THE NEED FOR MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE:
TO FASHION THE CHRISTIAN MIND AND
FORM A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

by

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper will be to demonstrate that the spiritual discipline of meditation on Scripture is an essential practice needed for the formation of a Christian mind and the development of a Biblical worldview.

The concept of Christian meditation on Scripture will be defined as the prolonged thinking on a passage of Scripture so that the Scripture’s meaning may be more fully apprehended, and its transforming principles may be applied to one’s life.

A Christian mind then is one that thinks in terms of Biblical revelation. It is a mind that wants to view the world and reality in a way that is informed by the Word of God. It is a mind that seeks to think God’s thoughts after Him.

A Biblical worldview will be defined as a system of beliefs and behaviors that center on the sovereignty of God as revealed by the pages of the Bible.

In the midst of the busy, technology driven modern life it is extremely difficult for people to find time for focused concentration. Thus the question of how meditation on Scripture can be achieved in a modern context must be answered.

The ministry and practices of Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards will be examined to glean ideas of the importance of the practice. As well examples of how to apply meditation on Scripture in a modern context and overcome stumbling blocks to the practice will be sought.
Meditation, when viewed properly, can become an initial response to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30) because it requires use of all these faculties. When viewed in this way the importance of the practice can be understood and applied. In the end, meditation on Scripture is based on belief that Christ is all in all, and Christians need eyes to see God’s beauty. Then lives can become saturated with the reality of God and His call for His people to live for His glory.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE NEED FOR MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE

John Frame defines theology as the application of Scripture to all of life.\(^1\) The application of Scripture to life is part of the sanctification process that occurs by the coordinated effort of the Christian and the Holy Spirit. Gordon Smith states, “The whole of the New Testament assumes that a Christian is someone who grows toward spiritual maturity.”\(^2\) In order to apply Scripture to all aspects of life a person needs to be able to think about all of life in a Christian context. This process is spiritual formation that results in a Christian set of presuppositions, or worldview.

A worldview defines a person’s basic beliefs about reality and will direct the actions and attitudes of that individual. It has been observed that many Evangelicals in America fail to live out the basic commands of Scripture.\(^3\) The Word of God is being preached but many worshipers are unable to process the sermons they hear on Sunday in such a way as to apply them during the week. The result is a great lack of spiritual growth and maturity. The Barna Group made the following conclusions based on research conducted in 2009:

Our studies this year among pastors showed that almost nine out of ten senior pastors of Protestant churches asserted that spiritual immaturity is one of the most serious problems facing the Church. Yet relatively few of those pastors believe that such immaturity is reflected in their church. Few pastors have gone so far as to give their

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\(^2\) Gordon Smith, *Called to be Saints* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 14.

congregants a specific, written statement of how they define spiritual maturity, how it might be measured, the strategy for facilitating such maturity, or what scriptural passages are most helpful in describing and fostering maturity. Those pastors who made any attempt to measure maturity were more likely to gauge depth on the basis of participation in programs than to evaluate people’s spiritual understanding or any type of transformational fruit in their lives. Overall, less than one out of every ten pastors said they were completely satisfied with how they assess the spiritual condition of their congregation.

In order for Christians to act in accordance with Scripture they must do more than attend sermons. They must learn to think as Christians in order to grow as Christians. There must be definable steps or practices to help in the process of spiritual growth.

In the past several decades a number of books have been written to address the need of spiritual disciplines as tools for spiritual formation and Christian growth. Yet spiritual disciplines only have value as a means to an end. If people do not have a vision or goal for the practice of disciplines then the discipline will have little effect. People must recognize the need to view all of life through the lens of Scripture. It is only by the sanctifying process that worldviews will change and spiritual maturity realized.

One much needed discipline is meditation on Scripture. Christian thinking grows out of the spiritual discipline of Biblical meditation which is focused attention on the words of Scripture. Yet meditation as a term is seldom used because of its association with Eastern Religions and the New Age Movement. Most authors of books on spiritual disciplines acknowledge the idea behind meditation but search for other terms to identify it. There is a need to return the term meditation to its Christian connotation and root as a spiritual discipline. And meditation must be practiced with the goal of Christ-like obedience to the words that are reflected upon.

4 Ibid.

5 See pages 20-22 of this paper.
Forefathers to modern Evangelicals are the English Puritans. They represent much of what the modern Evangelical lacks. In fact J.I. Packer, when addressing what modern Christians need to learn from the Puritans, writes:

The answer, in one word, is maturity. Maturity is a compound of wisdom, goodwill, resilience, and creativity. The Puritans exemplified maturity; we don’t. We are spiritual dwarfs. A much-travelled leader, a Native American (be it said), has declared that he finds North American Protestantism, man-centered, manipulative, success-oriented, self-indulgent and sentimental, as it blatantly is, to be 3,000 miles wide and half an inch deep.6

A call to address this deficient in spiritual maturity must go forth if change of the current Christian environment is to occur.

In addition to Puritan maturity there was also the quality of their spiritual experience in which communion with Jesus was central and the Scripture was supreme. According to J.I. Packer the Puritans knew themselves to be creatures of thought, affection, and will. They understood that the way to the human heart (will) was through the human head (mind), thus the practice of meditation was widespread among them.7 The Puritan pastor Richard Baxter and the great American theologian Jonathan Edwards are examples of men who had a strong practice of meditation that was focused on Scripture and free from New Age and Eastern religious connotations of meditation. The lives and practices of these two men will be examined to help recapture the style of intensive meditation on Scripture necessary to promote spiritual maturity.

A final point of consideration is the fact that modern people seem to live a life of constant distraction. The reign of technology in Western culture is so pervasive that it often goes unnoticed. The drive for greater efficiency has led to an endless pursuit that seems to

7 Ibid., 24.
loop on itself. The reason for being more efficient is to be more efficient and not for improved quality of life. In the midst of the busy, technology driven modern life it is extremely difficult for people to find time for focused concentration. Thus the question of how meditation on Scripture can be achieved in a modern context must be answered. The focus of this paper will be to demonstrate that the spiritual discipline of meditation on Scripture is an essential practice needed for a Christian to develop a Biblical worldview.

**Defining Terms – Meditation**

In order to more accurately address the focus of this paper a few key concepts need to be discussed and defined. Meditation as it will be described throughout this paper is meditation on Scripture. It is meditation that is full of content and conversational. Christianity celebrates the God who speaks. The account of creation involves words, and God’s revelation of himself to mankind is through the words found in the pages of Scripture. J.I. Packer describes meditation as, “the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God.”\(^8\) Thus meditation practiced in a Christian context is the activity of the mind focused on words, namely the words of sacred Scripture.

Secondly meditation is conversational. Again Christianity recognizes that God exists as trinity; God is three persons in one essence. Such an understanding of God allows for the acknowledgment of the relational nature of God. The very existence of God is one of eternal relationship within the Godhead. God’s revelation of himself to mankind in the words of Scripture shows his relational nature not only within the Godhead but also his relational nature with his creation. The pages of Scripture reveal that God walked with man in the

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garden, which discloses the conversational nature of God’s initial relationship with humanity. The doctrine of the incarnation teaches that God took on human flesh in order to restore the relational bond that was lost as a result of the sin of man. Meditation in a Christian context will be conversational as well in order to be true to the nature of God’s relationship with man. The conversational nature of meditation leads to the application of the teachings of Scripture to the living of one’s life.

Meditation on Scripture is not the practice associated with the Eastern religions of Hinduism or Buddhism. Nor is it the Westernized versions of these religions under the name New Age Movement. In these other forms of meditation the participant is attempting to empty or still his mind by removing words, thoughts, and ideas. These versions of meditation are anti-conceptual: they seek to move beyond concept formation into an altered consciousness. There are groups who want to bring Eastern style meditation under the umbrella of Christian experience. In the course of this paper some of those practices will be identified and dispelled.

For this paper the concept of Christian meditation on Scripture will be the prolonged thinking on a passage of Scripture so that the Scripture’s meaning may be more fully apprehended, and its transforming principles may be applied to one’s life. God’s Word is the focus of meditation. Because God is a person to know, there is content to meditation. A person does not empty her mind as taught in Eastern forms of meditation but instead she fills her mind with the Holy Word.

**Defining Terms – Biblical Worldview**

A second concept that needs to be addressed is the idea of a Biblical worldview. Worldview defines one’s beliefs about reality and one’s outlook on life. Charles Colson says
a worldview is "the sum total of our beliefs about the world." 9 James Sire defines worldview as a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, which can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions which a person holds about the basic constitution of reality and that provides the foundation on which a person lives and moves and has his being. 10 Random House defines it as "a philosophy of life." 11 A worldview is something much profounder than personality or socio-economic status. Worldview is the set of assumptions a person uses to see and define reality. These assumptions have been described as a fabric, a map, a pair of glasses, a blueprint, or a script of a play through which existence or reality is interpreted. Worldview is at the core of belief systems, value systems, and behavior which determine how people deal with the basic issues of life. It serves as a decision-making filter. It enables someone to process large amounts of complex information, experiences, relationships, and opportunities faced in life. Through a worldview filter persons gain clarity on what is important, true, and desirable. It has a dramatic influence on one’s choices in any given situation.

Currently there are a number of worldviews that people operate under which include naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, deism, and Christian theism (Biblical worldview) to name a few. The worldviews people most often hold are incoherent. Many times depending on education, family background, or cultural background a person may operate under a mixture of various worldviews. Barna Research Group reports:

Americans typically draw from a broad treasury of moral, spiritual and ethical sources of thought to concoct a uniquely personal brand of faith. Feeling freed from

the boundaries established by the Christian faith, and immersed in a postmodern society which revels in participation, personal expression, satisfying relationships, and authentic experiences, we become our own unchallenged spiritual authorities, defining truth and reality as we see fit. Consequently, more and more people are engaged in hybrid faiths, mixing elements from different historical eras and divergent theological perspectives.12

Over the course of time man has picked up options from natural, supernatural, pre-modern, modern, and post-modern schools of thought on how to process and interpret the sense data he is constantly collecting.

Worldviews also operate on a sub-conscious level. The person does not always recognize the worldview or mixture of worldviews he is using to interpret his world. It is like the old proverb that says, “If you want to know what water is don’t ask a fish.” It is difficult to recognize the ways that worldview shapes thinking without a deliberate and sustained effort on the part of an individual. It requires a disciplined evaluation of thoughts, ideas, theories, advertisements, and propaganda to wade through the worldview smorgasbord.

James Orr suggests that there is an assured Christian view of life, which has a character, coherence, and unity of its own. It stands in sharp contrast with counter theories and speculations.13 A Biblical worldview has been tested by history and experience. A Biblical worldview stands or falls on its integrity. It is not piecemeal. It is a holistic approach to interpreting reality that offers stability of thought and unity of insight. A Biblical worldview is able to provide a reasonable and all-embracing view of all disciplines of study from religion to science, history, law, the humanities, the arts, etc. For the purpose

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of this paper a Biblical worldview will be defined as a system of beliefs and behaviors that center on the sovereignty of God as revealed by the pages of the Bible.

Defining Terms – Christian Mind

A third concept that needs recognition for the discussion that follows is the idea of a Christian mind. Aristotle said that “all men by nature desire to know.”14 It is the rational side of human existence that is often said to separate man from beast. In creating mankind in His image God endowed humanity with reason, creativity, and relational skills that make humans unique. In Genesis 2 and 3 God communicates with man in a way that He does not communicate with animals. God gives man work to do; he is to till and keep the garden God has created. In this association God is seen as cooperating with man by making him steward of His creation. Additionally God invites man to name the animals showing man’s governance over another aspect of creation as well. When God created woman from the man, Adam demonstrated his ability to use language in the form of poetry as praise for what God had made. As a result of this creative process it can be demonstrated that all minds have a spiritual basis.

Genesis 3 also records the disobedience of man as sin entered the creation. Romans 5:12 states “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.”15 All people have been

14 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W.D. Ross in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1552. What men know and how they know it has been a matter of contention in philosophy. Epistemology is born from that desire as men try to define the source or sources of knowledge. Epistemology (which comes from two Greek words episteme, meaning knowledge, and logo, meaning explanation) is the study of the nature of knowledge and justification. The long debate over what constitutes the source of knowledge can be read in many philosophy texts.

affected by sin. The original innocent state in which mankind was created has been lost. Humans by nature are at enmity with God and seek autonomy from God. All aspects of humanity are affected by sin including the mind. Scripture describes the mind as being darkened (Eph. 4:18). Men now by nature “suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18). Their minds are “senseless” and “futile” in their thinking (Rom. 1:21).

A Christian mind is different because a Christian mind is regenerate. It no longer seeks to be autonomous. A Christian mind has come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and therefore is humble. It places God and God’s Word as the defining factors for interpreting human existence. However, just because the Christian mind is regenerate does not mean it is completely free of its tendencies to be autonomous nor has it been totally freed from the influences of educational background, social status, family, culture, etc. As all Christians go through life in a process of sanctification so must the mind. The formation of a Christian mind requires persistent obedience to the Word of God. It takes time and effort to sort through all the ideas that sound reasonable only to discover later that these are inconsistent with Biblical beliefs. It is a lifelong struggle for a person to conform his thinking to the thinking of Christ. Yet it is a struggle that must occur in order for true discipleship to happen.

A Christian mind then is one that thinks in terms of Biblical revelation. It is a mind that wants to view the world and reality in a way that is informed by the Word of God. It is a mind that seeks to think God’s thoughts after Him. Harry Blamires describes the Christian mind as “a mind trained, informed, equipped to handle data of secular controversy within a framework of reference which is constructed of Christian presuppositions. The Christian
mind is the prerequisite for Christian thinking. Christian thinking is the prerequisite for Christian action.”

**Statement of Problem**

Mark Noll in his work, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, plainly states the problem. “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.” What Noll and others are noting is that despite a number of other virtues and accomplishments American Evangelicals are not worthy of imitation in their thinking. It is most often the result of one of two errors. Evangelicals have tended to go along with culture. By neglecting serious intellectual engagement with the issues of modern society Evangelicals have essentially allowed secular universities, Madison Avenue, and MTV to shape the way children of God view the world. Noll states, “It is very easy to adopt the herd instincts of popular culture and assume that life exists as a series of opportunities for pleasure, self-expression, and the increase of comfort.”

The second error Evangelicals fall into that truncates serious intellectual pursuits is the promotion of the idea that Heaven is home and this world does not matter. Evangelicals have in effect abandoned environmental and social issues because these are too difficult to solve. The Christian belief in eternity is one of the most important convictions held by believers. Yet the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 still stands which reads:

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18 Ibid., 34.

19 Ibid., 34.
God blessed them, and God said unto them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’

The call to stewardship is still part of the human experience. Neglecting to think about ways in which life can be improved to glorify God is to demean the whole realm of existence. Instead, life must be viewed and accepted as a gift from God. It must be lived with a deep understanding of what God requires and dictates. Dedicated and persistent thought will lead to deeper understanding of existence and meaning of life in this world as well as the next.

One of the key tenets that typically mark people who claim Evangelical status is the conviction that the Bible is the revealed Word of God. In it, God is revealed as the creator and sustainer of life. He is the author of human institutions such as family, work, and government. He is the source of creativity, harmony, and beauty. Despite these beliefs Evangelicals have for the most part neglected serious analysis of nature, human society, and the arts.\(^{20}\)

The reason for the lack of engagement in certain areas of discourse is a suspicion that too much thinking and learning are unnecessary for faith and can even be a detriment to that same faith. Many Christians have seen the trend of large numbers of high school youth who attend church too quickly drop that attendance during their college years. Thus an assumption is made that the correlation between loss of devotion and higher education is direct. To be sure some students are exposed to professors who ridicule the Christian faith. Most biological science classes will teach evolutionary theories of life development. Books will be read from authors who have little awareness of Christian values. As a result of the heavy secular influence many Christians distrust intellectual life.

\(^{20}\) Noll, 4.
The problem, however, does not rest solely on exposure to non-Christian ideals and philosophies. The lack of a Christian mind in the older generation who trains and teaches the young contributes to the inability of the next generation to withstand the cultural onslaught. J. Gresham Machen saw this problem in 1912 when he stated:

We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer, and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity form being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is destroy the obstacle at its root. . . . What is today a matter of academic speculation begins tomorrow to move armies and pull down empires.21

Much of the problem associated with the flight of young people from devotion to Christian practices is a lack of spiritual commitment and maturity. Often the faith of these young people is nominal at best. They have not been taught to think and process information in a Christian manner.

In today’s educational system and in society in general divergent thinking is often discouraged. Harry Blamires addresses the problem of why thinkers in general are frustrating and unattractive. He writes:

The thinker challenges current prejudices. He distrusts the complacent. He obstructs the busy pragmatists. He questions the very foundations of all about him, and in so doing throws doubt upon aims, motives, and purposes which those who are running affairs have neither time nor patience to investigate. The thinker is a nuisance. He is a luxury that modern society cannot afford. It will therefore naturally, and on its own terms justifiably, strives to keep him quiet, to restrict his influence, to ignore him. It will try to pretend that he does not exist.22

If thinkers have so much difficulty in the secular world then it is not surprising that distinctly Christian thinkers are even rarer.

