God’s Word and world?

(Wonder, Think, and Make Connections)

- Why might God have created the moon and planets? What are his purposes for them?

- What does the light of the moon and planets communicate about who we are?

Consider the source of their light.

### **PRAY**

- How might the moon and planets help you pray or lead you to pray?

- What circumstances of your life relate to the moon and planets that you might pray about?

### **CONFIRM** with Scripture

- What do the Scripture passages confirm and/or challenge in your wondering, thinking, and/or reflecting on the moon & planets?

- What else did you learn from the Scriptures about the moon & planets?

- What application does this meditation have for your life?

- How might the moon & planets serve as a prompt to remind you of the truths you've confirmed? How might these two elements prompt you to further meditation and prayer when you see them next?

### **The following questions are for doctoral project participants:**

How long did you spend on this moon and planets meditation?

Did you read or listen to the devotional? Or both? What feedback do you have on the devotional (length, content, relevance to your life)?

What prompted you to pick this particular meditation?

Was this meditation a part of your outdoor recreational activity? If so, what activity?

### **RELATED VERSES**

Psalm 148:3 - *Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!*

Daniel 12:2-3 - *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*

Philippians 2:14-15 - *Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. (NIV Translation)*



# MOON & PLANETS DEVOTIONAL

PSALM 148:3

“Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!”

## *EXPERIENCE*

On a clear fall evening my family went out for some stargazing in our front yard. This particular night the crescent moon, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars were all visible. Seeing them all on one night was special! Seeing them all through a telescope with 400x magnification was breathtakingly awesome!!! We could see two of the bands that wrap around Jupiter and also three of its orbiting moons. We could distinctly see Saturn and the ring that encircles the planet. The red planet, Mars, was indeed markedly orangish-red in color. Looking through the telescope at the moon blew my mind. We could clearly see its surface and the numerous craters and perfectly smooth portions of the lunar surface. Though the moon's color is a bland gray, as I pulled my eye from the eyepiece of the telescope the sting of looking at something

so bright took a moment to shake off. I was reminded of just how powerfully the moon reflects the sun's light. Though the moon's color is gray, and I would say gray is not all that pretty, there was a tremendous beauty to the moonlight I saw that night.

## *CONTEMPLATION*

The moon does not generate light. While that is an obvious statement of truth to modern ears, the biblical authors were limited in what they knew. We moderns know that the moon and the planets reflect the light of the sun. They do their job gloriously. The moon and the planets glitter, shimmer, twinkle, and shine beautifully. As I ponder their reflecting the glory of the sun, I think about Christians' call to do the same thing to one degree or another. Each believer is distinctly different, yet uniquely capable of reflecting the light of God's truth, his love, and his glory. Just as the moon and each planet reflects varying degrees of light and beauty so does each believer vary in how they reflect God's light. How gloriously they shine or twinkle is dependent upon their position relative to the sun. So, it is with our own lives and how well we reflect God's truth, love, and glory.

On that night we were fortunate to observe Saturn from its most stunning angle. The planet and its ring were turned so we could see the space between the ball shaped planet and its ring. Far less glorious is when the planet is positioned at a perfect side angle such that the ring is less distinguishable from the planet except for two oblong bulges at either side. The planets are emblematic of believers and how they each uniquely reflect the light of God. I concur with Jonathan Edwards, who proposed that the moon is emblematic of the Church (see Edwards note below). The moon is the luminary in the night sky

that is the biggest and most faithful reflective witness of God's light. It shines brightest and most consistently from week to week, month to month, and year to year.

Application: These extraterrestrial emblems beg the question for believers as individuals and as the Church, do our lives shine? The Apostle Paul exhorts believers in Philippians 2:15 to "shine as lights in the world." As we see the moon and planets gloriously reflecting the sun's light it should evoke in us a deeper desire to reflect God's glory in truth and love to all those we come in contact with. Additionally, just as each planet was uniquely made to reflect light in varying degrees of glory to humanity, so we are each created to reflect God's glory to others both now and throughout all eternity. As Christ's righteousness shines through our words and deeds we trust and hope that our personal witness and the Church's witness might "turn many to righteousness." Daniel 12:2-3 says:

*"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars [planets] forever and ever."*

After our resurrection, we will enjoy reflecting God's glory in worship back to him, even as our reflected light mutually spurs one another on in worship forever and ever.

## **PRAYER**

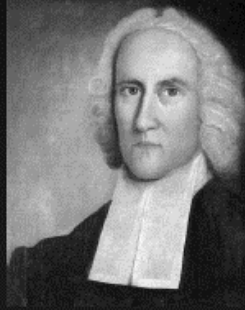
Heavenly Father, my heart yearns to reflect your light. I desire for my life to shine forth your truth, love, and glory, that others might see my

good deeds and glorify you (Matthew 5:16). Fill my mind and heart that they might overflow in benefit to all those I come in contact with today, that others might turn to righteousness because your grace is reflected in and through my life. I ask it in Christ's name. Amen.

