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# Implementing Biblical Meditation with Prayer in Contra Costa Korean Advetist Church

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# Implementing Biblical Meditation with Prayer in Contra Costa Korean Advetist Church

Jaewook Huh

# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

IMPLEMENTING BIBLICAL MEDITATION WITH PRAYER  
IN CONTRA COSTA KOREAN ADVENTIST CHURCH

Written by

JAEWOOK HUH

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

  
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IMPLEMENTING BIBLICAL MEDITATION WITH PRAYER  
IN CONTRA COSTA KOREAN ADVENTIST CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
JAEWOOK HUH  
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## ABSTRACT

### **Implementing Biblical Meditation with Prayer in Contra Costa Korean Adventist Church**

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2019

The goal of this project is to explore the various aspects of spiritual disciplines focusing on meditation with prayer, and to implement it into the little community of Contra Costa Korean Church to regain the passion for God and for the gospel. The effort in doing these spiritual disciplines would deepen this community's spirituality. Through careful examination of Scripture as well as various scholarly works, this project identifies the Word as the key factor for human transformation in disciplines like meditation. The working of human transformation is through the changed will and intention by hearing the voice of God in their hearts over a lifetime. To test this thesis, a pilot program was launched for two months in the summer of 2018.

During the actual pilot program of meditation with prayer, the participants are given the chance to encounter God speaking to their hearts, enjoying all the benefits of biblical meditation. This project is largely done individually in private spaces, however, the participants also spend time together at church to affirm and learn the lessons from what they experience. They are asked to read the four gospels along with *Desire of Ages* by Ellen White.

The project concludes the practice of this spiritual discipline enhances their understanding of the Word and deepens their relationship with God. Written and verbal assessments demonstrate dramatic increase in interest. However, due to the limited time and number of small group test samples, this finding is not complete and further practice is needed. Nevertheless, this initial project has been encouraging, and it contributes to Contra Costa Church's momentum to keep moving forward and deeper in spiritual growth.

Content Reader: Keith Matthews, DMin

Words: 272

To my parents, Samman Huh and Ilsun Lee, who have encouraged me  
to go on with the things God has put into me

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PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## INTRODUCTION

The culture of Contra Costa Korean Church (CCKC) has changed in the last few years; the church's passion for the gospel is different than before. The proclamation of the Word and intentional study of the Bible have been fundamental to what the church has offered its community in the past. However, it seems those services are now less effective compared to that of the previous decade. Furthermore, even the proclamation of the Word in this church seems less attractive than what the congregants can get from the media or the internet; they can easily find better preaching online or from other communities of faith. As time has gone on, the believers' energy has diminished and individuals have not felt passionate about evangelism or spiritual growth. Worship at CCKC appears feeble and dull. Members say they go to church to listen to the Word, but it has become superficial and unattractive.

In light of this problem, the church first needs to experience the restoration of the Word of God in worship. While there is a spiritual hunger in the congregation, the congregants of CCKC do not spend enough time reading and listening to the Word of God. Few spend even an hour per week on spiritual disciplines apart from the main worship service. CCKC used to host mid-week worship services and Friday night vespers, but there are no longer such church services. There are fewer special guests to deliver messages for mission week or a focused week of prayer.

Additionally, some who have been Christian a long time feel bored with the Bible, thinking they have learned everything they can from it making it harder for them to be motivated by the Word of God. Nonetheless, this knowledge does not seem to be

reflected in their actual lives. They stick to the touching stories and sensational testimonies but do not align what they hear with their actions.

Finally, people in the church believe the congregation is not active in the community with programs like outreach or feeding the hungry. This lack of outreach indicates the church is not reflecting Christ's character to the neighborhood. In fact, there is little vitality radiating from the church. There seems to be only the recognition of duty and poorly organized medical services for the local community.

CCKC needs to solve these issues and renew its relationship with its community. This project seeks to find solutions for these problems in the personal spirituality of the congregants. The goal is to take them back to the roots of faith and back to the Bible to recapture spiritual vitality.

This topic has been selected because of past pastoral experiences. I could not develop deep relationships with church members on spiritual disciplines at my previous pastoral periods because I had to carry out administrative work as a local director as well as a pastor in Korea. This experience inspired me to be deeply engaged in the spiritual disciplines when I went on to serve other churches. As I prepared and launched this project, I drew insights from my pastoral experience at two churches in California (Glendale Korean Church and Contra Costa Korean Church) after I came to the United States. This is significant because in some ways these two churches represent the entire Korean Adventist Church in America.

The life of most congregants at Glendale Korean Church (GKC) centered around the Word of God. My ministry focus also was biblical studies and proclamation of the Word. As pastors are often called preachers, they recognized me as such. The

congregants used to greet me by thanking me for delivering good sermons. I seldom heard them saying after the sermons that they would change their lives or actions to align with what they just learned from the Word. When they said the sermon was good, they meant it as a compliment, but it also gave me a chance to reflect on what I was doing. I received totally different feedback from my spiritual small group meetings, where they expressed the meetings were helpful in building a closer relationship with God.