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22 Blamires, 50.
Blamires began his work on the Christian mind with the statement that “there is no longer a Christian mind.” He made this statement viewing the landscape of 1960’s Great Britain. What was true then in that nation seems even more applicable to the United States in the twenty-first century. He writes:

There is still, of course, a Christian ethic, a Christian practice, and a Christian spirituality. As a moral being, the modern Christian subscribes to a code other than that of the non-Christian. As a member of the Church, he undertakes obligations and observations ignored by the non-Christian. As a spiritual being, in prayer and meditation, he strives to cultivate a dimension of life unexplored by the non-Christian. But as a thinking being, the modern Christian has succumbed to secularization. He accepts religion – its morality, its worship, its spiritual culture; but he rejects the religious view of life, the view which sets all earthly issues within the context of the eternal, the view which relates all human problems – social, political, cultural – to the doctrinal foundations of the Christian Faith, the view which sees all things here below in terms of God’s supremacy and earth’s transitoriness, in terms of Heaven and Hell.\textsuperscript{23}

Succumbing to secularization in thinking is what is meant by the loss of a Christian mind which results in the loss of a Christian worldview. All the topics Blamires quoted above need to be viewed through the lens of Scripture. However, many Christians are not advancing in their ability to view life in a Biblical manner.

The Barna Group conducted a study among a representative sample of adults to determine how many people held a Biblical worldview. The survey was conducted in 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2009. For purposes of the survey a Biblical worldview was defined as believing absolute moral truth exists; the Bible is totally accurate in all the principles it teaches; Satan is considered a real being; a person cannot earn entrance into heaven via good works; Jesus lived a sinless life on earth; God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 3.
world and is still rules creation today. If a person held all these beliefs he was deemed to have a Biblical worldview.24

Overall, the latest survey showed only nine percent of the population in the United States held a Biblical worldview. When the research was broken out into various sub-populations, a group was identified as born-again based on answers to questions concerning their beliefs and relationship with Jesus Christ. Among born-again believers less than one out of five (19%) were identified as having a Biblical worldview. Such results seem to be surprising considering born-again believers typically are defined by the acknowledgement of the five statements used by Barna to conduct the research. Even with a high rate of respondents in this group acknowledging the accuracy of the Bible’s teachings (nearly 80%) there is an abysmal failure to apply the words of Scripture to the paradigm by which they gauge reality. When compared to the previous surveys the number of born-again believers with a Biblical worldview was flat: 18% in 1995, 22% in 2000, 21% in 2005, and 19% in 2009. This shows the great need for evangelical Christians to find more effective ways of gaining a Biblical worldview.

Again Noll has cutting insight into the root of the problem with the evangelical mind. He writes:

American Evangelicals never doubted that Christianity was the truth. . . . What they did do, however . . . was to make most questions of truth into questions of practicality. What message would be most effective? What do people most want to hear? What can we say that will both convert people and draw them to our particular church?25

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25 Noll, 67.
The result is preaching that does not offend but neither does it call people to account. Noll again writes:

To put it simply, the evangelical ethos is activistic, populist, pragmatic, and utilitarian. It allows little space for broader or deeper intellectual effort because it is dominated by the urgencies of the moment.\textsuperscript{26}

The drive to realize results left little time for evangelical pastors to think about how God wanted his children to relate to nature, society, ascetics, or the mind.

The glaring problems from lack of engagement with social issues to the absence of a Christian mind point desperately to the need for an adjustment in approach to forming and training a Biblical mindset. It is clear that there is a need to love God with all the mind in order to answer many of the problems mentioned. The evidence points to the need for a more systematic and rigorous application of the Word of God to the lives of believers. Even with the revival of the awareness of spiritual disciplines within American Protestantism the spiritual disciplines are not regarded as essential.\textsuperscript{27} The use of the spiritual discipline of meditation on Scripture is needed to help transform the minds of believers so that a more effective engagement of the world with the Gospel can be made.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 12.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ASSOCIATED WITH THE NEED FOR MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE

Spiritual Disciplines

As mentioned in the introductory section of this paper a number of works have been published on spiritual disciplines. Richard Foster’s book, *Celebration of the Disciplines*, was a ground-breaking work that brought spiritual disciplines back into the contemporary Christian landscape. His book served as a catalyst to renew discussion and research of the ancient ascetic practices that had been lost by most Protestants due to the practices’ associations with Catholicism. People wonder how they can practice the disciplines without viewing them as a means to meriting forgiveness or at least meriting God’s favor. In general Protestants exhibit scorn for ascetic practices.¹ Since Foster’s book, evangelical publishers are releasing several books a year on the importance and practice of spiritual disciplines.² Dallas Willard points out two factors that contribute to the change in Protestant views that have allowed for a new interest in spiritual disciplines. One is the softening of denomination divides among Protestants. In forties and fifties marriage or even friendships were discouraged across denominational lines. In the sixties and seventies these attitudes virtually disappeared resulting in what Willard calls the diffusion of Protestant sectarianism. The


² Gordon Smith, *Called to be Saints* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 16.
other is a desire for a faith that touches all of life. It must be noted that the developing the habit of practicing spiritual disciplines is not the goal. In order for the disciplines to be useful the goal of Christian maturity must be kept in mind. Growth in Christ-likeness must shape all of life.

In acknowledging the need of Christian maturity as a goal, Dallas Willard wrote *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* in 1988. Willard provides a good introductory guide to spiritual disciplines, and acknowledges the revival of interest in the spiritual disciplines sparked by Foster’s work. At the time of publication Willard felt that the spiritual disciplines where still not regarded as essential to Christian growth by the Christian populace. His contribution was to provide a theology of the disciplines as a means for transforming lives. Often people know the need for change but are unable to articulate how to do it. Willard says, “Failure to act in definite ways will guarantee that transformation will not come to pass.” The life of discipleship that so many fail to achieve is found in an “intelligent, informed, unyielding resolve to live as Jesus lived in all aspects of life, not just in the moment of specific choice or action.”

Donald Whitney wrote *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* which provides a survey of spiritual disciplines as well. But Whitney’s work tends to have an increased emphasis on actual implementation of the disciplines in the life of the Christian. He focuses

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4 Ibid., 25.
5 Ibid., 20.
6 Ibid., 10.
on practices such as Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning.

Kyle Strobel’s book, *Formed for the Glory of God*, addresses key issues about spiritual disciplines. “Too many people grab practices from the tradition (of spiritual disciplines) to fix their spiritual lives without ever investigating the purpose of these practices.” The spiritual disciplines are not a form of Christian self-help curriculum. Instead Strobel reminds readers that the disciplines are a means of grace. The term “means of grace” links the practices to salvation. Thus the goal of the disciplines is the transformation of character not just an ascetic practice. Strobel says, “The means of grace are actions that help us focus more fully on God, recognizing that God is the fountain from which all grace flows.”

**Meditation on Scripture**

In *Celebration of the Disciplines* Foster surveyed various spiritual disciplines including meditation. He defines Christian meditation very simply as the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word. He states, “It involves no hidden mysteries, no secret mantras, no mental gymnastics, no esoteric flights into the cosmic consciousness.” Due to the relational nature of God meditation on God’s written word is a vehicle for

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8 Ibid., 72.

communication. By meditating on Scripture “a familiar friendship with Jesus” grows.\textsuperscript{10} It is a friendship filled with awe and reverence as well as intimacy.

When Willard enumerates various disciplines he divides them into disciplines of abstinence and disciplines of engagement. He does not mention meditation as a spiritual discipline directly; instead he discusses the concept of meditation on Scripture under the title of study which is a discipline of engagement with God’s Word. As noted earlier a relational God wants a means to communicate with His people, and the Bible is one of those vehicles God has provided the Word but his children must in turn engage that Word with serious thought. Calvin Miller remarks: “Mystics without study are only spiritual romantics who want relationship without effort.”\textsuperscript{11}

Donald Whitney, like Willard, does not devote a chapter to meditation as a discipline but covers the concept under the topics: Bible intake, prayer, and journaling. He defines meditation as deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purpose of understanding, application, and prayer.\textsuperscript{12} Whitney holds that meditation goes beyond hearing, reading, studying, and even memorizing as a way of taking in Scripture. He compares meditation on Scripture within the context of Bible intake to the process of brewing tea. He states:

A simple analogy would be a cup of tea. You are the cup of hot water and the intake of Scripture is represented by the tea bag. Hearing God’s Word is like one dip of the tea bag into the cup. Some of the tea’s flavor is absorbed by the water, but not as much as would occur with a more thorough soaking of the bag.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{11} Calvin Miller, \textit{The Table of Inwardness} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. 1984), 83.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Brief or intermittent encounters with the Word of God are like dips of the bag in the cup. The more often these occur the more effect it has. Whitney says, “Meditation, however, is like immersing the bag completely and letting it steep until the entire rich tea flavor has been extracted and the hot water is thoroughly tinctured reddish brown.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Meditation on the words of Scripture should be done in such a way that changes the manner the events of the world are viewed. It has been attributed to Karl Barth that the best way to interpret the events described in the newspaper is with the Bible.\footnote{Perhaps the source that is most consistent with the alleged ‘quote’ comes from a Time magazine article published on Friday, May 31, 1963, which states: "[Barth] recalls that 40 years ago he advised young theologians ‘to take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.’"} Willard writes: “In study we also strive to see the Word of God at work in the lives of others, in the church, in history, and in nature. We not only read and hear and inquire, be we meditate on what comes before us; that is, we withdraw into silence where we prayerfully and steadily focus upon it. In this way its meaning for us can emerge and form us as God works in the depths of our heart, mind, and soul.”\footnote{Willard, 177.}

A second book, \textit{Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation}, by Richard Foster examines in greater detail the concept of meditation on Scripture and how to do it more effectively. Two sections that are particularly germane to this topic are concerned with reading Scripture with your heart and with your mind. In the section on reading with the heart Foster relates how one must read expectantly, or more exactly, how one must read anticipating the Spirit God to teach through the text. One must be reflective with each passage. Taking time to read and reread certain passages. The passage must then be obeyed.
Obedience comes with prayer to apply the passage or teaching to the appropriate areas of life.\textsuperscript{17} In the section on reading with the mind Foster examines how Scripture reading must engage the mind in order to be transformative. One must read to gain understanding. One must read with the awareness of the type of literature the particular passage falls under and what that type of literature intends to communicate.\textsuperscript{18}

Michael Casey wrote, \textit{Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina}, which provides background information that is both historical and practical as a foundation for the practice. Written from a Catholic perspective the practice does have slight mystical elements however the book offers good general suggestions for creating a regular, obedience oriented, and focused practice of Bible reading.

In the opening chapter Casey addresses several issues that limit or distract readers from the sacred text. He calls into question the reader’s devotion and fidelity to the practice of reading the Word in a way that does not jump from text to text. He states:

Needless to say, there are difficulties experienced in a method of reading that takes seriously the integrity of the text. Here our contemporary culture is no help. We are obsessed with getting to the bottom line that we are inclined to short-circuit necessary preliminaries. As a result our understanding of the content is often approximate and superficial … Like children who need their food cut up for them, we prefer to deal with little pieces rather than to chew over complex issues for ourselves. If we wish to be nourished directly by the Scriptures without seeking a predigested substitute, then we will probably need to develop new skills.\textsuperscript{19}

Recognizing the central importance of Bible intake and practicing patience with reading will help individuals overcome distractions to form a consistent, planned reading habit.

\textsuperscript{17} Richard Foster, \textit{Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation} (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 69.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 78-79.

Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God by John Piper contains important sections on reading as thinking. Though thinking can be defined very broadly Piper focuses on the idea of the activity of the mind as it is engaged with the Word of God. Part of gaining understanding from what one reads depends on the questions one asks of the text. Why did the author use that word? Why is this idea here and not there? How does he use that word in other places? How is that word different for this other word he could have used? How does the combination of these words affect the meaning of that word? Why did he connect these statements with because or therefore or although? Is it logical? How does it fit with what another author in the Bible says? How does it fit with my experience? When questions are asked of the text the deeper, richer meaning can be discovered. In addition the active engagement of the mind allows for the text to penetrate the memory for later recall. Proper time spent with the Bible allows for careful observation, questioning, active minds, and integration of the text into understanding.

As mentioned previously, Whitney links prayer and Bible intake through the practice of meditation. Often a person reads Scripture, closes the book, and tries to shift gears into prayer. “Instead there should be a smooth, almost unnoticeable transition between Scripture input and prayer output so that we move even closer to God in those moments. This happens when there is the link of meditation in between.”

The process works like this: a passage of Scripture is read, then time is taken through meditation to allow what God has said to be digested and thought deeply about, and then the person is able to speak to God in a meaningful prayer. The individual has confidence that the

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21 Whitney, 71.
prayer is being spoken with God’s thoughts back to Him. A passion develops about the subject matter of the prayer since time has been taken to allow the Word to sink into the heart and soul. Thus the passage has now taken root and the transforming power of Scripture can be realized.

*The Contemplative Pastor* by Eugene Peterson is also an excellent source on the practice of meditation and on a contemplative lifestyle. Peterson points out that a life of meditation and contemplation is an active choice that must be guarded and defended in a world of constant busyness. A person must keep one’s mind free from the clutter of the urgent and focus instead on the necessary. Peterson writes:

In Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, there is a turbulent scene in which a whaleboat scuds across a frothing ocean in pursuit of the great whale, Moby Dick. The sailors are laboring fiercely, every muscle taut, all attention and energy concentrated on the task. The cosmic conflict between good and evil is joined; chaotic sea and demonic sea monster versus the morally outraged man, Captain Ahab. In this boat, however, there is one man who does nothing. He is languid in the crash and the cursing. This man is the harpooner, quiet and poised, waiting. And then this sentence: ‘To insure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooners of this world must start to their feet out of idleness, and not out of toil.’

Melville’s sentence is a text to set alongside the psalmist’s ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ (Ps. 46:10), and alongside Isaiah’s ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength’ (Isa. 30:15).

It is true for pastors but it is also true for any follower of Christ who wants to walk in obedience to Scripture and practice what has been taught and learned. He must take time to still the mind and calm the heart in order to hear the voice of God speak and allow the transforming process of discipleship to take hold.

When examining the practical aspects of meditation Donald Whitney writes of journaling as a helpful technique in overcoming the fast-paced, media-distracted world of

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today. In the same way that a student taking notes from a lecture or a parishioner taking
notes from a sermon keeps the person engaged with what is being said so journaling can help
provide focus to meditation. He states:

Without a pen in hand, I can get so distracted in meditation that I begin tacking one
unrelated thought to another until I’m shingling off into the fog of daydreams instead
to thinking in the light of Scripture. The discipline of writing down my meditations
in my journal helps me concentrate.\(^23\)

When a person records meditations in a journal he can follow more closely the voice of God
as He relates himself through the text.

While considering journaling as a help to meditation it should also be mentioned the
role of posture has on memory. Causal reading as opposed to focused reading or study often
occurs with changes in the body’s position. A study at Florida State University was
conducted to test the effect of body posture on remembering events from the subjects’ lives.
When the body was placed in a position similar to a position the body would be in during
certain events the recall was significantly higher. An example would be asking someone to
stand with his hand on the door knob and recall a time he opened a door for a stranger. In
such cases memory recall would be much better. An opposite example would be to instruct
someone to sit down with her elbows on the table and her head in her hands and have her tell
about a time she went to a sporting event. Here, the recall would be significantly less. If
body position effects recall of events in a persons’ life then body position may also have an
effect on the ability to concentrate, intake information, and recall it later. A relaxed or
reclined position may be less conducive to learning than a forward upright position.\(^24\)

\(^{23}\) Whitney, 208.

\(^{24}\) Katinka Dijkstra, Michael P. Kaaschak, and Rolf A. Zwann, “Body posture facilitates retrieval of
Improving concentration takes a little time and effort, as recent books on neuroplasticity such as *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain* by Sharon Begley explains, the structure and function of the adult brain is *not* set in stone as scientists have always said. When a person learns a new skill, memorizes information, or develops a new habit, the connections in the brain change. It's further evidence that the brain's abilities, including the ability to concentrate effectively, can be changed for the better. Research shows that these changes do not occur overnight, however. A person has to work at it consistently and regularly to reshape the brain. Meditation on Scripture and Bible memorization can be one of the activities that work to reshape the brain. While other activities can have similar physical effects Biblical meditation adds the additional spiritual element and benefit.

Richard Foster has a brief section in *Celebration of the Disciplines* on misconceptions about meditation that is helpful in pulling the practice back from New Age and Eastern religions. He states, “Eastern forms of meditation stress the need to become detached from the world. There is an emphasis upon losing personhood and individuality and merging with the Cosmic Mind.” If detachment is the goal of Eastern forms of meditation then attachment is the goal of Christian meditation. Meditation’s goal is not to create Christians who are unhealthy with an otherworldly kind of aura. Instead meditation produces believers who are living with a redirected life that deals successfully with the trials and difficulties of this life as well as being in communion with Christ so that the next life also has proper perspective.