## CONFIRMATION

The moon as an emblem for the church is not found explicitly in Scripture. Therefore, a believer might wonder if this emblem is Scriptural? The argument for the moon as an emblem relies upon the sun and its light as confirmed Scriptural emblems. The sun is a Scriptural emblem for God, and light is a Scriptural emblem for God's truth, love, and glory. The moon, as an element that reflects the sun's light, is emblematic of anything that reflects God's truth, love, and glory. The Church (i.e. God's people) reflects God's divine qualities to the world. So, by way of this Scriptural tautology, this emblematic interpretation of the moon is admissible. Unless an emblem is confirmed explicitly by Scripture or is Scriptural, then it must be said to be a speculative conclusion.

- The moon and planets are emblematic of the Church and God's people individually, who reflect the sun's light, signifying God's light. Light may mean (1) truth, (2) love, or (3) glory.



*Jonathan Edwards*

**FROM IMAGES OF DIVINE THINGS NO. 4 & NO. 76**

Image 4: "The heaven's being filled with glorious, luminous bodies, is to signify the glory and happiness of the heavenly inhabitants; and amongst these, the sun signifies Christ and the moon, the church."<sup>1</sup>

Image 76 Footnote: "The moon is a lively image of the church, [as] she borrows all her light from the sun, so doth the church receive light from Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. The old moon represents the church under the Old Testament, which looks to, depends upon, and receives light from Christ yet to come, and is drawing nearer and nearer to the time of Christ's coming, as the old moon [looks towards the sun] [and] receives light from it yet to come, whose conjunction with the moon is yet future. The new moon represents the church under the New Testament, which receives light from Christ already come and having already united himself to the human nature, as the new moon looks towards and receives light from the sun as having already been in conjunction with her. The conjunction of the sun and moon in the time of the change seems to represent the coming of Christ, whereby Christ actually united himself to the church by uniting himself to the human nature, the church's nature."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Images of Divine Things*, WJE 11:52

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Images of Divine Things*, WJE 11:76

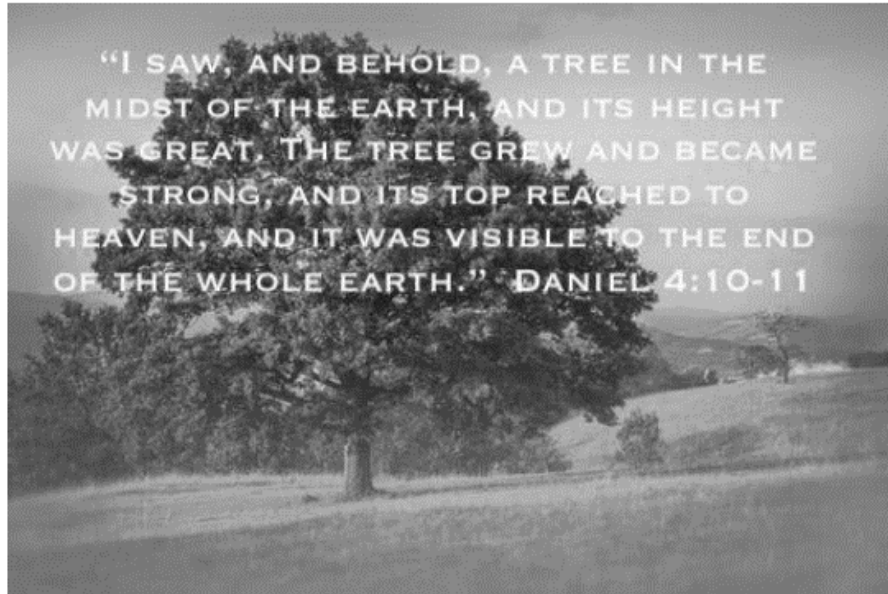


## APPENDIX 8

### TREES MEDITATION AND DEVOTIONAL

The follow is for a sample of the “Trees” meditation and devotional. The full (color) versions can be found at [www.thinkingoutdoors.org](http://www.thinkingoutdoors.org).

## Trees



### DO YOUR OWN TREES MEDITATION

Name:

Date:

Location:

Other:

**EXPERIENCE** - Use all of your five senses that are relevant.

- What is your experience of trees? Specifically, how have trees enriched your life? How are they life-giving?

- What are your favorite trees? Why?

- What do you see, hear, smell, feel, or taste?

**CONTEMPLATE-** What do you know and observe of God's Word and world?

(Wonder, Think, and Make Connections)

- What do trees communicate about who God is? About who we are? About the human experience of God and his world?

- What Scriptural examples come to mind where trees are referenced? How do they inform your thoughts on the emblematic aspects of trees?

**PRAYER**

- How might trees help you or lead you to pray?

- What circumstances of your life relate to trees that you might pray about?