Many congregants at GKC loved to listen to the Word and to high quality sermons. Their desire to learn about the Bible was great and they would look for opportunities to do so during the week as well. Nowadays, the best sermons are easily available online. Church members would form small group meetings for Bible study. Yet often, the head knowledge received from such sources would not reach their hearts. It was hard to see if or how it affected their daily lives. This is similar to what M. Robert Mulholland asserts in *Shaped by the Word*: The Bible should be read in a transformative way, not in an informative way.<sup>1</sup> They need to read the Scriptures and listen to the Word with the mindset of obedience. Charles Stanley says one needs “to listen to God submissively.”<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, that godly work of reading the Bible does not do any formative work because it does not lead to total obedience.

Life change as a result of Bible knowledge is often hard to see and measure. Simply reading the Bible to gain information will not necessitate change. What matters is the attitude of the reader. Many Christians in the Adventist Church know the contents of

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<sup>1</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000). 54-58.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Stanley, *How to Listen to God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 81.

the Bible very well. For the Christians who have been attending church for many decades, the Bible stories have become too familiar. As Dallas Willard writes, “familiarity breeds unfamiliarity.”<sup>3</sup> In order to avoid this, one must go deeper. Spiritual disciplines like meditation with prayer can help put knowledge into practice and invite a deeper presence with God. If believers read only for information, then they have not yet used the power of the imaginative mind to its fullest potential. Meditation practice takes more time than reading the actual words in the Bible. The human body’s response to the imagination is very similar to how it reacts to physical stimuli and human emotions are important to enact transformation. The Adventist Church is lacking emotional appeal because it almost exclusively promotes cognitive reason.

Congregants like myself, a Bible teacher, tend to approach the Bible with motives that are primarily or purely driven toward academic purposes. When I worked as a chaplain at a language school church, dozens of students would flock to Bible studies. Even non-Christians showed great interest in knowing Scripture. However, most of them did not actually finish the intended Bible study course because it turned out to be disruptive and intrusive to their interests. Something similar happens to the members of CCKC, and it has dire consequences.

CCKC has lost its power and energy for growth; even the existing members are dropping out of the community in this cycle of deterioration. No other church exemplifies this more than CCKC. There has been antipathy between groups in the church resulting in frequent pastoral leadership changes. This situation serves as the backdrop for why I

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<sup>3</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 11.

chose this topic for the project. It is time for the church to go back to the Bible.

Congregants must take a posture of willing obedience to the Word.

I have always been interested in the subject of hearing from God. I knew the Bible was the voice of God, but I wanted to dig deeper. When I was younger, I was amazed to read God communicated with the patriarchs directly and told them specifically what to do. This was somewhat confusing to me. For example, in the Bible, God converses with Elijah and tells him where to go and what to say in detail and Elijah obeys. Even when he flees from the threat of Jezebel, God prepares his successor and tells Elijah to anoint him. God tells David how to attack the Philistines in detail. I wondered if I could expect to have this kind of conversational relationship with God today. These experiences helped motivate me toward the spiritual disciplines and meditation.

God the Father takes the initiative in the redemptive work of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ does so on Earth in the Gospels, and the Holy Spirit does this work from the time of the book of Acts forward. As Henry Blackaby states, “Whenever God is working, all three persons of the Trinity are involved.”<sup>4</sup> In a sense, the Godhead has historically taken turns at taking initiative for the redemption of humanity.

Since today is considered the age of the Holy Spirit, believers cannot always expect to hear the audible voice of God like the prophets in the Old Testament. They need to understand when the believers are impressed with the Holy Spirit through Scripture, they are actually listening to the voice of God.<sup>5</sup> As Dallas Willard teaches in

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 134-138.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, Christ told his disciples his way of being present with them would change. For example, he breathed out and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit,”<sup>6</sup> (Jn 20:22) and taught through the Spirit in Acts 1.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Jesus shows he transcends space as he appears in the upper room after his resurrection. In the book of Acts, it is obvious that it is the Holy Spirit who takes the initiative.

When believers today talk about listening to the voice of God, it means to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. In *A Call to Stand Apart*, Ellen G. White writes, “The Bible is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe we would open God’s Word and with what earnestness we would search its precepts. The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One.”<sup>8</sup> God has spoken to our ancestors through the prophets and through Jesus (Heb 1:1-2). When a believer realizes this, Bible reading becomes a more meaningful time to meet with God.

The purpose of this project is to create a program and conduct an experiment which will enable those at CCKC to eagerly engage the Word of God. This pilot project aims to give them an experience which will show them the Word of God is powerful enough to transform their hearts. Through the spiritual discipline of meditation with prayer that the church has neglected so far, they will be able to advance their spiritual vitality. This project is to help the participants recognize biblical meditation makes them

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<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all bible verses are from the New American Standard Bible.