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Donald Whitney acknowledges that even among believers meditation is often more closely associated with yoga, transcendental meditation, relaxation therapy, or the New Age Movement than with the Biblical text. Because of this association many Christians shy away from the practice and are suspicious of those who say they engage in meditation. It must be reiterated: “While some advocate a kind of meditation in which you do your best to empty your mind, Christian meditation involves filling your mind with God and truth.” Mental passivity is not the means but mental activity. Detachment is not the goal but a transforming knowledge of God and His Word that leads to a life of discipleship and obedience.

**Biblical Worldview**

As defined earlier a Biblical worldview is a system of beliefs and behaviors that center on the sovereignty of God and His character as revealed by the pages of the Bible as the basis for human living. James Sire’s book, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* is a good introductory survey of basic worldviews. Sire poses seven questions that are helpful in identifying a person’s worldview. What is really real? What is the nature of the world around us? What is a human being? What happens to a person at death? Why is it possible to know anything at all? How do we know right from wrong? What is the meaning of human history? How a person answers these questions will reveal the basic tenants of the worldview the individual holds. The answers will also indicate the consistency and commitment to the worldview.

In Alister McGrath’s book *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind* he deals with the relevance of theology to the landscape of faith.

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27 Whitney, 47.

Theology falls into a category of habits of the mind. Helping develop the thinking patterns of the mind directs the way people live out their faith. McGrath writes:

> We cannot love God without wanting to understand more about him. … We cannot allow Christ to reign in our hearts if he does not also guide our thinking.\(^{29}\)

Communities are unified by the objects of their affection. By helping provide clear and cohesive beliefs based on Biblical revelation churches can more readily help its membership live every area of existence in obedience to Christ.

McGrath also addresses how to engage culture which is the application of a worldview to the world in which one lives. He addresses how some portray “warfare” between natural sciences and religion. It gives the impression that one cannot believe in the existence of God and be a scientifically viable researcher, scholar, or even scientifically educated. Yet as McGrath points out, “When properly and legitimately applied, the scientific method is religiously neutral – neither supportive nor critical of religious beliefs.”\(^{30}\) But in order to fit with a certain agenda science is often spun in a way that implies science disproves religion. However Christian belief does not hold that God is a part of the created order. He is not discoverable or definable by scientific inquiry. Atheists seem to assume that Christians hold God as an extra and unnecessary item on a list of entities in the universe that atheists do not have. Yet a person with a Christian worldview knows he does not have to prove the existence of God within the created order, for God is outside and above the created order.

McGrath touches on this and other basic themes that have characterized a Biblical worldview through the ages. He seeks to focus on the positive role of theology in molding, nurturing,


\(^{30}\) Ibid., 111.
and sustaining the Christian vision of reality and how one can engage culture with a Christian mindset or world view.  

Sire covers Biblical theism by first focusing on the nature of God since it is the prime proposition. He states, “God is infinite and personal, transcendent and immanent, omniscient, sovereign and good.” God is prime reality. Sire goes on to define the universe as created by God, humankind as made in God’s image, death is a door to the next life which is lived in the presence of God or in a state of eternal separation from Him, humanity’s capacity to know is innately given by God, ethics is based on the character of God, and history is a linear, meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God’s purpose for humanity. Each statement is derived from the Biblical revelation of God that this paper identifies as a Biblical worldview. Sire in subsequent chapters defines deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, pantheism, New Age, and postmodern worldviews. He summarizes the basic tenets of each worldview. He often gives some historical information and contributions of historical figures in various categories. He also provides some examples of various worldviews in practice.

*Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* by Albert Wolters looks at a reformational worldview as a subset of a Biblical worldview. He defines a worldview as a comprehensive framework of one’s basic belief about things. He deliberately uses the vague term things because a worldview affects every possible thing about which a person can have a belief. Beliefs are different from feelings and opinions. Beliefs make a

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31 Ibid., 110.
32 Sire, 26.
33 Ibid., 26-44.
cognitive claim to some kind of knowledge to which a person is committed. The beliefs are said to be basic because these are beliefs that involve matters of general principle. A worldview is not a belief about facts such as who was Super Bowl champion last year. Instead a worldview is a belief about whether violence can ever be right. Do constant norms for human life exist? Is there a point to suffering? Does existence continue after death? Finally a worldview is a framework or pattern that holds “things” together. It is the paradigm used to interpret the sense data of the world.34

Wolters writes on the dangers of segregating or compartmentalizing areas of inquiry into religious and non-religious arenas. Scripture does not just teach about religious practice but the Word of God is a guide for living in relationship with God in all areas of life. He addresses worldview as a matter of wisdom and common sense, whether Biblical or unbiblical. Wolters holds that worldviews are not gained by advanced degrees or seminars but through the shared everyday experience of mankind.35 Wolters examines a worldview that is shaped by the key concepts of the creation, fall, and redemption story found in the pages of Scripture.36

An example of a lived out Biblical worldview is recorded in Leland Ryken’s book Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were. The integrated life can be seen in the Puritan views of work and vocation. The goal of the Puritan was to combine their daily work


36 Ibid., 8.
with their devotion to God.\textsuperscript{37} The Puritan was driven by the insight that all of life is God’s.\textsuperscript{38} The call was to live an ordered life in the community as functioning, contributing members of society.

The integrated lives that the Puritans lived allowed them to combine personal piety with a comprehensive God centered worldview. No building can stand unless it is on a strong foundation. The Puritan belief in the providence of God allowed them to face many hardships with hope of a better life to come. But they did not use an other-worldly view to be escapists. They lived lives fully incorporated in this world. Every Puritan conviction was rooted in Scripture. Using the Bible as their guide they were able to relate their Christian faith to all aspects of life – to work, marriage, family, politics, social action, as well as church and worship. The words of Peter Bulkeley sum up the Puritan view, “If God be God over us, we must yield him universal obedience in all things. He must not be over us in one thing, and under us in another, but he must be over us in everything.”\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{Christian Mind}

\textit{The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think} is a book written fifty years ago by Harry Blamires. The central concept of the book is that there has been a loss of the Christian mind. Scientific minds and modern minds exist as a collectively accepted set of notions and attitudes but not a Christian mind. His thesis is that Christians in the modern world accept, for the purpose of mental activity, a frame of reference constructed by the

\textsuperscript{37} Leland Ryken, Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 25.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 208.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
secular mind and a set of criteria reflecting secular evaluations. The result is the lack of a Christian mind. He establishes his thesis by explaining and exploring the deficiencies in Christian thinking. Blamires writes, “Christianity is emasculated of its intellectual relevance. It remains a vehicle of spirituality and moral guidance at the individual level perhaps; at the communal level it is little more than an expression of sentimentalized togetherness.” He sums up what has been lost due to Christianity’s intellectual irrelevance:

We twentieth-century Christians have chosen the way of compromise. We withdraw our Christian consciousness from the fields of public, commercial, and social life. When we enter these fields we are compelled to accept, for purposes of discussion, the secular frame of reference established there. We have no alternative—except silence. We have to use the only language spoken in these areas. Our own Christian language is no longer understood of the people there. Moreover we ourselves have so long ceased to use it except for discussion of the moral, the liturgical, or the spiritual, that it is rusty and out of date. We have no Christian vocabulary to match the complexities of contemporary political, social, and industrial life. How should we have? A language is nurtured on usage, not on silence, however high-principled. And we have long since ceased to bring Christian judgment to bear upon the secular public world.

Due to the compromises and the lack of so many tools to engage in the sociopolitical debate Christianity is unable to make a noteworthy stand.

Mark Noll writes more specifically about the lack of intellectualism among American Evangelicals. As mentioned previously in this paper, he points out that one of two major errors occur in the thinking and actions of Evangelicals in America: going along with culture or ignoring cultural issues because this world is not important. Noll comments that to live life in this world one cannot get caught up in culture nor can one ignore culture but a person

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41 Ibid., 16.
42 Ibid., 27.
must accept life in this world as a gift from God. A Christian must maintain dedicated and persistent thought about reality and what occurs around him.\textsuperscript{43} For Evangelicals to regain a Christian mind they think more Biblically. When they think or learn about something they must not be just looking for knowledge of that object or subject only but for learning about the one who created the thing.\textsuperscript{44}

Noll identifies the prime source of anti-intellectualism in America as what he terms the “evangelical spirit.”\textsuperscript{45} It is defined by a charismatic, populist, pragmatic, and technological approach to life rather than intellectual. People are in a hurry to get out of school to start earning money or serving the church or preaching the gospel. They do not know the infinite value of spending years of learning with the greatest minds and souls of the past. An example quoted by Noll is of two Kentucky revivalists who were met with a quote from John Calvin in an argument over a theological issue. They replied, “We are not personally acquainted with the writings of John Calvin, nor are we certain how nearly we agree with his views of divine truth; \textit{neither do we care}” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{46} They miss the chance to ripen and sharpen and enlarge their powers of thinking.

The search for a Christian perspective on life is not just an academic pursuit. To actively engage the mind with issues of families, economies, health, the arts, literature, church and culture is to take seriously the truth of the sovereignty of God over the world he created. The mind that truly thinks as a Christian recognizes the Lordship of Christ over all


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 63.
aspects of human existence. The search for the Christian mind is in the end a search for God.47

John Piper also addresses the task of facing the challenges of anti-intellectualism. In similar fashion to Noll’s work, Piper also briefly looks into the historical factors that contributed to the anti-intellectual attitude of many Evangelicals. D.L. Moody when asked about his theology once said, “My theology! I didn’t know I had any. I wish you would tell me what my theology is.”48 Moody was expressing a perceived antagonism between intellectual pursuits and concern for the souls of men. But not thinking is not the solution to thinking arrogantly. N. K. Clifford has stated:

The evangelical Protestant mind has never relished complexity. Indeed its crusading genius, whether in religion or politics, has always been tended toward an oversimplification of issues and the substitution of inspiration and zeal for critical analysis and serious reflection. The limitations of such a mind-set were less apparent in the relative simplicity of a rural frontier society.49

Piper does not feel there is a necessary correlation between extensive learning and the right use of the mind. He says that many PhDs think poorly, and many people with little formal education think with great clarity and depth. The plea is not for formal education per se but for a hearty engagement of the mind in the pursuit of God.50

Having evaluated and discussed the fact that the Christian mind is woefully absent in so many instances it is time to establish what a Christian mind looks like. Blamires discusses what the Christian mind should be. He evaluates the supernatural orientation of the mind, the

47 Ibid., 253.
48 Piper, 122.
50 Piper, 128.
Christian mind’s awareness of evil, concept of truth, view of authority, concern for others, and a sacramental cast.

The supernatural orientation of the mind in a Christian cultivates an eternal perspective. Blamires states, “The Christian mind sees human life and human history held in the hands of God.” The result is an acknowledgment of God’s power and love as sustaining the whole universe. The supernatural order determines the flow of the natural order. He continues, “It (the Christian mind) sees this life as an inconclusive experience, preparing us for another; this world as a temporary place of refuge, not our true and final home.”

A second aspect of the Christian mind is an awareness of evil. A Christian mind thinks in terms of heaven and hell. Blamires says, “The Church sums up, in the doctrine of Original Sin, the fact that men and women are drawn towards evil by weaknesses in their fallen nature.” Yet it was into this fallen world filled with all manners of vices that Christ came incarnate. He walked among the extreme social disparities. He saw the rampant debauchery and corruption. He dwelt in the world of slavery and injustice, drunkenness and perversion. He came at the humblest level where he could work, serve, and love. He came to show-up the world’s evil but never pretended it was a world unfit for him. Blamires writes:

If Christians think carefully and prayerfully, they will come to understand what the Incarnation means for them in terms of their twentieth-century vocation. They will learn at what points they can enter into enterprises and social groupings eagerly and at what points they must, conversely, probe, question, and withdraw. They will learn

51 Blamires, 67.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 86.
what are the proper twentieth-century modes of judging the world, of identifying the self with its sins, of being in and yet being out of this world which our Lord inhabited and yet was not of. But these vital insights will be achieved only if there is among us a Christian mind sharp enough as an instrument of discrimination to cut cleanly through the befuddling mental jungle which constitutes the practical ethics of our secular society.\footnote{Ibid., 104-105.}

The Christian mind’s supernatural orientation also influences its conception of the truth. For the Christian mind understands that truths are supernaturally grounded and not developed within nature. Truth is objective not subjective. Truth is a revelation not a construction. Blamires writes:

To think Christianly is to think in terms of Revelation. For the secularist, God and theology are the playthings of the mind. For the Christian, God is real, and Christian theology describes his truth revealed to us. For the secular mind, religion is essentially a matter of theory: for the Christian mind, Christianity is a matter of acts and facts.\footnote{Ibid., 110-111.}

Truth is discovered by inquiry and not constructed or decided by the consensus of the majority. Truth is authoritative and imposed upon humanity. It is not a matter of personal choice.\footnote{Ibid., 107.}

The Christian mind accepts authority. The difference between claiming the Christian God as a useful intellectual convenience and acquiring the Christian Faith as a satisfying intellectual possession that awakens to “the tremendousness of a God-given revelation in time” is found in the word authority.\footnote{Ibid., 146.} It is the binding authority of the Christian Faith that holds the Christian mind in its grip as opposed to the secular mind trying to hold the
Christian Faith in its grip. It is under the acceptance of the authority of God that one learns of personal inadequacy and human dependence.

A fifth characteristic of the Christian mind is concern for the person. The Christian’s conception of the human person is extremely high and grounded in revealed theological truth. Starting with the story of creation God decided to make man in His image and “formed” him from the dust of the ground and “breathed into” him the breath of life. Additionally, the incarnation demonstrates the value of the person through the fact that second person of the trinity dwelt in human flesh. The value placed on human life drives Christian action in evangelism, ministry to the poor and destitute, care for the sick and suffering, valuing human life at any stage of development, etc. There are many influences trying to hide and dissuade Christians from taking action in social arenas. A living Christian mind holding high concern for persons will resist those influences.

The Puritan’s view that all of life belongs to God allowed them to have a greater sense of human worth and equality than their medieval forefathers. They cared for the poor and unemployed. William Perkins, the influential Puritan cleric and Cambridge theologian, stated that any money earned above what was needed for the family provision should be used for the good of others, relief of the poor, and maintenance of the church. Their understanding of man’s dignity as a creature made in God’s image was strong.

Finally a Christian mind has a sacramental cast. It thinks of life as richly derived from the supernatural. A sacramental cast teaches people to create beauty and experience beauty, to recognize truth and receive truth, to give love and receive love. “At a time when Christianity is so widely misrepresented as life-rejecting rather than life-affirming, it is

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urgently necessary to right the balance.”\textsuperscript{59} The sacramental cast of the Christian mind places all things in their proper place and perspective. Pleasures are not denied just experienced within the given bounds God has revealed.

Clifford Williams’ book, \textit{The Life of the Mind: A Christian Perspective} covers the topic of a thinking Christian as others listed have done but has fresh insights on the tension between the life of the mind and the faith. He addresses the fact that asking questions of Scripture in some minds is equated with not having faith in the truth of the Word. Inquisitiveness can have its detriments for some have lost what they once thought was secure. Yet being inquisitive can also expand faith. New ways of connecting faith and life experiences can be found. The nature of hope, forgiveness, work, leisure, worship, and relationships can all be explored and expanded. Faith and imaginativeness are not incompatible as long as they are kept in balance. As long as the one busy in the quest to understand Christianity does not forget that the point of Christianity is to be Christian then pursuits of the mind can be fruitful and liberating.\textsuperscript{60}

John Stott’s book \textit{Your Mind Matters} presents a strong Biblical case for a balanced use of the mind in emotionally-oriented Christians. Stott is not pleading for an arid, sullen, academic Christianity but for a heartfelt devotion set ablaze by the truth of God’s Word. He calls on the pages of history to prove how the thoughts of men shape their actions and the same must be true of modern disciples of Christ. Mankind was created with a capacity to think and a purpose of thinking God’s thoughts after Him. Stott addresses how the active engagement of the mind affects worship, discipleship, evangelism, acts of benevolence, etc.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} Blamires, 173.
\textsuperscript{60} Clifford Williams, \textit{The Life of the Mind: A Christian Perspective} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 90.
\textsuperscript{61} John Stott, \textit{Your Mind Matters} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 43.
Stott also draws from Scripture the fundamental connection of knowledge and action as the key to avoiding a barren hyper-intellectualism. He writes, “God never intends knowledge to be an end in itself but always to be a means to some other end.”

The mind plays an essential part in all fundamental spheres of Christian living. It is impossible to live as a Christian without the acquisition of certain knowledge but conversely the gaining of knowledge carries with it the responsibility to act upon what is known and to translate knowledge into appropriate action and behavior. Os Guinness writes, “What we do with what we know is what Christian knowing is all about.”

*Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling* by James Sire adds a focus on the connection between knowing and doing. Sire suggests a person only truly knows something if he acts upon it. He only believes what he obeys. Biblical knowledge is not a collection of facts about the text or historical and cultural insight into the writers and cultures of the Bible. Biblical knowledge is knowledge that impacts actions. It transforms the way people act and interact within the created order. Genuine Christian thought will result in obedience to God.

Dallas Willard laments that the Evangelical mantra that “Christians aren’t perfect just forgiven” is correct in letter but often nullifies any serious effort to change and grow. For

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62 Ibid., 79.


66 Willard, 22.
most Protestants being a Christian is tied to believing proper things about Jesus not living a life of discipleship attempting to follow His teachings. Thus a great disconnect has occurred between belief and action. A great debate has raged within the Christian faith over the idea of salvation without Lordship as result of this disconnect. Yet Dietrich Bonhoeffer affirmed, “Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”

Williams also addresses the life of the mind as being at odds with the culture. He focuses on three values of popular culture as getting ahead, speed, and entertainment. Climbing the ladder of success, “microwave” living, and spectator mentality do not allow for the development of the mind. To embrace thinking a person must tune out the cheering of the crowd. He must also realize it takes a lifetime to work on virtues including the pursuit of thinking projects. To pursue the life of the mind, the impulse to sit and watch must be overcome in order to adopt new ways of experiencing life.

Sire also includes a survey of intellectual virtues that are helpful in bringing application from meditation on Scripture. The four virtues of the mind include: passion for truth, passion for holiness, passion for consistency, and compassion for others. To possess these virtues requires a number of traits but one that is common to all the virtues is humility. Humility is not a product of direct effort but instead is a byproduct of fear of the Lord. A person who keeps her eyes on the Lord and not on self will discover humility is the key to the virtues of the mind.

Gregory the Great is quoted as saying, “Truth is not known unless it is loved.”

When a person desires something or someone she wants more and more of that object of

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desire. Passion for truth is a virtue of acquisition, a desire for more. To gain knowledge a person must be inquisitive, teachable, persistent, and humble.

A passion for holiness is an application virtue that requires fortitude, integrity, and a will to do what one knows. This harkens back to the connection between knowing and doing. It is the application of the teachings of Scripture to all of life that brings about a life of freedom and fulfillment. Without putting the words of Jesus into practice men are building houses on foundations of sand. In the time of trial nothing will stand.

The passion for consistency is a virtue of maintenance. It requires the use of perseverance, courage, tenacity, patience, and constancy. In a culture that seeks pleasure and leisure, constancy, or the “gut it out” attitude, is required or application is often lost. It is no wonder that so few Christians actually live out a Biblical worldview. Patience takes over when constancy produces frustration. Perseverance takes over when patience runs out. Perseverance in the faith is needed for the sanctification process to work in the life and mind of a Christian. The passion for holiness allows a person to humbly work with the Spirit of God to transform the “old nature” into a life that lives to glorify God.

Compassion for others is a virtue of communication. It includes clarity of expression, orderliness in presentation, and aptness of illustration. In order to truly teach a person must have the best interest of others at heart. Sloppy and lazing presentation only confuses the learners. In order to lead people to understand and apply truth some work must be done. The desire to impress or be praised must be pushed out of mind of the presenter.

**Summary**

A brief review of literature has shown the renewed interest in spiritual disciplines over the past several decades. Yet as noted there is still much ground to be covered to raise
awareness among Evangelicals of the benefits of these ancient spiritual practices. The life of
the disciple of Christ must be a life of continuing sanctification—part of the salvation process
that requires effort from the believer as well as the work of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual
disciplines are tools to be used in the sanctification of the believer as each seeks to live a
more Christ-like, more God-exalting, more God-glorifying life.

As the tools of spiritual disciplines are sharpened one must keep in mind that the
disciplines are not the goal—salvation is. Spiritual disciplines, when misdirected, can lead to
Pharisaical attitudes. The disciplines are a means of grace through which the Holy Spirit
works to transform lives. They are not self-help tools that Christians use to pull themselves
up by the boot straps.

Meditation on Scripture is one of the many spiritual disciplines that an individual
needs to practice. Unlike many Eastern Religions and New Age versions of meditation that
promote the clearing or emptying of the mind, meditation is a focused filling of the mind
with the Word of God. An effective practice of meditation on Scripture requires the use and
overlap of several disciplines including Bible reading, prayer, journaling, silence and
solitude. Ultimately a practice of meditation on Scripture is not just to learn facts about or
memorize portions of Scripture, but it must lead to obedience to the Word. Putting into
practice the things read and learned is what leads to transformed lives.

The use of meditation is one key way for Christians to beginning forming a Biblical
worldview. A worldview is a how an individual interprets reality. Worldviews are learned
from many sources over the course of time, and if an individual is not aware of the process of
worldview formation he will end up with a worldview that is a conglomeration of various
schools of thought. Recognizing that the lack of a Biblical worldview can be difficult since
many culturally learned habits are hard to discern. Thus meditation on Scripture is so important to help break through the barriers that blind a person’s thinking. All of life must be viewed through the lens of Scripture; life cannot be compartmentalized. It must be viewed and lived as an integrated whole based on the truths found in the pages of the Bible.

Due to the lack of a Biblical worldview many writers have chronicled the loss of the Christian mind. A distinctively Christian way of thinking is absent in a majority of key social concerns. The lack of a Christian mind or Biblical worldview is due in large part to the fact that Evangelicals have often fallen into the trap of going along with the culture instead of being a light to lead it. Another detriment to a strong mind among Evangelicals is the view that heaven is the true home and this world does not matter. Too many Evangelicals do not put forth the effort to think about many of the social issues. A Christian mind is one that is oriented toward spiritual reality as well as the physical world. There must be an awareness of the presence and effects of evil. Objective truth is believed in and valued. The Christian mind accepts concepts of and lives under authority. It has a genuine concern for others, and the Christian mind views all of life as sacred. Nothing is mundane or unimportant.

The Christian mind sees the connection between knowledge and action; therefore the mind plays an essential part of all spheres of life. Two of the most influential movements of Christian history, the medieval monastic movement and the Protestant reformation, were both marked with one similarity—both cultivated the life of the mind.69 Since thoughts and actions are always related, the practice of mental virtues translates into virtuous living. The necessity of spiritual disciplines in general and meditation on Scripture in particular must be

69 Noll, 44.
recognized if Christians are going to have a fully integrated Biblical worldview. The call to live a life that glorifies God requires the acquisition of a Christian mind.
CHAPTER 3
KEY CONCEPTS FROM BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE NEED FOR MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE

The ideas of mind, worldview, and meditation are connected in various ways. In this chapter these concepts and their connections will be viewed in three key Scriptural passages as well as in several supporting passages. Proverbs 4:23; Psalm 119:9-16; and Romans 12:2 will each be examined in relation to meditation on Scripture and its effects on worldview formation and transformation of the mind. The first concept that will be examined from Scripture is the connection between thinking and behaving or knowing and acting which has been defined earlier as the relationship of the mind and worldview as found in Proverbs 4:23. A second connection is the relationship of meditation on Scripture and obedience seen in Psalm 119:9-16. A third key Biblical concept is the transforming process of having the mind shaped by the Word as described in Romans 12:2.

Proverbs 4:23

The first key concept is found in Proverbs 4:23 which reads, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” The Hebrew text reads מִכָּל־מִשְׁמָר (with all vigilance)ךֶָּנְׁצֹר לִב (keep your heart)וּנּ ֶּכִי־מ (for from it)תּוֹצְׁאוֹת (sources of)חַיִים (life). “Heart,” here as always, refers not to the physical organ but to the mind and even the whole personality of the individual. It is “the wellspring of life” in that the capacity to live with joy
and vigor ultimately comes from within and not from circumstances. The corrupt heart draws one down to the grave, but Wisdom protects the heart from that corruption.¹

In some languages this is expressed as “Watch your mind,” “Keep a hand on your head,” or “Take care of your thoughts.” According to Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon, the phrase “with all vigilance” is literally “above all guarding,” or to state it another way, “more than anything else you may guard.” In his commentary on Proverbs 4:23-27 Charles Bridges references these verses as an invaluable safeguard for a Christian’s life against every possible place sin may gain a foothold. He writes, “First the heart, man’s citadel, the center of his dearest treasure. It is frightening to think about its many assailants. Let it be guarded carefully. Never let the guard sleep at his post (Deut. 4:9).”²

The New Jerusalem Bible translates the initial phrase of the verse, “More than all else, keep watch over your heart,”³ and the New Jewish Publication Society Version has “More than all that you guard, guard your mind.”⁴ W. D. Reyburn said, “The most important thing you can do is be careful what you think” or “The most important … is to think good thoughts.”⁵ The writer urges keeping or guarding the heart in the way that a prison guard keeps watch. According to John Peter Lange the Hebrew lends itself to literally translating

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³ The Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 816.


It can be argued that according to this verse the most important thing you can do is be careful what you think.

In the phrase “for from it flow the springs of life” the thought expressed here is that what people think, what is in their minds, determines how they will act. The Hebrew word כָּלִיָּה (springs of) usually refers to the extremity or border of a geographical territory, but in association with חַיִים (life) it seems to have the sense of a source or place of origin. The idea is that a person’s life is determined by the thoughts kept in the mind (heart). The Contemporary English Version reads “Carefully guard your thoughts because they are the source of true life.”

Several passages in the New Testament repeat the concept of Proverbs 4:23. In Matthew 12:33-35, Jesus speaks of the correlation of good fruit to a good tree and bad fruit to a bad tree. He connects the speech and actions of individuals to the condition of the person’s heart. The Pharisees have accused him of doing miracles via the power of Satan (Beelzebul). Jesus is rebutting this assertion of the Pharisees by saying they cannot have it both ways; either the tree and the fruit are bad, or the tree and the fruit are good. The source and the product are equivalent. Jesus is implying that if they deem his actions good it is because the actions are from a good source—the power of God. If the source of the power is bad (Beelzebul) then the actions would also be bad. He addresses them in verse 34-35, “You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good

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7 Reyburn, Proverbs, 112.

treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure.” Lange says, “The expression, heart, implies the sum-total of all the thoughts, words, and works of a man; in short, his entire spiritual possessions.”

It must be noted again that in Jewish thought the heart is not just the seat of the emotions as is often the thought of modern English speakers. As in Proverbs 4:23 the heart again is thought of as the total being who thinks and wills. The notion of mind is what conveys this concept best in modern thought. In this exchange Jesus is proclaiming the same principle already stated from Proverbs 4:23. Bridges notes, “Spiritually as well as naturally, the heart … is the wellspring of life. It is the great vital spring of the soul, the fountain of actions, the center and the seat of both sin and holiness.”

The principle of Proverbs 4:23 is issued by Jesus again in another context found in Matthew 15. Here Jesus is rebuking the scribes and Pharisees concerning ceremonial washings. Jesus’s disciples are unclear on the implications of his teachings. Jesus says, “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart comes evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt. 15:18-19). Jesus revealed that it is not the mouth of a person that is the source of defilement, but the heart. The heart represents the invisible, “inner person.” The inner person includes the mind and will—those components that determine moral character. The heart (not any external influence) is the source of all evil character, not the physical or spiritual “dirt” on a

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10 Bridges, Proverbs, 39.

11 Mark 7:1-23 records the same condemnation of ceremonial washing of the Pharisees with greater detail.
person’s hands. The natural heart is a fountain of poison representing the condition of his inner being.

Psalm 119:9-16

The second connection to be examined is found in the relationship of meditation on Scripture and obedience. One representative passage is Psalm 119:9-16:

9 How can young people keep their way pure?
   By guarding it according to your word.
10 With my whole heart I seek you;
    do not let me stray from your commandments.
11 I treasure your word in my heart,
    so that I may not sin against you.
12 Blessed are you, O Lord;
    teach me your statutes.
13 With my lips I declare
    all the ordinances of your mouth.
14 I delight in the way of your decrees
    as much as in all riches.
15 I will meditate on your precepts,
    and fix my eyes on your ways.
16 I will delight in your statutes;
    I will not forget your word.

The psalmist questions how a young man may keep his way pure. “Way” means conduct, behavior, way of living. The answer is by taking heed or guarding his way according to the Word of God. Verses 11, 13, 15, and 16 all directly or indirectly refer to the act of meditation on Scripture as a means toward the purpose of acting according to the word. The emphasis in verse 11 which reads “I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you” is the palmist’s determination not to sin against God. The act translated


‘treasure’ in the NRSV can also be translated as ‘store up’ or ‘hide away’. The passage
refers to memorizing the Law. It is by treasuring or storing God’s word that the psalmist
believes he can better attain his goal of keeping his way pure. Meditation is a key aspect of
memorization as one reflects on and turns over the words of Scripture in his mind again and
again. Verse 13 calls for reciting all the laws of God which is an effective means of
memorization.\textsuperscript{14} Lange writes of Psalm 119:14:

\begin{quote}
The Law is equaled in value to all possible riches; that is, to all blessings that can be
conceived, and that are most highly prized by men. The rendering should not be: as it
were more than all riches (ָות), but: as above all riches.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}
The Word has the ability to guard and protect a person’s way. It is of extreme value.

In Psalm 119:15 the verb הָושׁ is directly translated ‘meditate’ in NRSV. Here the
Hebrew verb literally means ‘to be concerned with’ or ‘to be occupied with’.\textsuperscript{16} It is a
deliberate act of filling the mind with the Word of God. The second line of verse 15 contains
the verb יָשִׁב which translated ‘fix my eyes on’ or ‘pay attention to’ which renames the idea of
meditation found in the first half of the verse.\textsuperscript{17} Meditation is engaging the mind on the
words of Scripture. In the final stanza of the passage the idea of not forgetting the Word of
God is coupled with delighting in it. The verb אֶשְׁכַח for ‘forget’ can also be translated
‘neglect’ or ‘disregard’. One avoids the neglect or disregard of the Word by meditation on it.
Thus the word is one’s delight.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Ibid., 1000–1001.
\item[16] Bratcher, 1001.
\item[17] Ibid., 1002.
\item[18] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Another passage that emphasizes the point of obedience and meditation on the Word of God is Joshua 1:7-8. Here God is giving instructions to Joshua concerning leading the Hebrews into the Promised Land. In these early verses much space is devoted to the idea of keeping the law. It is not the military conquest that dominates these lines but instead God indicates that the keys to success are spiritual. Then he writes in verses seven and eight, “Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.”

The phrase translated ‘being careful to act’ is a word pairing that occurs forty times in the Old Testament and is almost always associated with keeping or obeying God’s words. The importance of obedience to the law as the key to Joshua’s success cannot be overestimated.\(^{19}\) Joshua was to be careful to do the law. It was all the law that was to be obeyed. He was not to deviate from the law to the right or to the left. He was to meditate on the law day and night. And he was to be careful to obey everything written in the law book.

The result of his obedience was that his way would prosper (תַּצְׁלִיחַ) and then find good success (וְׁאָּז תַּשְׁכִיל). When these two words are used in the Old Testament they rarely refer to financial success. Instead they denote succeeding in life’s proper endeavors.\(^{20}\) When

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., 88.
people meditate on the Word of God it is not financial prosperity they seek but rather holiness and obedience. The idea implied here is the one found in Matthew 6:22, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” The priority is to seek God.

The second term in Joshua 1:8 that needs to be examined is וְׁאָּז תַּשְׁכִיל translated ‘to be successful’ here. It most commonly has the meaning of gaining insight, understanding, or being wise.²¹ A heart or mind informed by meditation on Scripture results in a wise person. A healthy, well-developed moral intelligence is the end result of meditating on the Word day and night. D. M. Howard states:

The promise of both prosperity and success to Joshua underscores the importance of obedience and faithfulness to the Word of God. The context here in Joshua is very clear about what is to be the key to Joshua’s success (1:7–8): he is ‘to be careful to obey all the law;’ he is not to turn from it to the right or the left; he is to have it constantly on his lips and to meditate on it at all times; and he is carefully to do everything written in it. His focus is to be upon God’s word and will; then, as he leads Israel in taking the land of Canaan, success will come to him.²²

The necessity of meditation on Scripture to bring one to faithful obedience can is just as important for modern Christians to find success and prosperity today.

One final passage related to this connection of meditation and obedience is found in James 1:25: “But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.” Here the idea of being blessed by God is connected to doing the will of God according to his Word. In Luke 11:28 Jesus said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” As seen in James chapter two those who are blessed by God live in the union of truth and action,

²¹ Ibid., 89.
²² Ibid.
this is their joy. In the passage of James 1:25 the idea of ‘intently looking’ literally means “stoop down to take a close look into.” One of the best illustrations of the force of παρακόψας is given by Coleridge:

It signifies the incurvation or bending of the body in the act of looking down into; as, for instance, in the endeavor to see the reflected image of a star in the water at the bottom of a well. A more happy and forcible word could not have been chosen to express the nature and ultimate object of reflection and to enforce the necessity of it, in order to discover the living fountain and springhead of the evidence of the Christian faith in the believer himself, and at the same time to point out the seat and region where alone it is to be found.