**CONFIRM** with Scripture

What do the Scripture passages confirm and/or confront in your wondering, thinking, and/or reflecting on trees?

- What application does this meditation have for your life?
- How might trees serve as an ongoing prompt for meditation and/or prayer?

**The following questions are for doctoral project participants:**

How long did you spend on this tree meditation?

Did you read or listen to the devotional? Or both? What feedback do you have on the devotional (length, content, relevance to your life)?

What prompted you to pick this particular meditation?

Was this meditation a part of your outdoor recreational activity? If so, what activity?

**RELATED VERSES**

Psalm 1:3 - He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 - Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.

Daniel 4:10-12 - The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

1 Peter 2:24 - He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.



# TREE DEVOTIONAL

DANIEL 4:10-12

"I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it."

## EXPERIENCE

Trees are life-giving. Not only do they produce the oxygen we breathe, trees provide many of the foods we enjoy (fruit, coffee, chocolate), they provide the structural support for most of the houses we live in, and in my case as a summer camp director, I have spent most of my career in, under, and around trees. For example, at the ropes course in the top of our trees, I've coached campers to push themselves beyond their perceived limits. I've camped, hiked, and biked in the

woods. I imagine you have spent many hours in, under, and around trees too.

Perhaps, like me you've anchored slacklines and hammocks to trees. There is nothing like the shade of a tree on a hot summer afternoon. Or perhaps some of your favorite play times with your kids has also involved swinging out over lakes on rope swings attached to trees.

I've hunted from trees year in and year out. As a rock climber I have used trees to anchor my climbing top-rope set more than any other anchor point. I've entrusted my life and the lives of hundreds of others to trees. Think of all the life humans have experienced in, under, and around trees. How has your life been specifically enriched by trees?

## CONTEMPLATION

Trees are an essential part of human flourishing. A brainstorm could last for hours considering all the ways trees are a blessing to humans. I can't help but think of maple trees and the sweet syrup that is produced from their sap. I think also of witch hazel trees whose leaves have a medicinal extract that is an analgesic. You can buy witch hazel pads at your local pharmacy. Black locust trees produced the majority of the fence posts across our country because of their natural resistance to rotting. Trees are amazing. It's no wonder they are a prominent part of the Scriptures.

The Bible begins in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 speaking of the tree of life, the fruit of which, if eaten, provides eternal life

(see Genesis 3:22). The Bible ends with the tree of life in Revelation 22, where we find out that the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations. In Proverbs, wisdom, a gentle tongue, and a desire fulfilled are all likened to a tree of life. One of my favorite passages where a tree is used to describe human flourishing is in Daniel 4:10-12. The king of Babylon is given a dream from God. Nebuchadnezzar is described as a thriving tree.

Throughout Scripture humans are likened to trees (Psalm 1:3, Jeremiah 17:7-8, Mark 8:24). Trees and humans are a common analogy. Trees are emblematic of human life and in particular human flourishing. Trees are both a means of human flourishing and they are an emblem of humans thriving. My number one favorite passage where a tree is used to describe human flourishing is the paradoxical passage from 1 Peter 2:24. It describes the apex of human tragedy and human flourishing. Peter writes, “[Jesus] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” The most important question for you and me is whether we have partaken of this tree of life described by Peter. Humans cannot truly thrive apart from right relationship with their Creator.

Application: Jesus shed his blood and bore the sins of sinners like you and me, such that anyone who believes in him shall not perish for those sins but have everlasting life. Friend, have you trusted in Christ and his work on the cross (the



tree) for your sins? Jesus took the punishment we deserve so that we might have life. Please take some time to consider your sins, your sinful nature, Christ's loving act of redemption, the gift of salvation he offers, and then take time to pray and talk with God about this salvation.

### *PRAYER*

Lord God, I confess my sin before you. I think specifically of the following ways I've sinned against you . . . I also know that my very nature is to act rebelliously against you by not loving you with all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, and all my strength and by not loving my neighbor as myself. I have failed to honor you as God. I ask for your forgiveness, and I trust in the saving work of Jesus on the cross. I embrace you as savior and as Lord of my life. Therefore, I surrender to you. Take my life and lead me into authentic relationship with you and into right relationships with others, that my life might reflect that I know you and am loved by you. Lead me to closer to you in the coming days. Please provide all that I need to grow in this newfound relationship with you. I ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

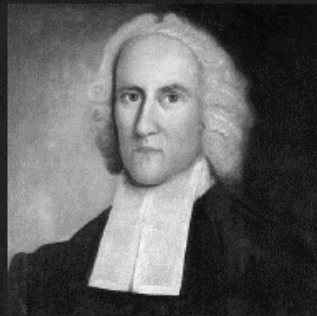
### *CONFIRMATION*

The numerous life-giving aspects of trees speak powerfully about the connections between human flourishing and trees. The Scriptures, as seen by the passages above, provide

many confirmations of this connection. Jonathan Edwards connects trees as an emblem specifically to the church, the flourishing family of God. He says, "There is a marvelous representation of the abundant profusion of God's goodness and lovely grace in what is to be seen in a tree, therein representing what is to be seen in the church."<sup>1</sup> Christ intends that humans flourish in connection to himself and the family of believers.