<sup>7</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 277-279.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *A Call to Stand Apart: Challenging Young Adults to Make an Eternal Difference* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing, 2002), 107.

more healthy Christians. They will learn that to take on Christ's character they must put into practice the teachings of the Bible. To accomplish these goals, I intend to form small groups where members are able to learn about the practice of meditation for a given period of time.

The goal of this project is also to give members of the church a chance to experience a dynamic communicative relationship with God by hearing God and speaking to Him in prayer every day. This very conversational relationship between a believer and God, at the center of meditation with prayer practice, plays the key role in spirituality. They will go beyond being content to just know the doctrine. The Christian life is more than just attending church habitually and this project will design a strategy for the members of CCKC to advance their spirituality, experience transformation in small groups, and learn biblical meditation and contemplation which involves using the imagination and emotions.

Therefore, this project aims to help people move their faith from their heads to their hearts so God can work in them before he works through CCKC. Three small groups will start to bring this spiritual revival to the church. Eventually the church will become an example in the community so that other churches can follow as they also strive to bring about revival and growth.

Although many forms of spiritual disciplines like Scripture reading or meditation are properly done individually, they can be also performed in group settings. This pilot project will be designed to involve both the personal and communal to maximize the project's effects. In fact, small groups have many advantages. Small groups are a community where the participants can freely share their hearts with others. It is easier to

ask questions, answer questions, and get to know the lives of others (all difficult to do through sermons). Spiritual growth can be done more effectively in small groups because it is easier to build deep friendship and allow relational transparency. Small groups help the participants be participatory and active in the process of spiritual growth.

Therefore, for the pilot project, the participants will meet weekly at the church in small groups of about five people. They will be guided into the spiritual discipline of meditation by me and other leaders, and then they will be doing the practice every day at their respective homes, with specific assignments each day. Each week they will share their experiences so they can learn from each other.

This paper consists of three main parts. Part one explores the context of CCKC. It examines the unique culture of the church and its mission-related programs of the past. It also deals with the impact of the cultural aspect of the church's growth and decline, including its strengths and weaknesses. This part traces its history by looking at the pastoral leadership for the last three decades, showing the past and current trajectory and mindset of the congregation. In this section, the core values of CCKC's theological positions are discussed. This chapter includes demographic and socioeconomic status of the church as well as the financial trends. It then focuses on some of the church's current challenges.

Part two explores the biblical and theological foundations for Christian spiritual practices, especially focusing on meditation and prayer. This section looks at how biblical characters engage in these disciplines and how they help them in their relationships with God. It discusses the vitality of the use of the Word and meditation in Christian transformation. Chapter two surveys arguments of some of the scholarly authors who

have examined the spiritual disciplines and their effects on Adventist theology. This chapter explores methods of spiritual transformation including formational reading and the process of human spiritual transformation. It provides various authors' insights regarding meditation and other practices. Chapter 3 lays a biblical foundation by word study in the Bible. Key texts from the OT and NT are reviewed exegetically. Part Two of this project contends the core goal of spiritual disciplines is the transformation of the follower and that, exegetically and logically, meditation and prayer is effective to this end.

Part Three introduces the ways in which this pilot project is designed and implemented. Chapter 4 shows the procedure one can follow step by step to practice meditation and prayer in solitude; it is designed particularly for this church group in CCKC. Chapter 5 discusses how the participants actually have been guided throughout the process with the detailed timeline in order to show the implementation process. It explains how the participants' minds and hearts have moved following the program.

This final section also includes how the collaborators are recruited and their role as a team working with myself as the leader and pastor. It describes the negative and positive feedback of some participants. The reactions of the collaborators are unpacked as well, which serve as good material for future reference. This part, in general, identifies the results of the project and its future goals, demonstrating the project overall helps enrich a deeper relationship with God and enables this group to actively follow Jesus and taste transformation. Finally, it concludes by making recommendations to the church for next steps.

## CHAPTER 1

### MINISTRY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF CONTRA COSTA KOREAN CHURCH

CCKC is an evangelical congregation that gathers for weekly worship services in Martinez, California. The church has met in many places throughout the East Bay area and has served the community for about forty-five years. This chapter provides a general description of CCKC in terms of spirituality by exploring its history, values, and theology. It also discusses the people and culture in the church. Specific challenges are explored and analyzed identifying the current deficit of spirituality.

#### **The History of Korean Adventist Church in the United States**

The history of Korean Adventists in America is interwoven with Korean immigration to the United States. Korean Adventists first immigrated to the US in the early 1900s. Two immigrants, Eunghyun Lee and Heungjo Sohn, were introduced to Adventism in Japan before boarding a ship to San Francisco, California. One of them

went back to Korea and became an evangelist.<sup>1</sup> The history of the Korean Adventist Church began through a person who was immigrating to the United States.