It seems to have a stronger meaning than beholding or even contemplating. It is to be absorbed in its contemplation. Not only did this man look closely into the Word but he abides by it or remains in it as some translate the passage. The Word gripped and held him. Thus meditation leads to the effectual doing of the Word (obedience) not just the hearing of it. It is the same principle taught by Jesus at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.” It is in the action on the teaching that makes one wise not just the hearing.

Romans 12:2

A third key Biblical concept that relates meditation, worldview and the mind is found in Paul’s letter to the Romans. He writes in Romans 12:1-2:

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Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.\textsuperscript{26}

Romans 12:1-2 are pivotal verses in Paul’s letter to the Romans. These verses mark the transition from Paul’s theological teaching about God’s redemptive act through Christ Jesus to the ethical applications. The ‘therefore’ does not refer to the argument about God’s mercy in bringing salvation to the Jew and Gentile but it refers back to everything Paul had been teaching (the mercies of God) since the beginning of the book.\textsuperscript{27} In light of everything that has been expounded (chapters 1-11) Paul urges the readers to offer their bodies as living sacrifices. This is an act of total dedication. The believer is encouraged to make a conclusive offering of self. Holiness of life seldom occurs apart from a deliberate act of the will.\textsuperscript{28} Sanctification is a gradual process in the sense that it continues throughout earthly existence but each advance depends on an act of the will. The dedication of Romans 12:1-2 leads to the transformed everyday living that follows in Romans 12:3 to 15:13.

If Romans 12:1 speaks of a specific act in which a believer offers self to God then verse two refers to two ongoing activities of sanctification. First the believer is no longer to conform to this world. Rather than allowing the world to “squeeze you into its own mold” (Phillips), Paul told believers to be “transformed by the renewing of your minds.”\textsuperscript{29} He is to set his mind on things above (Col. 3:2) as citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20). The actions of the


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 231.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 232.
fallen nature must be put off. The believer must with other believers, stand apart from the
world and be examples of God’s intention for humanity. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on
the Mount, the people of God are to be salt and light in this world (Matt. 5:13-14).

The second activity is to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. The
transformation of which Paul spoke in Romans 12:2 is not a change effected from without
but a radical reorientation that begins deep within the human heart. The verb transformed
occurs in two other settings in the New Testament. The first is found in Mark 9:2 and
Matthew 17:2 where Jesus is ‘transfigured’ before his disciples. The other is found in 2
Corinthians 3:18 where Paul teaches that believers are ‘transformed’ into the likeness of
Christ by beholding his glory. These transformations as well as the one in Romans 12:2 all
occur via the Holy Spirit’s energizing activity. Yet it is argued that the Christian still plays
an active role in this work along with the Holy Spirit.

The renewing of your mind is not just an outward disconformity to the ungodly
world. Many of the outward actions in themselves may be virtuous and praiseworthy.
However it is an inward spiritual transformation that makes the whole life new. One gains
new motives, even where the outward actions do not differ from those of the world. The
newness that is gained, when considered as a whole, is unattainable except through the
constraining power of the love of Christ. Lange writes:

The transformation and shaping of the life of the Christian are determined not by
external worldly forms, but by this inward renewing, or renewing ascending to the
whole of the external life (ἀνακαινώσις) through the productive power of the Spirit.

31 R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, & D. Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak
The νοῦς, as such, does not then receive the new μορφή (Tholuck), but rather the whole Christian life from the νοῦς outward.\textsuperscript{32}

Paul never uses the plural forms of mind in Greek. When he is writing in reference to groups he uses the word mind in a collective singular sense. Paul is not careless in his word choice nor is this distinction without significance.\textsuperscript{33} When Paul urges the readers to be renewed in mind he is addressing them not as individuals but in their solidarity; “mind” is in some sense something they share. He is not addressing the mind as the common rational faculty that is possessed by all men nor is he referring to a great “over-mind” that is somehow shared by all which is found in some ancient Greek philosophical systems such as Stoicism or Gnosticism.

In Romans 12:2 the word mind is used as a notion of external standards—ideas or principles which are the springs of action.\textsuperscript{34} In modern parlance Paul is urging believers to be renewed in their mindset or worldview. The Christian confession demands that the entire bent of one’s mindset be changed. The entire clause may be rendered as “permit God to change you inside by giving you a completely new mind’ or “by making your mind and heart completely different.”\textsuperscript{35} The new worldview as it is shaped by the teachings of the apostle in particular and all of Scripture in general is ‘know what God desires and do those things.’

Being able to know what God desires and make right moral judgments is predicated on the

\textsuperscript{32} John Peter Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical: Romans*, vol. 19, trans. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1950), 382. [The mind is renewed in the newness of the Spirit, and from within the transforming impulse proceeds to transfigure the whole life. This seems to be Dr. Lange’s meaning.]


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 164.

The fact that a person has a mindset dictated by what one reads in the Word of God and has formed a Biblical worldview. Robert Mounce states:

The mind renewed enables us to discern the will of God. Released from the control of the world around us, we can come to know what God has in mind for us. We will find that his will is ‘good, pleasing and perfect.’ It is good because it brings about moral and spiritual growth. It is pleasing to God because it is an expression of his nature. It is perfect in that no one could possibly improve on what God desires to happen.\(^{36}\)

In 1 Corinthians 2:16 Paul uses mind again in a collective singular sense: “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.” The first use of mind refers to God’s mighty purpose of redemptive history. The premise is that no one could have guessed how God would bring about the redemption of man. He is not instructed, nor does anyone know His mind. The idea of a worldview can be seen as a way of viewing all that has been recorded in the Bible as occurring to bring about the predetermined goal of God.

The second use of mind in this passage teaches that believers have the revelation of this plan of salvation from the teachings of Scripture. The same way that Christ was submissive to the plan of God, so believers also must be humble in working to proclaim the gospel to others according to God’s revealed plan. Verse sixteen is a final thought on a discourse Paul has been presenting to the Corinthians and all subsequent readers on the relationship between the wisdom of this age and the wisdom that comes from the Spirit of God. In the second chapter Paul is not putting down intelligence as some have thought\(^ {37}\) nor

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\(^{36}\) Mounce, 233.

\(^{37}\) In 1 Corinthians 2:6 Paul makes a distinction between wisdom from God and wisdom of this age. The wisdom of God is not learned by normal means of education but comes from the Spirit of God. Some have used these verses and others like it to undermine the value of higher learning. Yet the wisdom from God has to come by the Spirit no matter the educational level of the recipient. Other passages that have a similar message include Matthew 11:25-26 which reads, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things for the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.” “Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things to shame.
is he saying that the presence of the Holy Spirit’s work will replace all special effort in learning.\textsuperscript{38} The chapter is expounding the idea that the foolishness of God, which is the foolishness of the cross, is wiser than the wisdom of the world. Christians are going to have this same mindset. The mind of Christ is not some mystical experience given to a select few super Christians but instead it is the attitude of humility toward oneself that leads to shouldering one’s own cross and bearing the burdens of others in service to God.

Because believers have in mind the plan of God to proclaim the gospel message they must take action to control and shape their thoughts. As mentioned previously sanctification is a process that continues throughout the believer’s life and in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 Paul gives instructions about the way a follower of Christ is to control his mind with the Spirit’s help. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ…”

\textsuperscript{38} The argument that mental activity is essential for a valid Christian life has been made by many. Martin Luther when promising in 1529 to write a book against parents who neglect the education of their children said, “I shall really go after the shameful, despicable, damnable parents who are no parents at all but despicable hogs and venomous beasts, devouring their own young.” Martin Luther, “Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” in \textit{Luther’s Works}, vol. 46, ed. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 211.
Paul describes spiritual warfare in the previous passage. It is a battle against ideas, thoughts, philosophies, mindsets, i.e. worldviews. Because it is a battle of ideas, the fight is not waged with carnal weapons. Instead it is waged with truth which is the Word of God. Truth is used to replace error. Paul sees every competing worldview that tries to capture the hearts of men as threatening to the glory of God. Paul knows that every unbiblical presupposition is essentially a rival religion. These rivals must be pulled down and destroyed. For a follower of Christ to grow in grace he must have his ideas and convictions (worldview) liberated by ever-increasing degrees from worldly wisdom by the teachings of Scripture.

Summary

The three primary texts examined (Prov. 4:23; Ps. 119:11; and Rom. 12:2) as well as supporting texts all demonstrate the connection between the mind and actions. In considering behavior, obedience, and transformed living, all flow from a mind focused on Scripture with meditation playing a key role. Without the power of the Word of God to direct and redirect the mind the Christian life cannot be lived to the glory of God. The discipline or means of grace of meditation on Scripture is the link to shifting one’s worldview and forming a Christian mind. It is necessary to guard the heart against the outside influences of the worldliness. The heart must also be transformed inwardly to the power of the Spirit to change the sinful disposition inherent in fallen humanity. Both outward guarding and inward transformation come through the reading, meditating, and memorizing of the Word of God which is then applied to life by active daily obedience to what has been learned. True knowledge of the Scriptures is demonstrated by putting it into
practice. As Os Guinness has said, “What we do with what we know is what Christian knowing is all about.”\textsuperscript{39}

CHAPTER 4
NEED FOR MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE AS LEARNED FROM CHURCH HISTORY

Lessons from Puritan Past

How has the practice of meditation on Scripture been used by Christians throughout the history of the Church? Meditation on Scripture has a long history. By viewing what those who have gone before practiced many important lessons can be learned and valuable insights gained. As seen in the Biblical section of this paper the idea of meditating on the words of Scripture is as old as the Scriptures themselves. A review of the practice of meditation throughout the history of the church would be too vast for this paper. One particular group, the Puritans, had a very strong and pervasive practice of meditation on Scripture worth examining. In reviewing the strengths of the Puritan’s spirituality J.I. Packer writes:

Knowing themselves to be creatures of thought, affection, and will, and knowing that God’s way to the human heart (the will) is via the human head (the mind), the Puritans practised meditation, discursive and systematic, on the whole range of Biblical truth as they saw it applying to themselves. Puritan meditation on Scripture was modelled on the Puritan sermon; in meditation the Puritan would seek to search and challenge his heart, stir his affections to hate sin and love righteousness, and encourage himself with God’s promises, just as Puritan preachers would do from the pulpit.¹

This chapter will examine two pastors who both preached and practiced meditation on Scripture as a spiritual discipline: Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards.

As a whole the Puritans demonstrated a particularly strong practice of meditation on Scripture that resulted in a Biblical worldview. Thomas Watson defined meditation as “a holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truths of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder upon them and apply them to ourselves.”\(^2\) One thing that the contemporary church could learn from the English Puritans is how to have an integrated Biblical worldview. An integrated Biblical worldview or holistic lifestyle is what informed so much of Puritan thinking and action. As discussed, today’s life is very compartmentalized. The modern mantra of separation of everything religious from everything secular has created generations of churchgoers whose daily lives are uninformed by Christian virtues. The holistic lifestyle allowed the Puritans to connect the various aspects of life with the common factor that everything belongs to the Lord giving them a solid Biblical worldview. The modern church would have a great tool for battling compartmentalized life if it recaptured the English Puritan vision of an integrated life.

The source of this Puritan view can be identified as their heavenly vision. They saw everything as belonging to the Lord. The Puritans strong belief in the Providence of God allowed them to accept all aspects of life as sacred. The heavenly vision invigorated their daily devotion and practice of personal piety. J. I. Packer pointed out that the Puritans believed that “Heaven ought to be in your eyes all the time.”\(^3\) The hope of heaven was seen as directing life on earth. The two-worldly view may seem to be paradoxical as a driving force for an integrated life. Often today a two-worldly view is the very thing that drives modern Evangelicals to give less attention to things of this world and focus only on future

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\(^3\) J. I. Packer, “English Puritan Theology” (lecture, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS, 1988).
glory. As a whole Evangelicals are accused of being less concerned about the environment and social injustices than many non-Christian groups. The Puritans were much more comfortable with paradoxes than modern Christians are today.\textsuperscript{4} Even though the Puritans had a view that this was not their final home they did not let that idea hinder them from fully embracing the life that God had given them on this earth.

**Introduction to Richard Baxter**

Richard Baxter (1615 – 1691) was an English Puritan and pastor in the town of Kidderminster. Baxter grew up from humble means. He lived with his grandfather much of his early life because of his father’s gambling debts. During that time Baxter was subjected to several disappointing schoolmasters. Baxter would return to his parental home after the conversion of his father, and although his educational opportunities did not improve, he did begin to receive some spiritual guidance. Through his father’s example and by reading Christian books, Baxter recounts that at about age fifteen “it pleased God to awaken my soul.”\textsuperscript{5} The use of books as guides to spiritual growth and education in general would stay with Baxter his whole life. He would write numerous works on conversions to help others discover faith in Christ. He would make use of a library at Ludlow Castle to help himself through a lifetime of learning by independent study. George Eayrs argues that Baxter probably read more books than any human being before him.\textsuperscript{6} Baxter did use a very large number of citations in his own writings.


Baxter was ordained by the Church of England in 1638 and began preaching in vacant pulpits. In 1639 he became an associate pastor in Bridgnorth where he served for two years. During that time the parishioners of Kidderminster were attempting to have their vicar removed. The man eventually resigned instead of facing removal, and in March 1641 Richard Baxter was selected as their lecturer. Baxter served over a year at Kidderminster before he was forced to leave as a result of the English Civil War between Parliament and the monarchy. Baxter himself, loyal to the monarchy, had previously spoken of the attitudes of Parliament as championing religion and liberty. Royalists in Kidderminster denounced Baxter as a traitor so he withdrew from the parish.

During the conflict between the Parliamentary party lead by Oliver Cromwell and the Royalist loyal to King Charles, Baxter sought ways to continue preaching. He served by preaching to soldiers once a week at Coventry then later would serve as a chaplain in Cromwell’s army. Poor health forced his resignation. He was near death for a period of almost five months. During this period of sickness Baxter still was not idle. Instead he began writing *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*. Baxter recounts that period of his life:

> The second book which I wrote…was that called *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*. Whilst I was in health I had not the least thought of writing books, or of serving God in any more public way than preaching. But when I was weakened with great bleeding…and was sentenced to death by the physicians, I began to contemplate more seriously on the everlasting rest which I apprehended myself to be just on the borders of. And that my thoughts might not too much scatter my meditation, I began to write something on that subject. . . .

Eventually the book would be published in 1649 and become an immediate bestseller. The book went through ten editions in ten years. Baxter’s fame spread throughout England and

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onto the continent. Baxter would develop the phrase “as a dying man to dying men” as the guide for his life and ministry. Baxter maintains, “Weakness and pain helped me to study how to die; that set me on studying how to live.”

The English Civil War resulted in the beheading of King Charles I and victory for the Parliamentary party. Oliver Cromwell would serve as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth till his death in 1658. Cromwell’s son, Richard, would serve in Oliver’s place but unrest would result in the return of the monarchy in May of 1660. Richard Baxter would serve as chaplain to the King Charles II for a period of time. He was offered the bishopric of Hereford but refused the post rather than recant on his Nonconformist views. The time at Court proved to be the most peaceful times of Baxter’s life. The next twenty years would be filled with oppression and harassment.

Baxter would be imprisoned several times throughout his career. In May of 1662 the Act of Uniformity would be passed requiring all ministers to adhere to the prescribed doctrines and practices of the Church of England. All who refused to conform were removed from their ecclesiastical posts. Baxter immediately left the Church of England as a statement that he would not conform. Baxter would marry during this time and continue his writing ministry. He would also conduct worship meetings in his home even though it was forbid by the Conventicle Act of 1664. In December of that same year a plague broke out in London forcing many to flee the city including many ministers. With pulpits vacant Baxter began preaching again as a fill in. Initially no action was taken against Baxter for his Nonconformist preaching but in 1669 a warrant for his arrest was issued. Baxter would

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spend six months in prison. In 1685 Baxter would be imprisoned again for eighteen months. The charge was that his book *Paraphrase of the New Testament* was an attack on the established church and state. Baxter continued his writing ministry. Upon his release he assisted Matthew Sylvester in ministerial duties and preaching.

Even as Baxter approached death he continued to instruct others. In his last hours he shared with some who came to visit him:

> You come hither to learn to die; I am not the only person that must go this way. I can assure you that your whole life, be it never so long, is little enough to prepare for death. Have a care of this vain, deceitful world, and the lusts of the flesh. Be sure you choose God for your portion, heaven for your home, God’s glory for your end, His Word for your rule; and then you need never fear but that we shall meet with comfort.¹⁰

A few hours before Baxter’s death he was asked how he was. He replied, “Almost well.”¹¹

On December 8, 1691 Baxter entered his everlasting rest.