Healthy and thriving trees are an emblem of human flourishing.

Every tree we see can be a reminder of the life-giving sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. Trees remind us in numerous ways about the life-giving character of God.



Jonathan Edwards

FROM THE *SCRIPTURE NOTES ON IMAGES OF DIVINE THINGS #99. [WJE 11:89]*

"A tree that has so many branches from one stock and root, that gradually increases more and more, becomes so great in so manifold branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit, from so small a seed and a little twig, appearing so beautiful and flourishing under the light of the sun and influences of the rain, is a lively image of the church of God,

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:89

which is often compared to it in the Scripture. It is represented by an olive tree, and vine, and a palm tree, and the bush on Mt. Sinai, trees of lignaloes cedar tree, etc. The church in different ages is lively represented by the growth and progress of a tree; and the church in the same age in Christ its head and stock, is like a tree. The various changes of a tree in different seasons, and what comes to pass in its leaves, flowers and fruit in innumerable instances that might be mentioned, is a lively image of what is to be seen in the church. The ingrafting of a tree and the various things done about it by the husbandmen also represent what is to be seen in the church. There is a marvelous representation of the abundant profusion of God's goodness and lovely grace in what is to be seen in a tree, therein representing what is to be seen in the church. Some particular sorts of trees do more represent the church on some accounts, and others on others, as the vine, the olive, the palm, the apple tree, etc. A tree also is many ways a lively image of a particular Christian, with regard to the new man, and is so spoken of in Scripture."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:89

## APPENDIX 9

### AUTUMN LEAVES MEDITATION AND DEVOTIONAL

The follow is a sample of the “Autumn Leaves” meditation and devotional.

The full (color) versions can be found at [www.thinkingoutdoors.org](http://www.thinkingoutdoors.org).

## Autumn Leaves

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### DO YOUR OWN AUTUMN LEAVES MEDITATION

Name: \_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_

Other:

**EXPERIENCE** - Use all of your five senses that are relevant.

What is your experience of the fall leaves—the sights, the smells, the sounds? Take a picture of the leaves you are looking at right now.

What past memories do you have of fall leaves?

Do fall leaves make you feel a certain way? What do fall leaves make you think of?

**CONTEMPLATE** - What do you know and observe of God's Word and world?

(Wonder, Think, and Make Connections)

Why do you think God created trees to shed their leaves with such beauty? What are his purposes for such beauty?

What do fall leaves communicate about who God is? About who we are?

### **PRAY**

How might fall leaves help you pray or lead you to pray?

What circumstances of your life relate to fall leaves that you might pray about?

### **CONFIRM** with Scripture

What do the Scripture passages confirm and/or challenge in your wondering, thinking, and/or reflecting on autumn leaves?

How has God spoken to you through His world and His Word today?

How might autumn leaves serve as an ongoing prompt for prayer and meditation? Take the picture you took and make it your phone or computer background this month to remind you of how God spoke to you through leaves.

### **The following questions are for doctoral project participants:**

How long did you spend on this autumn leaves meditation?

Did you read or listen to the devotional? Or both? What feedback do you have on the devotional (length, content, relevance to your life)?

What prompted you to pick this particular meditation?

Was this meditation a part of your outdoor recreational activity? If so, what activity?

### **RELATED VERSES**

Jeremiah 8:13 - *When I would gather them, declares the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.*

Psalms 71:8-9 - *My mouth is filled with your praise, and with your glory all the day. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not*

*when my strength is spent.*

*Psalms 71:17-18 - O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.*



# LEAVES DEVOTIONAL

Isaiah 34:4

“All the host of heaven shall rot away and the skies roll up like a scroll; and their host shall fall as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree.”

## EXPERIENCE

The colors of fall leaves are incredibly pretty, even though the leaves are dying. The stunning orange, yellow, and red color variations let us know the leaves are about to fall to the ground. Leaves do radiate a beauty in their last moments, but only if they are connected to the tree.

This fall, I went out to pick some green leaves off a tree in which most of the leaves had already turned color. I took my green leaves and clipped their stems to a dead tree. My work colleagues laughed at me, wondering if I had lost my mind. Together we watched as my leaves withered over the next few days. The leaves turned from green to brown—no orange, no yellow, no red. The leaves did not die with resplendent color. Their demise was absent of glory. They withered away and fell without any beauty at all.



## CONTEMPLATION

The demise of leaves is emblematic of our own human deaths. Death is inevitable and unavoidable. It is sorrowful, but it need not be without a certain beauty. Christians have an opportunity to die beautifully even as death is ultimately a grotesque reality. Many leaves die well, they die with a richness of color that makes people marvel. Their color is stunning. Christians can also approach their death in a way that others marvel. Christians die beautifully when their deaths cause others to glory in Christ Jesus. This glorious fading happens only as they remain connected to the tree.