Korean immigrants' numbers were very low in the early 1900s until the Korean War occurred from 1950 to 1953. Then, more people began to come to America for education. From 1959 on, some nurses immigrated to the United States.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the first immigrants from Korea were students and nurses who contributed a great deal to the growth of Korean Adventist churches in America. The first two churches were LA Central Church founded in 1962 and Washington DC Church founded in 1963.

The US President Lyndon Johnson signed the new Immigrant Act, known as the Hart-Celler Act, in 1965, resulting in easier immigration for more people; an article from the Migration Policy Institute explains its impact: "The 1965 law abolished the national-origins quota system. It was replaced with a preference system based on immigrants' family relationships with U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents and, to a lesser degree, their skills."<sup>3</sup> The beneficiaries included many people from Asia. However, this was also good for Americans because they were at war against Vietnam at that time and needed a lot of workers. By signing this act, the president of the United States showed the nation treated immigrants from all nations equally.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Yunglin Lee 이영린, *Miju Hanin Jaerom Gyohoisa* 미주한인 재림 교회사 [The History of the Korean Adventist Church in the Americas] (1904-2006), Revised Korean Edition, (Los Angeles: Korean SDA Church Council of Americas, 2011), 11-15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 41

<sup>3</sup> Muzaffar Chishti et al., "Fifty Years On, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Continues to Reshape the United States," Migration Policy Institute, October 15, 2015, accessed May 22, 2018, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/fifty-years-1965-immigration-and-nationality-act-continues-reshape-united-states>.

From this point on, the immigrant church began to experience huge changes. Starting in the 1970s, the effect of the new immigrant act began to show. In 1970, two more Korean Adventist churches were planted in the US.<sup>4</sup> Three others were founded in 1972 in Glendale, Orlando, and Staten Island. By the end of 1979, the number reached twenty-seven throughout the United States. The 1980s was the decade with the highest number of immigrants from Korea.<sup>5</sup> The Korean Adventist churches began to organize more systematically, holding conferences for pastors and annual camp meetings (the Western camp meeting has been meeting for thirty-five years).

The Adventist Churches have similar characteristics because each church is not just a separate individual entity but rather part of the whole. Every church is under the leadership and supervision of its local conference, which is made up of multiple local churches in a region. Multiple conferences make up one union, and then the unions form one operating body, called the general conference. This hierarchical structure help Adventist churches to be uniform in doctrines and practices of faith.

Furthermore, Korean Adventists have their own cultural ethnic organization called the Korean Adventist Association, though it has no administrative authority over the local churches. Korean Adventist churches in America belong to the local conferences by administration, but they are also culturally a part of the Korean Adventist Association. This organization manages its own missionary work for its ethnic group in the US. It has an association known as the Korean American Youth Adventist Missionary

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<sup>4</sup> Dennis Yunglin Lee, 이영린, *Miju Hanin Jaerom Gyohoisa* 미주한인 재림 교회사[The History of the Korean Adventist Church in the Americas] (1904-2006), 41-50.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Movement, or Kayamm Movement. It operates a publishing house that prints Church Compass, monthly magazines and devotionals, and *Signs of the Times*. It also runs a health business, TV missionary programs, and completes community service work. The mission-focused works of Adventist churches have typically succeeded on the denominational level rather than at the individual church level.

### **The History of Contra Costa Adventist Church**

CCKC commenced when five Korean families gathered together to have a Bible study at Pleasant Hill Adventist Church in 1970. They rented the library of the church to host their own worship service. Two more families joined the group in 1981. There was significant growth in the group after that point. However, when three families suddenly left the city for education or job offers elsewhere, the small group could not help but dissipate. The remaining members began attending a nearby church in Napa Valley.

After some time, with the help of some new converts, they began meeting again in Pleasant Hill Adventist Church. They named their church Contra Costa Korean Church in 1982.<sup>6</sup> Two new members were baptized. The church kept growing and welcomed eight more members. Pastor Tongryun Choi was appointed as the first pastor of the church. The little group continued growing; they soon had forty-five adult members and thirty children in 1987, which was enough to be registered as an official organized church group at the Northern California Conference. As immigrants kept coming to the US, the church kept on growing. Most of the immigrants who came were in their thirties or forties

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<sup>6</sup> The history of Contra Costa Korean Church recorded in the following paragraphs is from unpublished church documents and informal conversations with church members.

and had children. After Pastor Choi left for Denver, CCKC members remembered him for his selfless service because he had been an unpaid, self-supporting pastor.

Pastor Dongho Kim from Napa Church took over as the church's second pastor. However, he served for only two years and was succeeded by Pastor Younghee Won. The church went through a season of growth as more immigrants came during the 1990s. Pastor Won served the church for fourteen years, a CCKC pastor's longest tenure to date. The church grew to seventy members and was recognized as an official organized church by the Northern California Conference of Adventists. In 1995, Pastor Won was ordained. As church growth was soaring, the congregants saw the need to own a church building.