**Ministry of Richard Baxter**

Baxter would return to Kidderminster, a town of over 3,000 people, in 1647 where he would serve as pastor for fourteen years. The dominant industry in the town was weaving, and most weavers worked from their homes. John Brown writes of Kidderminster, “… it was one of the most unpromising towns in England to which a young man could be sent, who was starting his career as a preacher and pastor…” He went on to say, “it had been, morally and spiritually, so grossly neglected as almost to have sunk into practical heathenism.”¹²

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¹¹ Paul Powell, *Joy Comes in the Morning* (Dallas: Texas Baptist Leadership Center, Inc.), 64.

In *The Reformed Pastor* Baxter wrote of the necessity of four key elements that all successful ministers must practice: study, prayer, conference, and practice.\(^{13}\) The third of these elements will be examined here as a practice that contributed to Baxter’s ministerial success. Conference is a word seldom used today in reference to duties of ministers. In modern language the term conference would be called ‘shared experience of God’s ways.’ Pastors confer in two ways. First a pastor confers with a mentor who has greater experience with God than the pastor does. The mentor guides a less experienced pastor to deepen his spiritual life. Second a pastor confers with his parishioners. He guides the people to share their own joys and struggles. He offers comfort for failings and challenges for future growth.

The practice of conference with the parishioners of Kidderminster was key to Baxter’s pastoral ministry. He spent many hours each week interacting with individuals in their daily routines. Since much of the industry of Kidderminster was home based it afforded Baxter opportunity to catechize his parishioners during the week. He found that he could visit the nearly eight hundred homes under his care by instructing fifteen to sixteen per week. Thus over the course of a year every family’s spiritual condition could be evaluated and bolstered. He developed basic material on Christian growth applicable to every stage of Christian maturity.

Baxter wanted the people under his spiritual guidance to have a Biblical family structure so that each person knew and preformed the duties given to him or her. Families that are well ordered promise benefit for the whole community. The growth and maturity that develops in individuals only has slower impact due to it uneven nature. It was Baxter’s practice to facilitate conditions that allowed for community change. Baxter writes, “You are

not like to see any general reformation, till you procure family reformation. Some little
religion there may be, here and there; but while it is confined to single persons, and is not
promoted in families, it will not prosper, nor promise much future increase.”14

J.I. Packer writes that Baxter had "the most fruitful Puritan pastorate anywhere
recorded," and "wrote constantly, becoming the most voluminous of all British theologians." 

15 Baxter gave his own assessment of the transformation that occurred in Kidderminster:
“When I came thither first, there was about one Family in a Street that worshipped God and
called on his name, and when I came away there were some Streets where there was not past
one family in the side of a street that did not so.”16 His achievements in Kidderminster as a
pastor are incomparable. George Whitfield visited Kidderminster 83 years after the time
Baxter was there, in 1743, and he wrote in his diary. 'I was greatly refreshed to find what a
sweet savour of good Mr. Baxter's doctrine; works and discipline remain to this day'.17

Richard Baxter’s Focus on Meditation

Meditation deepens the vertical relationship between God and man. To meditate on
Scripture is to nurture a knowledge of the self-revelation of the living God. Baxter wrote:

Say not now, how shall we get so high, or how can mortals ascend to heaven? For
faith hath wings, and meditation is its chariot.18

14 Ibid., 102.


16 Quoted in Packer, Quest for Godliness, 45.


18 Ibid., 499-500.
In fact, Baxter’s approach to meditation can be viewed as having two key components as seen from two of his major works: *The Reformed Pastor* and *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*. He wanted men to guard their own hearts and to keep their eyes on heaven.

Baxter opened *The Reformed Pastor* with the phrase from Acts 20:28, “Take heed to yourself.” And though the book was intended as a guide for ministers to be able to conduct their duties in a godly manner, the book’s principles of self-watch can be applied to all believers desiring a closer walk with God. Baxter writes, “Take heed to yourselves, lest you be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others…”

Growing in the practical understanding of ‘life for God’ is the basis for living out the Christian faith. Reflecting on God’s self-revelation in Scripture leads to noticeable increases in godliness. Baxter writes, “Nothing can be rightly known, if God be not known; nor is any study well managed, nor to any great purpose, if God is not studied.”

Throughout the work the idea of Jesus teaching from the Sermon on the Mount about self-evaluation before judging others is seen as a major task in guarding the heart.

When properly practicing the discipline of meditation on Scripture, a person really preaches the truth to his own heart and life. Baxter reflects on taking some Biblical truth and preaching it to self, as David did throughout the Psalms. For example, when he instructed his soul to praise the Lord’s holy name (Psalm 103:1) or when he asked himself why he was

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20 Baxter, *Reformed Pastor*, 56. Baxter went on to reflect on the importance of this focus on God as guiding all others studies as well. He criticized ‘Christian academies’ as making a grand error when they set the study of the creature before study of the Redeemer. Study of God must lay the foundation and lead the way of all studies. He would state that “divinity must be the beginning, the middle, the end, the life, the all, of their studies.”

21 Matt. 7:1-3, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?
downcast and disturbed of soul (Psalm 42:5). In that same section Baxter discusses the importance of soliloquy (speaking to one’s own soul) when he writes:

As every good master and father of a family is a good preacher to his own family, so every good Christian is a good preacher to his own soul. Soliloquy is a preaching to ones’ self; therefore the very same method which a minister should use in his preaching to others, should a Christian use in speaking to himself.22

Finding regular time to spend in undistracted meditation on Scripture will facilitate the soliloquy Baxter proposes. Baxter used the evening before going to bed as the time that was least interrupted.

To be a person who impacts his circle of influence in a meaningful way he needs to guard his own heart as Baxter encouraged. It is the character or quality of character that a person possesses that gives him a platform to speak about issues and be heard in a meaningful way. Many voices are proclaiming their way of interpreting facts but it is the inner quality of spiritual life that will profoundly influence those listening. As Baxter said:

When your minds are in a holy, heavenly frame, your people are likely to partake of the fruits of it. Your prayers, and praises, and doctrine will be sweet and heavenly to them. They will likely fell when you have been much with God: that which is most on your hearts, is like to be most in their ears.23

Baxter knew the importance of keeping the balance between heart and head. Baxter did not see a focus on theology as opposing to a warm heart. Doctrine and practice are both needed for an effective ministry.

The other major focus of Baxter on the topic of meditation was keeping the heart in heaven. He wrote much on the topic of meditation in The Saints’ Everlasting Rest. He held that meditation was a necessary practice for motivating the heart toward forceful prayer and

22 Baxter, Saints, 593.

23 Baxter, Reformed Pastor, 61.
enthusiastic obedience. One of the key focuses of meditation for Baxter was on the hope of glory.\textsuperscript{24} Through meditation Baxter found a way of energizing his spiritual life. He encouraged others to do the same.

Baxter instructed his parishioners to reflect on the greatness and goodness of God as revealed in Scripture. When they did so Baxter said, “The most covetous man will let go silver, if he might have gold instead of it.”\textsuperscript{25} Baxter was convinced that heavenly-mindedness needed to be the state of all those on earth who hoped to effect change in their lives and the lives of others. It was meditation on glory that sustained the spirit during suffering, bolstered patience and joy, and firmed the resolutions.\textsuperscript{26}

Baxter also attended to the details that would make the practice of meditation on Scripture an effective exercise. In preparing the heart for meditation he encouraged two major actions. First, “Get thy heart as clear from the world as thou canst; wholly lay by the thoughts of thy business, of thy troubles, of thy enjoyments, and of everything that may take up any room in thy soul.”\textsuperscript{27} Attention on God’s word must not be hindered by distractions of daily life. True meditation will depend on the capacity and disposition of the mind to focus on the Word.

The second emphasis Baxter proposed is to “be sure thou set upon this work with the greatest seriousness that possibly thou canst.”\textsuperscript{28} Recognition of the importance meditation

\textsuperscript{24} Col. 1:27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.


\textsuperscript{26} Baxter, Saints’, 501.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 568.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 569.
will play in transforming the mind-set of a person toward heavenly things is needed to make this practice a regular part of daily practice. As well the seriousness of the practice will help facilitate the previous practice of clearing the mind of distractions.

When relating the true nature of salvation, Baxter states:

Faith entereth at the mind, but it hath not all its essential parts, and is not the gospel of faith indeed, till it hath possessed the will. The heart of faith is wanting, till faith hath taken possession of the heart.29

Baxter stressed the importance meditation played to complete this process of faith possessing the will. He writes:

It (meditation) is in word confessed to be a duty by all, but by the constant neglect denied by most; and, I know not by what fatal customary security, it comes to pass that men that are very tender-conscienched towards other duties, yet do as easily over slip this, as if they knew it not to be a duty at all. They that are presently troubled in mind, if they omit but a sermon, a fast, or a prayer in public or private; yet were never troubled that they had omitted meditation perhaps all their life-time to this very day; though it be that duty by which all other duties are improved, and by which the soul digesteth truths, and draweth forth their strength for its nourishment and refreshing.30

Baxter compares meditation on Scripture as doing for the soul what the digestive process of turning food into blood and emulsified fats (chyle) is for the vigorous health of the body.

Meditation turns truth received and remembered into warm affections, raised resolution, and holy conversation. It is the work of taking what is known and understood with the head and absorbing it into one’s heart. For Baxter, meditation is not just the effort of understanding and memory. It is the work of a lived out experience of truth.


Introduction to Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards is considered to be among the greatest spiritual thinkers in church history. Charles Colson wrote of Edwards as:

A man generally regarded as the greatest theologian of American history, and described by some as the greatest intellect North America has produced. A classic preacher and writer who profoundly influenced the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century.

He was born October 5, 1703 in East Winsor, a town in colonial Connecticut as the only son among eight siblings to a Congregational pastor. Edwards was educated at home with a view toward ministry.

Edwards, at the age of 13, entered the Collegiate School of Connecticut (later Yale University) to obtain his Bachelor’s degree. He stayed at Yale to complete his Masters of Arts to prepare himself for ministry. After a brief pastorate in New York City, a few years tutoring at Yale, and another short pastorate in Bolton, Connecticut Edwards was called to serve as an assistant pastor to his maternal grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, at a church in Northampton, Massachusetts.

The time of service at Northampton is what Edwards is often most remembered. It was during these years that Edwards work as a preacher was used by God as one of several catalysts to spark the Great Awakening, a period of widespread revival that impacted most of colonial North America. Joseph Tracy, the minister, historian, and preacher who gave this religious phenomenon its name in his influential 1842 book The Great Awakening, saw the this time period as a precursor to the American Revolution. The evangelical movement of the


1740s played a key role in the development of democratic thought, as well as the belief of the free press and the belief that information should be shared and completely unbiased and uncontrolled. These concepts ushered in the period of the American Revolution, which created a demand for religious freedom.\textsuperscript{33}

Edwards’ ministry at Northampton was not without controversy; numerous factors contributed to unrest in the congregation under Edwards’ leadership. His pastoral troubles came to a boiling point in late 1749 over the issue of requirements for communion. His grandfather, Solomon Stoddard had opened communion to all who agreed with the doctrines of Christianity and led a moral life, with or without a profession of a saving work of the Holy Spirit. Stoddard believed the saving work of the Holy Spirit was not always discernable, yet Edwards disagreed with his grandfather’s position. He felt the saving work of the Holy Spirit could be known by the individual and seen by others.\textsuperscript{34} Due in part to Edwards’ reversal of his grandfather’s practice, in 1750 Edwards was removed from his position as pastor of the Northampton congregation. Oddly he would continue to be asked to pulpit supply for another year before God would move him to his next station.

Edwards would go on to minister at the far west outpost of Stockbridge, Massachusetts among the English speaking settlers and local Native Americans. During his seven years at Stockbridge, Edwards also oversaw a school for Native American children and wrote many of his most well-known treatises including: \textit{A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will (1754), A Dissertation Concerning the}


End for Which God Created the World (1754), The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended (1758).

In 1757, Edwards accepted the presidency of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University). He traveled to New Jersey in the winter leaving the rest of his family until they could join him in the spring. He was inaugurated in 1758, but five weeks later, on March 22, 1758, he died as a result of an inoculation against smallpox. Edwards asked that his wife be told that he loved her and looked upon their marriage as an “uncommon union.”

Jonathan Edwards on Meditation

Meditation on Scripture was an important aspect of Jonathan Edwards’s spiritual development. He spent much of his life reflecting and meditating on Scripture. Edwards writes:

My mind was greatly fixed on divine things; almost perpetually in the contemplation of them. I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often 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.

Such was Edwards’ practice. His meditation serves as an example to be learned from and emulated by believers today. Edwards’ view of spiritual practices as means of grace shall be examined, as will his view of meditation. Finally some practical examples of Edwards’ practice of meditation shall also be surveyed.

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Dallas Willard wrote, “… the “desert” or “closet” is the primary place of strength for the beginner as it was for Christ and for Paul.” Jonathan Edwards would agree. Edwards viewed meditation on Scripture as one of several activities he labeled as means of grace. As examined earlier, spiritual disciplines are Christian activities that help a Christian grow more mature. Spiritual disciplines can be an unfortunate term when it leads a person to believe he has the power to transform his life on his own. Often believers fall prey to attempting the spiritual disciplines as ways of making themselves (autonomously) holy. Christians must remain in a posture of receiving from God which is why Edwards, with the Puritans, wrote about these same ‘disciplines’ as a means of grace.

A ‘means of grace’ is a Christian practice that helps the believer focus more fully on God, realizing that God is the source of change and transformation made possible via His grace. Since grace is the term most associated with Christian salvation, the phrase ‘means of grace’ paints a clearer picture of the work of God in the continuing salvation process of sanctification. Practicing ‘means of grace’ does not create grace or holiness but these practices are like irrigation channels bringing the waters of life to a dry and parched land.

According to Edwards the ‘means of grace’ facilitate Christian growth toward Christ in two ways. First is an immanent act of grace, which is not a specific practice or physical action but instead is a focus of the heart on Christ. Edwards said, “Such are the exercises of grace which the saints often have in contemplation when the exercise is within the heart

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39 Strobel, 82.
alone.”40 By contemplating the words of Scripture the heart takes to and is inclined toward God. Contemplation will help form a disciple’s life, but it does so indirectly, as it forms the heart directly.41 Meditation is a means to the renewing of the mind and redirecting thoughts. The mental activity of thinking about God and his plans and purposes will result in the out flow of Christ-like living. Remembering Paul’s word to the church at Philippi, “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8). Putting the teachings of Christ into practice is not physical activity only but mental as well.

Edwards addresses outward actions as well when he writes:

The second kind of act of grace is more practical or effective exercise. They are exertions of grace in response to the command of the will and are directed in outward actions. So when a saint gives a cup of cold water, he is exercising the grace of charity. Or when he voluntarily endures persecution, in the course of duty, he is exercising supreme love to Christ. In these instances, the exercise of grace produces the effect of some outward action in practical and productive ways. Such is properly the exercise of grace in the act of the will.42

The importance of the second expression of grace is not in the good deed only. It is important in the fact that the disciple is following Christ in such a way that the only response she has to any praise directed her way is “Without you I can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Understanding meditation as a means of grace that will direct physical activities shows the connection between meditation and obedience. In a similar way seeing meditation or any spiritual discipline as a means of grace that flows from God will help the Christian avoid a


41 Strobel, 82.

42 Edwards, Religious Affections, 177-178.
Pharisaical attitude of pride that often develops among those who maintain spiritual disciplines.

Having seen the way Edwards’ views meditation as a means of grace it will also be helpful to identify the primary subject of meditation according to Edwards. It is said that Edwards would pray: “Oh, God, stamp eternity on my eyeballs!” For Edwards the basis for meditation was a common sense notion that when a person loves something she sets her mind on it. “When men would discover anything in human arts, they set themselves to study upon it.” Thus the love of God will naturally result in a desire to study His Word in order to gain a clearer vision of who God is.

Edwards directed his parishioners to set their minds on and turn their eyes toward things of divine nature for “… that these highest glories that can be thought, might be more the objects of their meditation!” Meditation is joining the mind acutely on the beauty and glory of God. The “mind’s eye” sees the reality of all that God is and has done. Edwards preached a sermon on God being God which provides an example of the vision of God that he held. He writes:

It is most evident by the works of God, that his understanding and power are infinite; for he that hath made all things out of nothing, and upholds, and governs, and manages all things every moment, in all ages, without growing weary, must be of infinite power. He must also be of infinite knowledge; for if he made all things, and upholds and governs all things continually, it will follow, that he knows and perfectly sees all things, great and small, in heaven and earth, continually at one view; which cannot be without infinite understanding.

Being thus infinite in understanding and power, he must also be perfectly holy; for unholiness always argues some defect, some blindness. Where there is no darkness or delusion, there can be no unholiness. It is impossible that wickedness


should consist with infinite light. God being infinite in power and knowledge, he must be self-sufficient and all-sufficient; therefore it is impossible that he should be under any temptation to do anything amiss; for he can have no end in doing it. When any are tempted to do amiss, it is for selfish ends. But how can an all-sufficient Being, who wants nothing, be tempted to do evil for selfish ends? So that God is essentially holy, and nothing is more impossible than that God should do amiss.\textsuperscript{46}

This is not physical sight that sets the mind on the beauty of God. However, when the beauty of God becomes the central focus for a believer then a way is sought for knowing God for Himself and not for the worldly goods He can provide.