Application: In John 15:4, Jesus exhorts his people to remain in him. When a believer's life is fading over years, months, weeks, or days, their life in Christ has an opportunity to reflect the glory of their maker. As they remain in Christ till their dying breath, the beauty of God shines through. I cannot help but think of two saints who died recently. As death was imminent, both Linc and Bob spent their last few days on earth speaking of Jesus to every family member, visitor, and hospital staff member who entered their rooms. As these men's strength was fading, the glory of their creator's strength was on display. Linc and Bob lived out Psalm 71:17-18. The passage is clear about how this glorious strength is exhibited:

*"I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come."*

My hope for believers' whose life is in its final fade is that the strength of their Savior may be beautifully displayed. However, believers in all stages of life are called to die well. The fall leaves are a reminder of Jesus's call in Luke 9:23-24 to die daily. He said:

*"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."*

Whatever season of life this finds you, we are called together to die to self and live unto Christ in such a way that Christ is magnified in our lives. How might you “take up your cross” for Christ’s sake today?

## PRAYER

Lord God, death is a reality with which I must reckon. Though I do not enjoy pondering the subject, help me to yearn to live this life and to expire from this life in such a way that displays your beauty. I long that my life from first to last breath might glorify you. Would you be pleased to allow my life to proclaim your might and your glory through those years of gray hairs and until my last breath. And show me this very day, how I might deny myself, losing my life for your sake? I ask it in Christ’s name. Amen.

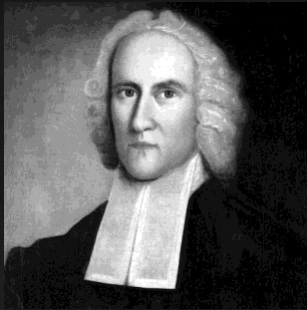
## CONFIRMATION

Withering leaves are an emblem in Scripture (Isaiah 34:4 and Jeremiah 8:13) of human death. Jonathan Edwards (see below) also saw the connection between the differing seasons and the human experience. Edwards specifically made the connection between the church (redeemed humanity) and leaves. It is interesting to note how Shakespeare (see below) saw the specific connection between autumn leaves and dying beautifully.

- *Colorful fall leaves are an emblem of aging and dying. Fall leaves call out to believers to age and to die in such a manner that expresses the glory of God.*

**SCIENCE**  
**CORNER**

“The autumn leaf is in its final phase of its life span. It has accomplished its work on behalf of the tree, so it has only one final task—beauty! The green chlorophyll makes its way from the leaf to the inner parts of the tree leaving behind the breathtaking colors we observe. What is left behind in the leaf are only the materials the tree is unable to use. The colors come about simply by old age and the quickly fading life of the leaf. The stem forms a last layer of substance between it and the twig, when completed the leaf is enabled to fall on its own. Often a gentle breeze is all it takes to bring about the leaf’s fall to the ground.”<sup>1</sup>



**Jonathan Edwards**

**FROM IMAGES OF DIVINE THINGS NO. 99**

*“The various changes of a tree in different seasons, and what comes to pass in its leaves, flowers and fruit in innumerable instances that might be mentioned, is a lively image of what is to be seen in the church. . . A tree [and its leaves] also is [in] many ways a lively image of a particular Christian, with regard to the new man, and is so spoken of in Scripture.”<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Anna Botsford Comstock, *Handbook of Nature Study* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 621-622.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:89



## William Shakespeare

### From Sonnet 73

*"That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the death-bed whereon it must expire  
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.  
This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long."*