Korea Community Center (KCC) was a non-profit organization which had been established by some of the church members in 1999. KCC bought a church property in Castro Valley, California and allowed the congregation to use it for free. The church was renamed Pleasanton Korean Church (PKC) at that time. The church held many evangelistic meetings and a series of health care meetings with the speaker Dr. Lee, who was a well-known medical doctor in Korea. Many attended the meetings and showed interest, but it was difficult to lead them to church. Pastor Won concluded his term in 2007 after serving the church for fourteen years.

Pastor Donghun Kim from Thousand Oaks took over the position as the fourth pastor in 2008. During his term, the church vacated the building that KCC had offered for free and began worshipping at Oasis Methodist church in Concord, California. It later moved to Quaker Evangelical Friends Church in 2008 and stayed there for about four years. After Pastor Kim was transferred to Sacramento Adventist Church, Pastor Won came back as the interim pastor and served for a year. The church went back to the

building in Castro Valley where they used to have worship services. In 2012, under the new leadership of Pastor Hyunjoon Kim, KCC kindly donated the property to the church and registered the ownership transfer. The congregation continued to grow as many new families from the Pleasanton area joined the church, increasing membership to about one hundred.

It was at that time that Pleasanton Korean church faced a critical moment. A major donor, along with some other congregants, insisted on moving the church to the Pleasant Hill area where it had originally begun. The church leadership felt obligated to do so. PKC began searching for a church property in the Pleasant Hill area. During this transition period, many members left. It was a difficult time for them as its members could not agree about these major decisions that would affect the congregation overall. Some said the church must move to the area where it was before, while others insisted that it was not in their best interest to move. After many complications, PKC finally sold the Pleasanton property for about 1.7 million dollars and bought the current property in Martinez for about 1.2 million dollars. The attending members dropped to about thirty and this discouraged the remaining congregants. However, they struggled to revive the church by conducting Health Design, a health screening service for the community care program in league with North Bay Group in Fairfield, California.

Pastor Kim announced his resignation in the beginning of 2016 and left the church at the end of that year. The church conducted a retreat in Albion, California but failed to motivate the majority of members to attend. I was then appointed as the sixth church pastor and started in September 2017.

There are not many Koreans in the Pleasant Hill area and the greater vicinity including Concord and Walnut Creek. New immigration from Korea has been drastically reduced as of late. Most of the Koreans in the church are in their sixties and seventies. In other words, the church is aging rapidly. If the second generation had all remained in church, it would have maintained a good size. However, it seems the first-generation immigrants failed to pass on their faith to the next generation. Though they still have the desire to grow the church, it has been very difficult to bring the desired growth. One of the big challenges the church is facing is that the church has a building project with a tight budget. Most church members are comfortable financially, but they do not have enough extra income to donate to build a new sanctuary.

### **Demographic and Socioeconomic Analysis**

The Korean population makes up the sixth largest Asian population in the San Francisco Bay Area, with nearly 90,000 people according to the 2010 census.<sup>7</sup> According to 2018 data at the county level, the Korean population is 8,916 which makes up of 5.2 percent of the total Asian Population or 0.80 percent of the total population in Contra Costa county.<sup>8</sup> This is the primary demographic CCKC desires to reach.

The church's weekly attendance is around thirty, while it has eighty-three registered members. Attendance reaches about fifty when there are special occasions.

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<sup>7</sup> S. Ivey et al., "Korean Needs Assessment of the Bay Area," *Korean Community Center of the Bay Area*, accessed November 14, 2018, [http://kcceb.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/KoNA-Bay-Area-Main-Report\\_March-10\\_2016.pdf?x40303](http://kcceb.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/KoNA-Bay-Area-Main-Report_March-10_2016.pdf?x40303).

<sup>8</sup> Statistical Atlas, "Ancestry in Contra Costa County," accessed November 14, 2018, <https://statisticalatlas.com/county/California/Contra-Costa-County/Ancestry>.

Until a few years ago, the church received approximately \$100,000 in annual tithes but decreased to \$60,000 in 2017. The annual budget has been about \$40,000.

This church is not diverse, as it is a Korean ethnic church specifically serving Korean people. The worship service is in Korean. Although there are some English-speakers, they are all second-generation members. Some particular characteristics further define this church. The church is aging fast and not all age groups are represented in the congregation. Most members are either in their sixties or are teenagers. The average age of the congregants is 65. The first immigrant generation is decreasing and the second generation does not attend this church. This is common among Korean Adventist churches in America. The core group of members has become old and there are not many younger people coming in. One of the challenges that I face as CCKC's pastor is Korea has an order culture, meaning younger people respect the elderly and the elderly take that for granted. Since I am one of the youngest in the community, I might face difficulties from the cultural assumptions from the community's mindset.

Almost all members have received more than a high school education. The first immigrant generation church members have had higher education and came from elite backgrounds. Their children who grew up here became high class professionals like medical doctors or lawyers.

Most of the members live within thirty minutes of the church. The church's location in Martinez is not as central as when the church met in Pleasanton. Almost all the members have been attending the church for many years; some left but later returned to the church. About 30 percent of the members are from Presbyterian churches and other denominations. There are few visitors from other neighboring Adventist churches.