Meditation is an activity of the heart that seeks to unite the understanding and the will to an affectionate knowledge of God. Alister McGrath comments that faith is fundamentally a relational matter, faith is about trusting God. However part of the inner dynamic of the life of faith is a desire to understand more about who and what we trust.\textsuperscript{47} Anselm wrote that theology is faith seeking understanding.\textsuperscript{48} Theology is a passion of the mind. For faith to grow and flourish it must have a perpetual vision of its object.

Meditation as a means of grace sets the mind and heart on Christ so that the Spirit can illumine the sight of Christ.\textsuperscript{49} Edwards writes:

When we meditate, then we act as reasonable creatures, then reason acts, then the soul is in exercise. Shall we have souls within us, and let them lie dead without any exercise? We ought to spend much time in meditation: we ought to meditate on God’s


\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Fides quaerens intellectum}, “faith seeking understanding” was the \textit{Proslogion}’s original title and is an apt designation for Anselm’s philosophical and theological projects as a whole. In Greg Sadler, “Anselm of Canterbury (1033 - 1109),” \textit{The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy}, http://www.iep.utm.edu/, Internet; accessed 15 March, 2014.

\textsuperscript{49} Strobel, 81.
Word day and night (Psalm 1:2). The law of God should be a constant companion to converse with, lying down and raising up, wherever we are.\textsuperscript{50}

Our understandings were given us to be used, and above all to be exercised, in divine things. Therefore God teaches us in such a way that we shall have some exercise of meditation and study. God gives us the gold, but he gives it to us in a mine that we might dig for it.\textsuperscript{51}

Meditation is an appeal to be thoughtful and attentive to the God who loves you.

Edwards also provided practical examples of the practice of meditation in his own life. It is said that Edwards’ father taught Jonathan from his youth to focus his attention with a pen in his hand. It was a practice that Edwards retained throughout his life. He wrote resolutions as to how to live life each day as it at the end of that day he had to give an account to God of how he used his time.\textsuperscript{52} He would reflect in his journal how each day had been spent in regard to said resolution.\textsuperscript{53} Jonathan Edwards produced with his pen a wealth of solid, Biblical and Reformed insights in his fifty-five years of life. The Yale edition of Edwards’ works is twenty-seven volumes. His writings are filled with deep philosophical insight and rich theological discernment produced by a lifetime of meditation on Scripture.

Another practice of Edwards that has value for imitation is recorded in a biography of Sarah Edwards, where Elisabeth Dodds relates the following story:

When he was younger, Edwards had pondered how to make use of the time he had to spend on journeys. After the move to Northampton he worked out a plan for pinning a small piece of paper to a given spot on his coat, assigning the paper a number and charging his mind to associate a subject with that piece of paper. After a ride as long as the three-day return from Boston he would be bristling with papers. Back in his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Jonathan Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” in \textit{Works} 14:95.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Jonathan Edwards, “Profitable Hearers of the Word,” in \textit{Works} 14:246.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Whitney, 137.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 214.
\end{itemize}
study, he would take off the papers methodically, and write down the train of thought each slip recalled to him.\textsuperscript{54}

It is common for people to spend much time travelling. Edwards did not want to waste a single moment even under difficult conditions of horseback riding he would redeem the time. Modern travelers under much more comfortable and controlled conditions could use travel time as valuable time to engage their minds with the truths of Scripture.

As mentioned, Edwards made a common practice of seeking solitude in order to meditate on beauty of God. He wrote:

Some are greatly affected when in company; but have nothing that bears any manner of proportion to it in secret, in close meditation, prayer and conversing with God when alone, and separated from the world. A true Christian doubtless delights in religious fellowship and Christian conversation, and finds much to affect his heart in it; but he also delights at times to retire from all mankind, to converse with God in solitude. And this also has peculiar advantages for fixing his heart, and engaging his affections. True religion disposes persons to be much alone in solitary places for holy meditation and prayer… But this is all that I aim at by what has been said, to show that it is the nature of true grace, however it loves Christian society in its place, in a peculiar manner to delight in retirement, and secret converse with God. So that if persons appear greatly engaged in social religion, and but little in the religion of the closet, and are often highly affected when with others, and but little moved when they have none but God and Christ to converse with, it looks very darkly upon their religion.\textsuperscript{55}

He knew the importance of both Christian fellowship and solitude with God. In fact he reflected on those who lack a practice of solitude with God in order to meditate on His truths.

**Summary**

Through the examination of Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards a number of key elements about meditation on Scripture and its practice have been put forth. Both men


espoused the common Puritan qualities of a heavenly vision as directing life in this world and
an integrated Biblical worldview that connected the words of Scripture with daily actions.
The integrated Biblical worldview led to a well-articulated social theory. The manifestations
of Christian thinking of Puritans in general and of Baxter and Edwards specifically were
rooted in the pages of Scripture. These men drew out of the sacred text truths to lead their
respective congregations to live life before a Holy God. Meditation played a key role for
both men in transforming them and those in their charge. What is evident in these men is the
fruits of a Christian mind.

Baxter’s life and practice showed the importance of meditation as leading to a ‘lived
out’ experience of the Word of God. The transformation of the town of Kidderminster under
his tutelage is a testament to that fact. His emphasis on guarding your heart and taking heed
of self is evident in his major works, especially *The Reformed Pastor*. Such inward
reflection only comes about with time spent examining one’s life through the lens of
Scripture. The focus allows life to be lived in a God honoring, Biblical existence.

Baxter also is a prime example of living life with eyes on heaven. His multiple stints
in prison are proof that he was unwilling to compromise his beliefs about Christian practice
for the pleasures of this world. Instead he endured suffering in this world for the sake of the
life to come. Baxter’s meditations were also focused on a heavenly vision, allowing himself
and his church to gain true treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and
thieves do not break in and steal.

Edwards likewise provided a solid example of meditation on Scripture as a means to
guide living. His specific contribution was an increased emphasis on disciplines as a means
of grace. Meditation is still an act of receiving from God His gracious gifts. Meditation is
not a self-help exercise but a vehicle through which God transforms hearts and minds via the use of Scripture.

Edwards focus on the fact that what we love we dwell on is a good reminder of sinful tendencies still present in the Christian’s heart. Seeing the beauty of Christ as a subject of continual thought and attention unites the head with the heart, intellect with emotion.

Edwards’ practical example of focusing his attention by putting a pen in his hand is a lesson still to be applied today. Baxter also provided practical instruction on meditation with his emphasis on getting the heart clear from the world and being serious about the practice of meditation. He knew the importance of guarding the heart for from it flows the streams of life.

Meditation assumes a sinful heart. A fact that Edwards knew well but is often lost in modern culture. He wrote:

For the vanities of the world, you have neglected reading, praying, and meditation: for the things of the world, you have broken Sabbath: for the world you have spent a great deal of your time in quarrelling: for the world you have envied, and hated your neighbor: for the world you have cast God, and Christ, and heaven behind your back: for the world you have sold your own soul: you have as it were drowned your soul in worldly cares and desires: you have been a mere earthworm, that is never in its element but when groveling and buried in the earth.  

It is in the midst of lustful thoughts and anxious minds that the benefits of meditation are most fully experienced.

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CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGICAL APPLICATION OF NEED FOR MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE

Call for Obedience

The transformation process associated with the Scripture passage in Romans 12:2 and the discussion of forming a Christian mind and adopting a Biblical worldview are all related to what theologians call the process of sanctification. When viewing the doctrine of salvation it is often subdivided into various aspects. Justification is associated with a person’s legal status before God being changed from guilty to not guilty; it is a matter of one being declared just.\(^1\) Justification is viewed as a onetime event. It is followed by a lifetime process of growth in holiness termed sanctification. Sanctification is the work of God in which the individual co-operates with the means of grace given through the working of the Holy Spirit to put off the old sinful nature and put on the new nature in Christ. Berkhof states, “It (sanctification) consists fundamentally and primarily in a divine operation in the soul, whereby the holy disposition born in regeneration is strengthened and its holy exercises are increased.”\(^2\) Glorification is the completion of the salvation process which will occur in the life beyond death when the believer will finally be perfected.\(^3\)


\(^3\) Erickson, 918.
Sanctification affects the whole man because it takes place in the inner life of man. As seen from the review of key Biblical text the inner man (translated heart) is the spring of all that flows out of a man. The inner man cannot be changed without changing the whole organism of the man.\textsuperscript{4} The means of grace is the term Edwards and the Puritans referred to so often as the way to understand Christian practice.\textsuperscript{5} Berkhof mentions such activities as constant exercise of faith, the study of God’s Word, prayer, and association with believers.\textsuperscript{6} Meditation on Scripture has been shown through the review of Edwards as well as in common Christian practice of spiritual disciplines to play a key role in the sanctification process.

For many Christians the practice and discipline of meditation on Scripture has evaded them. Years have gone by without a regular practice of reading and reflecting on the Word of God. The lack of spiritual growth is evident from the Barna Group research cited earlier. Richard Lovelace in his book \textit{Dynamics of Spiritual Life} stated that evangelical theology and practice are marked by a sanctification gap.\textsuperscript{7} Attention to this issue gave rise to much of the current writing on spiritual disciplines, but as Barna points out much more needs to be done. More time spent studying and meditating on the pages of Scripture will contribute to closing the sanctification gap.

The addition or strengthening of meditation on Scripture as a spiritual exercise requires a vision of the importance of the practice. It has been shown from the Biblical texts

\textsuperscript{4} Berkhof, \textit{Systematic Theology}, 533.


\textsuperscript{6} Berkhof, \textit{Systematic Theology}, 534.

\textsuperscript{7} Gordon Smith, \textit{Called to be Saints} (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 14.
(Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:11, 15-16; etc.) that God has instructed and expects his people to dwell on his Word. The benefits of such meditation have also been examined from Biblical texts as well as in the review of the lives and practices of Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards. Yet there often remains disconnectedness from information acquired to application made. The ‘disconnect’ or gap between our information and application is one of obedience.

Obedience is not a word people like. It is an idea that the fallen human nature is repulsed by. Obedience is so mundane and so beneath self-conceived grandeur. It is the humility of obedience that is lacking when people ask why it is so difficult to be a disciple of Christ. When people seek to grow in maturity they are looking for some great secret of the faith. Like James and John so many are seeking positions of prominence with in the kingdom (Mark 10:37). But as has been shown it is the mind of Christ that Christians must seek and that mind was revealed so eloquently by Paul in Philippians 2:5-11:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It is when followers of Christ meditate on and apply this passage of Scripture that one is able to understand Christian obedience.

C.S. Lewis in his classic work *Screwtape Letters* addressed the very issue of obedience when Uncle Screwtape (a demon) instructed his nephew, Wormwood, about the dangers of losing a man to the enemy camp (Christianity) when he noted:

Be not deceived, Wormwood, our cause is never more in jeopardy than when a human, no longer desiring but still intending to do our Enemy's will, looks round
upon a universe in which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.\footnote{8 C.S. Lewis, \textit{Screwtape Letters} (C. S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., 1942, paperback edition, New York: HarperCollins Publications, 2001), 40.}

Thus the first step in growing in the practice of meditation on Scripture is being resolved to obey. But God does not require his children to have that naked resolve as if it comes from human will-power, for human nature is fallen. Once a person recognizes the importance of obedience to God’s commands then she asks for grace to be able to obey. For outwardly holiness is obedience but inwardly holiness is love in action. A love for God and a response of gratitude for God’s mercy leads to outward expressions of holiness demonstrated as love for others.\footnote{9 J. I. Packer, \textit{Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God} (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 69, 164.}

\textbf{Meditation on Scripture Forms a Biblical Worldview}

A major benefit of meditation is a shift in paradigm or worldview. The more a person focuses on and reflects on the words of Scripture the more the mind is oriented toward God and God’s way of viewing the world. The development of a more Christian worldview begins to replace the various secular worldviews that have been passively (sometimes actively) adopted over the course of years. The more God’s Word saturates the mind the more readily the mind responds in a way consistent with the Bible’s teachings. As seen when reviewing the Biblical basis for meditation, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”

The worldview is shaped during the sanctification process that goes on in the life of a Christian. As God works with the believer to be freed from old habits, learned patterns,
cultural norms, and ingrained sin the mind is able to process what it views as reality from a more Biblical basis. The life of the believer comes more in line with God’s purposes. Family life is improved. Effort is put forth for the betterment of the community and workplace. E.E. Carpenter writes:

God gave His laws and teachings to the Israelites to study and meditate upon, making them different from all other people of the world. Israel was to be a special people to the Lord and by meditating upon His law they would become like Him.10

The shift in worldview is needed among Christians if a nation’s culture and morality are to be improved. Unfortunately as explored earlier the Church does not have a great track record of helping people shift their worldview.

Meditation on Scripture Helps Develop the Christian Mind

Charles Malik said, “The mind in its greatest and deepest reaches is not cared for enough.”11 Though Malik was speaking of an academic period of study the same principle applies to Christian life. Sanctification is a lengthy process that never reaches perfection in this life.12 Yet must be continually engaged in with the help of the means of grace or spiritual disciplines.

The writings of Jonathan Edwards points to three ways that the means of grace (of which meditation of Scripture is chief) are used by God in spiritual transformation. First, it orients the mind to God.13 Edwards believed that right knowledge about God was directly


11 Malik said this when giving the inaugural address at the dedication of the new Billy Graham Center on the campus of Wheaton College. Cited in J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 1.

12 Berkhof, 534.

13 Strobel, 78.
tied to Christian growth. This is one reason Edwards’ sermons were so heavily theological. The grace of God gained from His Spirit through a practice like meditation takes the raw data of Scripture and makes it personal for application and beautiful for contemplation. “When the true beauty and attraction of the holiness found in divine things is discovered by the soul, a new world of perspectives is opened.”14

John Calvin wrote, “Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists in two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves.”15 Meditation on Scripture provides both types of knowledge. For example 1 John 1:8-10 is a passage to contemplate concerning human tendencies to be deceived or hypocritical without self-knowledge. “Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinizing himself.”16

Second, meditation on Scripture helps form the mind to the contours of the gospel. When a person responds to a gospel call it may be initially be for selfish motivation. As a Christian grows in maturity and begins to see the gospel in an increasingly affectionate way it is because the mind has gained a glimpse of the beauty of God.17 As the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 1:2 of the blessed he said, “but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.” Again Psalm 119:15-16 reminds us, “I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statues; I will not forget your

16 Ibid., 1.1.37.
17 Strobel, 79.
word.” Edwards wrote of his joy in meditation on Scripture, “I seemed often to see so much light exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading; often dwelling long on one sentence to see the wonders contained in it, and yet almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders.”

When Christians learn or think about something it is not for knowledge of the thing only but for learning about the One who made the thing. “Meditation lead us from Scripture to prayer because meditation is more than reading for information, but is learning from God the reality of our own lives.” The Word of God is the chief means of grace. And meditating on it will provide the greatest benefit.

Third, there is a submission of the mind to the forming grace of God. The mind becomes inclined to the goodness of God and away from the evil of the world, flesh, and devil. An understanding of the deceitfulness of our own heart is gained by meditating on Jeremiah 17:9. Christian maturity should not be measured by attaining a position, or memorizing a battery of verses, or practicing a number of spiritual disciplines, or generally climbing a ladder of pietistic living. Christian maturity should be marked by an ever increasing dependence on Jesus and an ever increasing awareness of personal depravity. In this way an ever growing sense of humility will develop in the Christian. Humility leads to obedience.

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20 Strobel, 122.

21 Ibid., 85.

22 Ibid., 79.
Genuine Christian thought will result in obedience to God. Obedience has been a reoccurring theme connected to formation of a Biblical worldview and the acquisition of a Christian mind throughout this paper. In the literature review, Biblical analysis, and historical sections obedience has been a topic considered. Anytime a person obeys, it results in some form of humility. It is a recognition that someone else is in a position of authority. The Christian mind that is focused on Scripture will develop an attitude of humility toward God and His Word. As James Sire says, “The formation of a Christian mind requires persistent obedience.”

Meditation on Scriptures as Evangelical Call

Urgency is a key strength of Evangelical practice. If that urgency could be directed toward the need of transforming a mixed-bag worldview into a Biblical worldview a lot of progress would be made. Evangelical activism drove Protestant missions for over a century. If just a portion of that fervor could be directed toward the life of the mind with a view toward the renewing of the mind that Romans 12:2 speaks of as driving transformation then the practice of meditation on Scripture will be seen as a vital component of God’s work in the lives of believers.