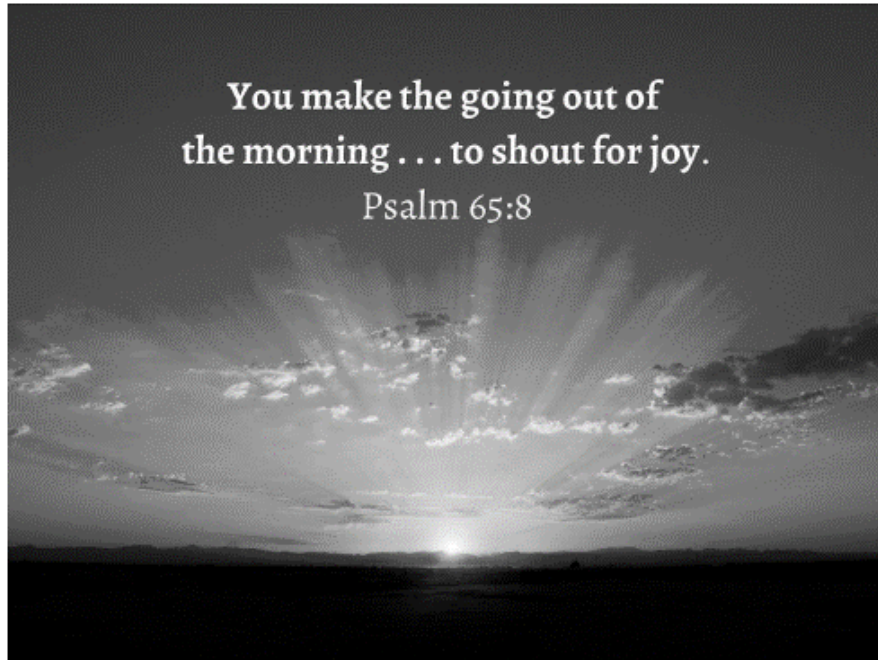
## APPENDIX 10

### SUNRISE MEDITATION

The follow is a sample of the “Sunrise” meditation. The full (color) version can be found at [www.thinkingoutdoors.org](http://www.thinkingoutdoors.org).

## Do Your Own Sunrise Meditation

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### “DO YOUR OWN” SUNRISE MEDITATION

Name: \_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_

Other:

**EXPERIENCE** - Use all of your five senses that are relevant.

- Use as many descriptive words as you can think of to describe the sunrise you are experiencing.

**CONTEMPLATE** - What do you know and observe of God’s Word and world?

(Wonder, Think, and Make Connections)

- In what ways does the sunrise reflect the beauty of God?

- What are all the ways you can think of that God is beautiful?
- What do sunrises communicate about fresh starts? Where do you need a fresh start today?

**PRAYER**

- How does the sunrise prompt you to praise God, thank God, confess your sin to God, and/or delight in God?

**CONFIRM** with Scripture

- How has God spoken to you through His world and His Word today?
- What application does this meditation have for your life?
- As you see and experience sunrises in the future, what will you remember from this meditation? How has this meditation shaped your perspective of sunrises?

**RELATED VERSES**

Pick a few of the following verses to look up and reflect upon:

Psalm 65:5-8

Psalm 19:1,4-5

Malachi 1:11

Psalm 50:1-2

Psalm 113:3-8

Psalm 80: 3, 7, 19

Job 38:12-13

Psalm 57:8

Psalm 119:147

Proverbs 4:18

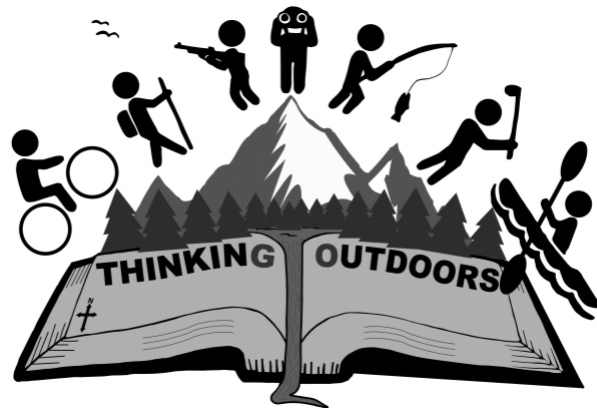
Psalm 90:14

Isaiah 45:5-6

Isaiah 59:18-19

APPENDIX 11

THINKING OUTDOORS T-SHIRT AND STICKER





APPENDIX 12

PRE-PROJECT SURVEY PERCEPTIONS RELATED TO  
IDENTIFYING WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA  
WILDLIFE

Table A1. Pre-project survey perceptions related to identifying  
Western Pennsylvania wildlife

Perceptions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can confidently identify most Western PA trees by name.	8	7	3	8	3	1
I can confidently identify most Western PA birds by name.	6	8	4	7	0	5
I can confidently identify most Western PA plants by name.	8	6	8	6	1	1