Usually Adventist churches have many visitors because they are linked through shared programs in the denomination. In addition, some do not attend Sabbath school but only attend the Sabbath worship service.

Even though CCKC is aging fast and has lost its vitality, the church recognizes this reality and is putting in effort to address these concerns. However, the members do not know how to revive or where to start. Some Korean members attend Caucasian churches because they cannot come to this church. Some second-generation Koreans simply give up their faith. Yet, I believe there to be potential for this church.

### **Financial Priorities of the Church**

The church's 2017 audit was completed by Jeffrey Maxwell of Northern California Conference in the presence of the church treasurer Ms. Lim. It shows Contra Costa Church's financial priorities. The church has unrestricted net assets as well as restricted net assets due to a donor's specifications. However, these are viewed as unrestricted net assets by some of the church members and the conference. This may bring difficulty to the church regarding the assets and the church may face another big division. It is difficult to assess the church's financial priorities by looking at the budget.

As of last year, the church's primary expense is personnel. Since the church has reduced in size, the pastor salary is the largest expense. Running programs comes next in terms of expenses incurred. Currently 60 percent of the budget goes to personnel and 30 percent to program expenses. The church is planning to construct a building this year. A large part of the church's assets will most likely be invested in the building plan. While there have been concerns raised about the construction and use of the funds, plans are

progressing steadily. However, there has not been a thorough study on the building project in relation to the church's mission statement and vision.

### **Cultural Influences**

CCKC is under the influence of both the American and Korean cultures in a unique setting. Most of the main members came to America in 1970s and 1980s as mentioned previously. Despite all the changes in the world in the last several decades, they still maintain the same lifestyle and views of 1970s or 1980s Korean culture. People of the same generation in Korea now experience a very different culture because Korean society is changing fast, not only economically but also culturally. Korean churches in America maintain an old mentality that no longer exists outside of their subculture. So CCKC culture seems to remain unchanged and unwilling to do so.

Communication in high context cultures, according to Edward T. Hall in *Beyond Culture*, depends on context rather than words, whereas low context culture depends more on the words.<sup>9</sup> Many things are left unsaid in a high context culture. A listener must discern what the speaker means by the context. Korean culture belongs to a high context culture while America is a low context culture. Korean immigrants face a big cultural difference as they come from Korea to the US. They usually have a hard time adjusting to a low context culture. Therefore, there is a tension in CCKC because some people behave in high context culture ways while others, mostly younger believers, behave in the ways of a low context culture.

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 91.

Even in church, there may be unspoken expectations from others. Another notable cultural difference is that of the pastor's employment stability. Korean churches in America want to both employ and lay off the pastor at will. This can be attributed to either Korean Adventist church culture or American Adventist culture.

A Korean immigrant church functions as a place of fellowship as well as a place of worship. It is natural people of the same ethnic group feel a sense of closeness. It becomes a safe place where they can freely express themselves according to their cultural norms. For example, respect for elderly people is crucial. Age is so important in Korean culture that even a one-year difference means a lot. The younger address the older with respect. This respect for the elderly is a value that strongly affects communication. CCKC is ruled by this cultural influence.

The first generation of immigrants who came to America still hold on to the Korean culture of the 1970s. Their mentality has not changed much at all. However, the second generation experiences a totally different cultural environment. They go to Korean American churches where they feel comfortable and have fellowship. Even though they speak English, they tend to go to Korean churches. However, there are some young people who have left the Korean church. CCKC is trying hard to keep these second-generation congregants in the church.

### **Stated Vision and Ministry Goal**

CCKC, as a local congregation, belongs to the Northern California Conference, which is under the leadership of the General Conference, the world-wide organization of Adventists. It therefore shares its mission statement and vision with the General

Conference, which can be found on their official website. The vision statement is, “In harmony with Bible revelation, Seventh-day Adventists see as the climax of God’s plan the restoration of all His creation to full harmony with His perfect will and righteousness.”<sup>10</sup> The mission statement is, “The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced by the three angels’ messages (Rv 14:6-12), and to prepare the world for Christ’s soon return.”<sup>11</sup>

CCKC implements the mission statement by devoting itself to exhibit the lordship of Christ in members’ lives and by ministering to the surrounding community. CCKC continues to follow Jesus to experience spiritual growth and development. These beliefs are meant to spread into all areas of the believers’ lives. Each congregant is invited to experience God, who desires to shape his people as they practice these missional goals in their daily lives.