The value of thinking and meditating upon God and His works—and especially the truths revealed in Scripture that He has given to all people—has been clearly displayed. Believers should think and meditate upon things whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, excellent, and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8), but even more followers of Christ should

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24 Noll, 250.
put into practice (keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard) the things on which they meditate (Phil. 4:9). Devotion is to be centered upon the Lord (2 Cor. 11:3) and by thinking upon those things that are pure, the heart is purified (Jas. 4:8).

CHAPTER 6

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Helps for Meditating on Scripture

As Augustine prayed, “Give me grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will.”\(^1\) God provides believers with what is needed to do His will. Prayer is the avenue by which strength is granted. My wife remembers when she was serving as a missionary to Muslim people in France how she was not feeling great love or compassion for this people group. She prayed that God would help her feel their great need. She tells that one day her eyes were opened and she grieved for these people. The work she was doing no longer felt like work. She was compelled by the Holy Spirit to reach them. She was given what she needed. From that time forward she could not, not do the work.

Once that one sees the ability to meditate is possible it is important to set aside a dedicated time for the practice. People live with day planners in hand these days. Most have the schedule of occasions, appointments, work, meetings, children’s events, community events, etc. on phones or tablets or computers. It is seen as normal to schedule reminders about important events so that one does not over book or miss something. Scheduling set times for Bible study, prayer, and meditation on the Scripture is the most important meeting of the day. It will set brackets around the practice that “is a hedge to duty, and defends it

against many temptations to omission.”

Meditation is the source of truth strength and guidance that will allow someone to succeed with all the other demands of the day. It is the principle behind the quote often attributed to Martin Luther which states, “I have so much to do today that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.”

Firm scheduling of appointment times with God’s Word should not be neglected. It will allow individuals to avoid distractions and interruptions. A person when in a consultation with a doctor does not take a phone call from a friend or acquaintance. The same type of devoted attention should be given to the heeding of Scripture. Turn off the phone, lock the door, put out some type of “do not disturb” signal. Since time is accounted for on a daily planner, it is an appointment that cannot be missed.

Once the time is scheduled a location must also be secured, preferably one that is free from visual and audible distractions and not easily accessed by others. It is often helpful to get out of the normal surroundings if possible. Thomas Merton writes: “That is the only reason why I desire solitude – to be lost to all created things, to die to them and to the knowledge of them, for they remind me of my distance from You: that You are far from

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3 The source of this saying is fuzzy, as it has been often quoted but not found in Luther’s own writings. In Westminster divine John Arrowsmith’s Armilla Catechetica: A Chain of Principles (1659, 1822), p. 143, there is a reference to this anecdote, which cited a source. Viet Dietrich (also known as Vitus Theodorus), the Nuremberg Reformer who was Martin Luther’s close friend, and who served as amanuensis both to Luther and Philipp Melanchthon. He wrote a letter to Melanchthon dated June 30, 1530, which states: Nullus abit dies, quin at minimum tres horas, easque studiis aptissimas in orationibus ponat. Arrowsmith elaborates: [Luther], during his retirement in the castle at Coburga for the safety of his person, having then more time to spare for devotion than his many public employments had been wont to afford him, was no niggard of it: but (as one Vitus Theodorus, who then lived with him, informed Melancthon) spent no less in prayer to God, then at least three hours every day, and those such hours as were fittest for study. Here Arrowsmith cites the Latin text of Dietrich’s June 30, 1530 letter to Melanchthon. The quote widely attributed to Luther, is likely an extrapolation from this reference by Viet Dietrich in his letter to Philipp Melanchthon. While Luther may not have uttered the words repeated so often today, yet they do, it seems, accurately reflect the importance of prayer in his life, and his own specific practice to pray three hours a day, early in the day, at least while he resided at Wartburg.
them, even though You are in them. You have made them and Your presence sustains their being and they hide You from me. And I would live alone, and out of them. O beata solitude!”

Finding a place of solitude and silence allows the soul to regain an eternal perspective and free itself from the things that worry, entrap, and oppress it.

Those who work in an office may have the ability to lock the door and turn off the phones, but the pile of work on the desk may still prove to be too distracting. Sometimes a coffee shop may provide enough anonymity to allow for undistracted time of study, meditation, and prayer. Finding a park bench in a nearby location may provide the needed space. Doing some sort of physical exercise such as walking or jogging allows people to spend time in conversation with God and reflection on Scripture. However, outside locations and physical exercise are not conducive to those requiring reading of Scripture or notes. Such a person must find a location that allows for reference to the written word.

The use of technology as an aid to meditation on Scriptures may also benefit some trying to form the habit. Digital Bibles and books allow for easy access to material for study and reflection. There are many common Bible apps that can be used to receive daily Scripture passages to read, study, or memorize. The same app may also include devotional material to read on a given passage.

The presence of digital devices may also prove to distract a ‘would be’ meditator; therefore, holding an actual book may prove to add focus. Physically turning pages may add to that body positioning idea that can help recall. It may be that an older style method of Bible reading relates well with some peoples appreciation of the history of the faith and a believers connection with believers from the past. A person may find that putting away all

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the modern technological machinery helps clear the mind and gain focus. Going back to the “old ways” can provide an air of novelty that assists a person in developing and maintaining a practice. Looking for ways to make the practice meaningful and significant greatly increases the chances of integration into daily life.

If a person is having difficulty maintaining the practice of meditation on Scripture he may need to set some goals. A task-oriented person enjoys a sense of accomplishment when an undertaking is completed. Setting goals that are attainable may motivate certain types of people to continue attempts at Bible meditation. Once one goal is achieved another can be established. Goals need to be kept realistic however to avoid frustration until the habit of study is firmly established.

The second idea is to create an environment conducive and specific to meditation on Scripture. An obvious choice is a secluded desk of some kind, but the difficulty is to make sure you only meditate in that spot. As discussed in the review of literature posture can influence memory. The recreating the posture in which the original event occurred helps in recall. Thus Scripture memorization and meditation on specific passages can be better recalled in the same posture. The Puritan writers suggest “maintaining a posture that is reverent, whether it be sitting, standing, walking, or lying prostrate before the Almighty.” Meditation in bed or recliner is a bad habit, for example, because the body is trained to want to sleep once a person gets into bed or reclined position.

Additionally, as discussed in the section of Jonathan Edwards’ practice of meditation, the use of paper and pen can be beneficial to the thinking process. Writing and rewriting a passage can help with mental retention. After processing a passage for several minutes

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attempting to write the basic meaning and application of the passage in your own words will help the thinking process. Keeping a journal of meditative times with the Word will help chronicle growth and provide encouragement when viewed over the course of time. Journaling has a fascinating appeal to most who hear about it and practice it. It blends Biblical doctrine and daily living, “like the confluence of two great rivers, into one.”

Other tips that have shown to help study habits can also be applied to meditation. Research shows that chewing gum while performing a task can improve the concentration level on the task. Also taking mental snapshots of important events helps improve retention. Focus intently on a passage then associate the passage with some mental picture or event or marker. Later recall the passage and associated reminder. Jonathan Edwards’ practice of fastening slips of paper to his clothes as he traveled is an example of ways to connect an activity or reminder with a thought. Modern people do not need to pin slips of paper but can use their mobile devices with notes, reminders, photos, etc. to accomplish a similar effect by improving concentration and form a vivid memory of the event.

A final help that can be used by a person seeking to achieve increased time spent meditating on Scripture is accountability. The principle is found in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 which states, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.” The passage teaches that it is better for two

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people to work together in various activities in order to achieve success. Hebrews 10:23-25 teaches:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (emphasis added).

The idea of accountability has long proved its usefulness in bringing lasting change to the actions and behaviors of individuals.

Learning to love God with the mind through meditation is not just an academic exercise. The way a person applies Scripture to all of life is best learned in a worshiping community. When left alone with their ideas people tend to be shaped by personal bias. These biases are formed by religious traditions, personal experiences, family heritage and upbringing, personality types, and a host of other influencing factors. In order to gain a more well-rounded view of life a person needs interaction with others. Round-table discussion about what the Bible is teaching on any particular subject will give greater clarity of the truth being presented. Thus a form of accountability occurs when people converse about Scripture in small groups.

The next step in this accountability idea is the application of what is learned to the way a person lives. It is good to broaden understanding through discussion of topics with others but that is not the final step. Truth must be applied in order for it to truly be known. As seen in the life and practice of Richard Baxter, his home visits and teachings were toward the end of lived practice. The Puritan practice of catechesis proved to be a great tool for transforming the people of Kidderminster. Though few today would implement such a program, the principle behind the practice still has great merit. A person needs his
meditation on Scripture to be driven by intentional implementation of what is learned on a daily basis.

The final step of a successful accountability process is reproducing what is learned in the life of others. When a person is able to teach a topic or principle from Scripture then that truth has come full circle for the individual. To teach someone else a person needs to know the content inside and out. It is not enough just to know the bare minimum about the subject. In order to inspire the learner to engage his mind with the material a quality teacher must be able to point off into the distance to show all the intriguing applications to be explored. The student will desire to reach that level himself. But a teacher that does not know well or put into practice what he is trying to teach will have great difficulty inspiring students. One must be drinking from the well himself in order to bring others along.

**Stumbling Blocks to Meditation on Scripture**

As mentioned in the opening section of this paper as well as in the previous section on integrating the practice of meditation on Scripture into a contemporary context the greatest challenge facing Christians today who are serious about Biblical meditation is living in a world of constant distraction. The Information Age has transformed many areas of human life. But not all of them are for the better. Humans have always lived with distractions. However the distractions today seem to come in large quantities at rapid speeds. Email notifications, Twitter and Facebook messages, text messages, and phone calls travel with people in their back pockets or purses. The ability to get away has been trumped by the devices that “keep us connected.”

People who work in front of a computer have the same distractions that come from phones and tablets plus an array of additional of temptations. The browser offers an endless
supply of reading material, shopping, chatting, gossip, news, photos, videos, and much more. Added to what is in front of the person is all the other distractions present in a workplace ranging from ringing phones to music from other coworkers, colleagues dropping by, incoming paperwork, someone calling a meeting, etc. When a person leaves the workplace work travels along in the form of mobile devices. Once home, an individual is bombarded by 200 television channels and half a million advertisements. The presence of the home computer provides continued pull for a person’s attention.

The instant positive feedback comes so readily in the Information Age that activities like checking email, internet browsing, blogging, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc. become addicting. Daniel Anderson, a professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst believes that young, developing brains are becoming habituated to distraction and to switching tasks, not to focus. In the same way that drugs or junk food provide an instant pleasurable feeling with delayed negative consequences the constant checking of social media offers that same immediate response. Young people often judge how many followers they have on a particular social media sites and use that as a sense of pride or validation of self-worth when someone ‘likes’ a post or ‘retweets’ something.

A new type of lifestyle has been created by the Information Age, one that humanity may not be ready for. It has developed so quickly that strategies for dealing with being ‘constantly connected’ have not been fully developed. Nor has there been time to consider the health effects of a lifestyle that does not allow a person to leave work behind. An expectation has developed in society that a person should always be available to be contacted. When a person leaves behind a cell phone, those on the other end making a call

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expect to be able to get in contact with the person immediately. After a few repeated tries and no return call the person attempting to make contact can become very frustrated and angry.

People plan ahead much less because of the assumption that a person can be contacted at any time to exchange information. The same is true for those who give up email or Facebook. People are insulted that someone would not be available through these types of social media. The expectation of constant availability has become the norm and has transformed the way people approach both work and social life. This transformation has made the old practice of meditation on Scripture (which was never easy) even more difficult.

As noted, due to the constant distraction in modern culture the difficulty in maintaining a practice of meditation can be compounded by what is termed a sin cycle. When attempting to respond to a call to change and add a habit of meditation each time a person misses his window of opportunity a feeling a guilt can develop. An individual will reason that, “I am guilty because I missed my meditation opportunity. I don’t want to face God whom I have failed.” Thus the individual fails to start back the next time there is the opportunity. The feeling of being unworthy of God’s presence is not unique to failing to meditate. All sins committed can have that associated cycle. This only reinforces the idea that the practice of meditation is not by the person’s own strength or will power. It is a means of grace and when viewed that way it is easier to return to the presence of a gracious God who knows our weakness.

Another major stumbling block for an effective practice of meditation on Scripture is spiritual pride. As noted from the change in society, being able to have a consistent and meaningful practice is becoming increasingly difficult. When a person does find a way to develop the habit it can be a source of judgment of others who have not mastered the skill.
Fallen human nature is always looking for ways to validate worth and gauge accomplishment. It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing certain practices as reflecting levels of personal improvement. It must be remembered that the goal of meditation on Scripture is openness to God. Edwards warns of the temptation to allow the practice to become the goal. He writes:

What they are chiefly excited about is not the glory of God or the beauty of Christ but the thrill of their experiences. They keep thinking, ‘What a good experience is this! What a great discovery is this! What wonderful things have I encountered!’ And so they put their experiences in the place of Christ and His beauty and all-sufficiency. Instead of rejoicing in Christ Jesus, they indulge in their own wonderful experiences. They are so caught up in their own imagination about these great and wonderful experiences that all their notion of God relates merely to them. As their emotions intensify, these hypocrites will sometimes be completely swallowed up in narcissism, self-conceit, and a fierce zeal with what is happening. But it is all built like a castle in the air that has no foundation other than imagination, self-love, and pride.  

The hope of bearing fruit because a person is abiding in Christ and receiving true life from God should be what drives meditation as a means of grace. It is not just the experience in itself that is to be celebrated.

There is a certain scorn for various ascetic practices among many Christians because these practices are viewed as ways of meriting God’s forgiveness or extorting God by these practices. The argument goes like this: since I have given up this or that or because I do this on a regular basis God owes me something. Christians who want to emphasize the mantra of saved by grace alone through faith alone by Christ alone often want to avoid all forms of spiritual disciplines because they seem to be associated with a works based view of salvation. Due to this type of reasoning many spiritual disciplines are excluded from mainstream

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Protestant life. What is needed is an understanding of the fact that the spiritual disciplines are needed for a vibrant Christian life. Seeing the connection between practicing a discipline such as meditation and the formation of a Biblical worldview underscores the importance. As Christians abide in the Word the mind begins to think in the bounds of a new paradigm. By utilizing meditation a believer more consciously participates in God’s creative and redemptive action in and on human life.

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CHAPTER 7
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF NEED FOR MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE

Mark Noll has stated that modern Evangelicals are descendants of the Puritans. Yet, for some reason, the Puritan kind of all-inclusive thinking, the sort of mind fully shaped by Christian influences, modern Evangelicals do not enjoy.¹ Many Evangelicals today display a lack of spiritual maturity due in part to a failure to integrate faith into thinking and life. Without a distinctly Christian worldview many professing followers of Christ live lives that are virtually non-discernable from the lives of non-believers. A Biblical worldview is prerequisite to Christian thinking. Christian thinking precludes Christian action.

The failure to recognize how heavily secular a worldview has become is a primary factor in the failure to live in obedience to Christ. One tool to improve development of Christian worldview is use of meditation on Scripture. Meditation leads to wisdom by reflective thought about Scripture and how to apply it to everyday subjects as well as the areas of major social debate. If a person wants clarity about her own worldview she must reflect and profoundly consider how she actually behaves.²

It must be remembered that spiritual disciplines like meditation are tools for the journey. They are not the goal. Practicing meditation on Scripture will not somehow merit God’s favor. Nor must they be viewed as spiritual self-help activities. They are not attempts

to make oneself holy. We must remain in a posture of receiving. Similarly, practicing means of grace does not create grace or holiness but these practices are like irrigation channels bringing the waters of life to a dry and parched soul. A farmer puts forth great time and effort to prepare a field so that the irrigation waters have the most efficient effect. When water runs across dry land it initially saturates the soil but additional water can be lost if the ground is not prepared to receive it. A field that has been terraced to hold more water slows the runoff event so that more of the water is captured in the soil to be utilized by the plants. Meditation on Scripture is like the terracing process. It allows the deep truths of God’s Word to linger and soak into the heart and mind of the Christian.

In a digital world of constant access and distraction finding the silence and solitude necessary for meditation is an increasingly difficult problem. Yet these are needed to some degree to meditate on God’s Word, contemplate the meaning of the text, and seek application for daily life. Meditation can be seen as wrestling with God and His Word. Thus a degree of urgency must be associated with the need of developing a truly Biblical worldview and give fuel to the individual to overcome the obstacles that prevent meditation on Scripture. Thus as seen before meditation entails knowing God (as He reveals Himself in His Word) and ourselves (being prone to wander).

The principal learned from Edwards that “if you love something you dwell on it” must be a driving force to develop a stronger habit of meditation. Christians must watch out for excuses the heart gives for not meditating and take heed to the words of Paul, “For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self” (Romans 7:22). The words of the Psalmist also

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ring true: “Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).

Meditation, when viewed properly, can become an initial response to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30) because it requires use of all these faculties. When viewed in this way the importance of the practice can be understood and applied. In the end, meditation on Scripture is based on belief that Christ is all in all, and Christians need eyes to see God’s beauty. Then lives can become saturated with the reality of God and His call for His people to live for His glory.
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