APPENDIX 13

TOTAL MEAN SCORES FROM PRE-  
AND POST-PROJECT SURVEYS

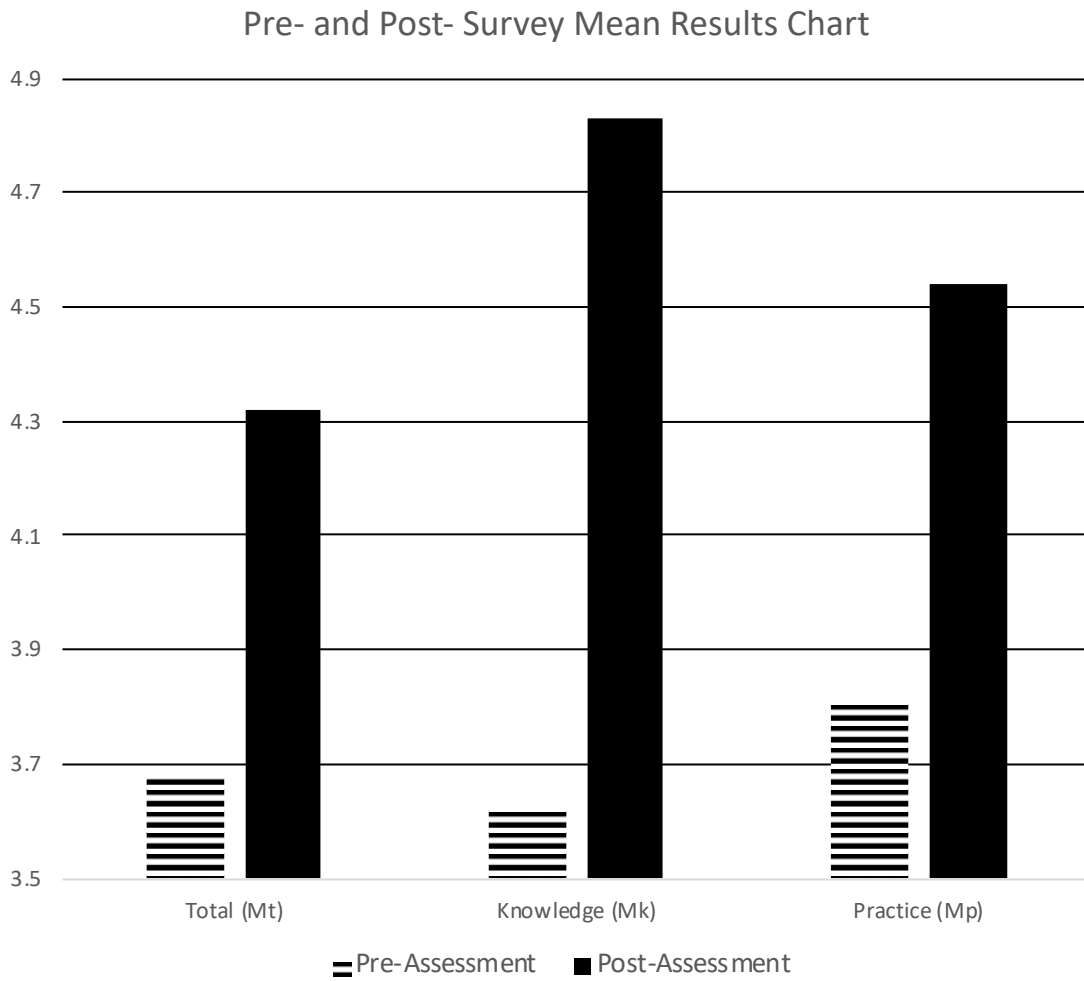


Figure A2. Total mean scores from pre- and post-project surveys

APPENDIX 14

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY  
CHANGE IN KNOWLEDGE

Table A2. Pre-project and post-project survey change in knowledge

Survey Statements	Pre-Project Mean	Post-Project Mean	Change
12. I am confident that my thoughts regarding how God speaks through creation are thoroughly biblical.	4.2	4.6	+0.4
15. I can confidently define biblical meditation.	3.6	5.1	+1.5
18. I am confident that my understanding of meditation is biblical.	3.9	5.0	+1.1
20. I can confidently outline key principles of biblical meditation.	3.1	4.6	+1.5
21. It is important for all believers to practice biblical meditation.	4.9	4.9	0.0
22. I can confidently open my Bible right now to a passage about the subject of meditation.	3.3	4.4	+1.1
26. I am familiar with Jonathan Edwards and his creation theology.	2.3	4.2	+1.9
27. The Scriptures prescribe meditation on the elements of creation.	4.7	5.4	+0.7
29. I know how to meditate on the elements of creation (birds, trees, etc.)	3.2	5.3	+2.1
31. It is important for all believers to listen to and learn from God's communication via creation.	5.0	5.1	+0.1
32. Discerning God's revelation of Himself via creation is a common practice among believers today.	4.2	4.0	-0.2
33. I can confidently open my Bible right now to a passage about the subject of General Revelation.	3.5	4.3	+0.8
34. I can confidently name two elements and explain from the Bible what God intended to communicate through them.	3.0	4.9	+1.9

APPENDIX 15

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY  
CHANGE IN PRACTICE

Table A3. Pre-project and post-project survey change in practice

Survey Statements	Pre-Project Mean	Post-Project Mean	Change
4. I struggle to pray while doing my recreational activities.	3.63	4.23	+0.60
5. I struggle to meditate upon God in a fruitful way during my recreational activities.	3.37	4.33	+0.90
6. I often find myself thinking about why God created a certain element in creation.	4.33	4.90	+0.60
11. I am prone to think about elements of nature (trees, birds, rivers) in relation to how they teach me something about God.	4.00	4.83	+0.80
13. The elements of creation are constant reminders to me to think about God.	5.00	5.23	+0.20
14. I am regularly thinking about God's natural world multiple times a day.	3.70	4.67	+0.90
16. I am passionate about God's Word.	5.23	5.50	+.27
17. I faithfully meditate on Scripture.	3.97	4.67	+0.70
23. Memorizing Scripture is an important practice for me.	3.47	3.87	+0.40
24. I confidently remember what I read in my devotional time most days.	4.10	4.53	+.43
25. I struggle significantly to keep my mind focused on one verse or biblical concept.	3.20	3.67	+.47
30. I am confident in my ability to faithfully practice biblical creation meditation.	3.43	5.03	+1.6