### **Leadership and Decision-Making Profile**

CCKC is a part of the Seventh-day Adventist communion, a world-wide church network whose members have the same policies for operating the church when it comes to leadership and decision-making processes. The Adventist church manual states:

The Seventh-day Adventist form of governance is representative, which recognizes that authority rests in the membership and is expressed through duly elected representatives at each level of organization, with executive

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<sup>10</sup> “Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” Seventh-day Adventist Church, October 13, 2014, accessed May 22, 2018, <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/-/mission-statement-of-the-seventh-day-adventist-church/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

responsibility delegated to representative bodies and officers for the governing of the Church at each separate level.<sup>12</sup>

As stated above, the delegates from each part of the lower entities make decisions together at the General Conference which holds the highest authority in the administration of the church. The same principle applies to the local congregation, therefore church business meetings where all its members are present have the supreme decision-making authority. CCKC follows this policy faithfully. However, while the business meeting, or general assembly of a local church, technically has authority over the board, most local church boards are the ones that make decisions. CCKC is no exception. Therefore, CCKC should hold business meetings a little more often in order to include all believers in making discipleship plans and other outreach programs.

Likewise, in terms of the organizational structure, CCKC is well organized and protected by the Conference. Every person's voice is important and should be regarded as such in decision making. However, it is easy for a whole meeting to be influenced by one outspoken person. Emphasizing the union of the church, the Adventist church manual instructs one should respect others' opinions.<sup>13</sup> One of the biggest problems for CCKC is it does not have a safe space for all members to set forth their views freely. The church board must create such a place where every member's input is valued and protected.

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<sup>12</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual*, 19<sup>th</sup> edition, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2016), 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

However, this can be difficult. There must be restoration to right spiritual practices like meditation and prayer so that the decision-making board can fulfill its vision and mission.

### **Core Values and Theological Convictions**

CCKC's values are rooted in Scripture. Its identity is from an Adventist-specific understanding of the book of Revelation, especially the teachings on the second coming of Jesus. Adventists focus on preparing for his return as last day people.

Although CCKC is an ethnic church serving mostly Korean people, it values diversity and freedom of community in the Church at large. CCKC places the highest authority on the Bible. However, it also highly values Ellen White's writings, as supplementary or reference to Scripture. CCKC encourages each other to read both Scripture and her writings for spiritual growth. One other characteristic of this church is it accepts what Willard calls "sin management."<sup>14</sup> Many believers may think one of the most important things is to know about forgiveness of sins so that they can go to heaven. People think what they need from God is only forgiveness and salvation. Obedience on earth to the Word has become secondary and not essential, at least in practice.

CCKC members must experience a spiritual awakening and realize that spiritual growth must happen in this life and that this is part of the gospel. Church members need to think seriously about God as the Lord of our life here, not only as the Lord of our life hereafter. Even though some people in the church want to have programs for transformation, there is still a tendency to think of spiritual disciplines as legalism. Many think the great saints are simply faithful in attending church and giving offerings.

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<sup>14</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 41.

Spiritual disciplines are viewed as works or a duty. Some may do them out of guilt. This mentality must be immediately corrected in order for this project to be successful.

### **Expanded Description of the Challenge**

According to the demographics and issues addressed in this chapter, the biggest challenge is the church is old and has lost its vitality. It is very hard to attract younger people to church and to change the ongoing mentality of boredom and burnout. The faith of the first generation has not been successfully passed on to the second generation; this is main cause of why church membership has decreased and the church in general has not continued prospering. It is also very difficult to bring back members who have left the church. Furthermore, since I am younger than most members, I have age-related prejudices to work against since age is so important in Korean culture. Yet, it is in this context and given this history that this project will develop a strategy for the spiritual formation of this congregation through meditation and prayer.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews seven books that help build theoretical foundations and a practical program for Contra Costa Korean Church to take steps towards Christlike character. Out of the seven materials, two of them were written by Adventist scholars. This chapter includes overviews and evaluations of each book or article as well as its contribution in the development of this project.

#### ***Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* by John Jefferson Davis**

From his own spiritually transformative experience of meditation, John Jefferson Davis offers theoretical backgrounds of meditation and contemplation as well as very practical guidelines on how to put them into practice. In chapters one and two, Davis explores some distractions evangelical Christians encounter when reading Scripture today. First, Davis points out America has become a religiously plural country.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 14.

Therefore, Christians may wonder which forms of spirituality to pursue. Second, Davis stresses that, in general, Americans have lost interest in reading the Bible. He supports his argument with research showing there is great biblical illiteracy in America.<sup>2</sup> Third, the most problematic factor as reported by Davis is that we live in an age of information overload through TV, social media, and the internet. Human beings cannot handle that much information at a time and it makes people rushed, less effective, and not productive. He states, “In the face of today’s rushed lives and information overload, such slow reading of the Word of God seems more important than ever.”<sup>3</sup>

In chapters three through five, Davis outlines a sound theological foundation for meditation which focuses on inaugurated eschatology, union with Christ, and the Trinity. In the Bible, Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God is at hand. Davis argues that “The promised kingdom of the Messiah has now been inaugurated with the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of the Father.”<sup>4</sup> Davis asserts that kingdom of God has already arrived, so believers can enjoy it here and now. Davis writes, “The already presence of the kingdom and the Spirit means that communion with the living God, in faith and through the Scriptures, can have a new depth of richness and immediacy that was not yet the case in the old covenant.”<sup>5</sup>

Davis writes the gospel is a living message, so salvation does not only mean believers go to heaven after death, but also they enjoy and experience the kingdom now.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 31.