APPENDIX 16  
T-TESTS RESULTS

Table A4. T-test results from all statements

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre-Survey 1</i>	<i>Post-Survey 2</i>
Mean	125.1333333	146.8666667
Variance	270.9471264	275.4298851
Observations	30	30
Pearson Correlation	0.740518205	
Hypothesized Mean Differenc	0	
df	29	
t Stat	-9.996925498	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0000000000332	
t Critical one-tail	1.699127027	
P(T<=t) two-tail	6.64606E-11	
t Critical two-tail	2.045229642	

Table A5. T-test results from knowledge statements

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre-Survey 1</i>	<i>Post-Survey 2</i>
Mean	48.93333333	62.06666667
Variance	74.68505747	64.34022989
Observations	30	30
Pearson Correlation	0.675097276	
Hypothesized Mean Differer	0	
df	29	
t Stat	-10.67246589	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00000000000739	
t Critical one-tail	1.699127027	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.47736E-11	
t Critical two-tail	2.045229642	

Table A6. T-test results from practice statements

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre-Survey 1</i>	<i>Post-Survey 2</i>
Mean	47.43333333	55.46666667
Variance	61.4954023	51.9816092
Observations	30	30
Pearson Correlation	0.589728818	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	29	
t Stat	-6.432367136	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00000245	
t Critical one-tail	1.699127027	
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.89961E-07	
t Critical two-tail	2.045229642	

APPENDIX 17

PRE- AND POST-PROJECT  
SURVEY RESULTS

The following table shows the pre- and post-project survey results:  $M_{total}$ ,  $M_{knowledge}$ ,  $M_{practice}$ ,  $M_{\Delta}$ , and % increase based upon the following subgroups: outdoors people vs. non-outdoors people, church leaders vs. not in leadership, and more spiritually disciplined vs. less spiritually disciplined.

Table A7. Pre- and post-project survey results

Subgroups	$M_i$ Pre	$M_i$ Post	$M_i$ $M_{\Delta}$	% $\Delta$	$M_k$ Pre	$M_k$ Post	$M_k$ $M_{\Delta}$	% $\Delta$	$M_p$ Pre	$M_p$ Post	$M_p$ $M_{\Delta}$	% $\Delta$
All Participants	3.68	4.32	.639	17.4	3.76	4.77	1.01	26.9	3.95	4.62	.670	17.0
Outdoors People	3.81	4.50	.686	18.0	3.90	4.98	1.09	27.9	3.97	4.72	.750	18.9
Non-Outdoors People	3.43	4.08	.650	19.0	3.48	4.49	1.01	29.0	3.89	4.53	.644	16.6
Church leaders	3.69	4.40	.708	19.2	3.87	4.91	1.04	26.9	3.92	4.71	.795	20.2
Those not in church leadership	3.66	4.25	.594	16.2	3.63	4.64	1.01	27.8	3.99	4.57	.578	14.5
More spiritually disciplined	3.76	4.35	.590	15.7	3.87	4.82	.944	24.4	4.19	4.72	.533	12.7
Less spiritually disciplined	3.56	4.32	.761	21.4	3.60	4.77	1.18	32.8	3.67	4.57	.893	24.3

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING PEOPLE FOR BIBLICAL MEDITATION ON CREATION AT ST. PAUL'S EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOMERSET, PENNSYLVANIA

Scott Paul Steltzer, DEdMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022  
Faculty Supervisor: Donald S. Whitney

The Thinking Outdoors ministry project was developed to equip participants to meditate on the elements (e.g., trees, leaves, thorns) of creation at St. Paul's EPC in Somerset, Pennsylvania. The project aimed to engage participants in creation meditation as they enjoyed their favorite outdoor recreational activities in order to equip and inspire them to meditate on Scripture and, ultimately, on God. Chapter 1 outlines the context, rationale, purpose, goals, and methodology of this project. Chapter 2 defends the biblical and theological basis for creation meditation, proposing that the biblical authors prescribe meditation on emblematic elements in creation as integrally important for enhancing believers' understanding of, faith in, and worship of God as well as apprehension of and delight in his Word. Chapter 3 describes how creation meditation is faithfully practiced within the parameters of a biblical and historically orthodox theology and methodology. Chapter 4 details the background, development, promotion, and implementation of this creation meditation project. Chapter 5 evaluates the collected data, analyzing and reflecting upon it, for the purpose of potential future use in other settings.

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