The question of how this happens is closely linked with the following notion. Davis explains the second concept of union with Christ using the apostle Paul's analogy of the temple of God in reference to the local church and individual believers (1 Cor 3:16; 1 Cor 6:19).<sup>6</sup> Just as God had been present in the tabernacle, through the Spirit he dwells in humans as his temple, creating an intimate relationship between God and humans. Once a Christian believes this, he or she does not have to pursue supernatural phenomenon to experience God. Davis asserts that charisma is not always an extraordinary manifestation, saying that believers should live into "the ordinary supernatural" life.<sup>7</sup> Davis' understanding of the union with Christ is also ontological in that it is "not just a metaphor; because the Holy Spirit is real [it is] a real umbilical cord."<sup>8</sup>

Davis' reasoning behind the union with Christ is that just as the Trinitarian God exists in unity in three persons, so a believer is to be united with Christ because he or she has been made in the image of God in loving relationship. A Christian believer, through meditation on the Word of God, is united with God in a special way in his presence. This concept is connected with Davis' understanding that salvation is a relationship with God, more than simply forgiveness of sin and going to heaven when one dies.

In the fifth chapter, Davis constructs an argument for an inaugurated epistemology that the spiritual realities are in fact more real than physical ones. In the section about epistemology and spiritual realism, Davis explains the brain interrelates with objects in the imagination or with the information that comes through our sensory

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 43.

organs such as eyes and ears; he writes, “Our minds and bodies are in actual contact with an environment outside our minds.”<sup>9</sup> He explains the brain reacts to the Bible in the same way that it responds to physical reality. Therefore, the Word of God truly takes effect when the Holy Spirit works in the human mind.

In chapters seven and eight, Davis introduces the practicalities of meditation. He elaborates on three major types of meditation: reading Scripture, centering prayer, and whole-brain meditation. The first method is a variation of *lectio divina*. It is organized into three parts: offering invocation to God for his guidance, reading the Scripture text, and reflecting upon it. Then, Davis adds one more step at the end, which is recollection.<sup>10</sup>

The second method, centering prayer or Jesus prayer, seeks more of a direct communion with God. This may not be recommended for evangelical Christians who feel uneasy toward this approach (Davis proposes an alternative method for this, which is “Focusing Prayer”).<sup>11</sup> The third method is whole-brain meditation. This practice is based on the idea that because human brains are made up of the right and left hemispheres which function differently (the left for language and the right for visual and spatial), both sides of the brain should be engaged during meditation.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Davis writes that during the meditation process, participants have to combine words with concepts and images.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 126-128.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 143.

This book not only explains the basis of meditation, but it also provides two practical and biblical ways of meditation which have proven very useful for this project. Unlike other works that weigh heavily either on methods or samples of practices, Davis combines his theory with experience. He has developed a thorough theological foundation which boils down to an intentional reading of Scripture as a real act of communion with God. Again, one of the strongest points about this book is that it offers very firm theoretical groundwork for building a robust meditation practice.

Davis delineates how the Word, not human experience, becomes the primary source of encountering God when believers commune with him.<sup>13</sup> This book is very helpful for this project in that it provides a sound theological foundation for the spiritual discipline of meditation with prayer.

### ***Praying the Scriptures by Judson Cornwall***

Cornwall suggests praying the Scriptures involves not only speaking to God about human concerns but also imparts many other spiritual blessings. The main idea from Cornwall's work for this project is that using Scripture in prayer is part of hearing from God rather than just speaking to Him. However, Cornwall does not elaborate on what praying Scripture looks like until chapter four where he writes that Scripture instructs believers while they pray. In the first part of the book, he touches on the basis of prayer, calling it "the cry of the inner person to . . . someone considered higher."<sup>14</sup> He also argues it must be a conversation, not a monologue, to have true communion.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 90-106.

<sup>14</sup> Judson Cornwall, *Praying the Scriptures: Using God's Words to Effect Change in All of Life's Situations* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2008), 3.

Cornwall describes the effects of praying the Scriptures in chapter three. He writes that the practice leads those who pray to simplicity and sincerity.<sup>15</sup> At the end of chapter four, he connects prayer to the Word of God by writing, “Prayer naturally brings us to the Word, and God’s Word will always bring us to prayer.”<sup>16</sup> So, he affirms that prayer and reading the Word of God should not and cannot be separated.

Cornwall suggests that one has “a small notebook handy” while praying the Scripture.<sup>17</sup> This is a helpful technique because insights come and go quickly. With a notebook available, a person can easily write down ideas and wisdom that comes to mind. Cornwall also invites the reader to put it into real practice to maximize the joy of communication with God.

The second part of Cornwall’s book talks about how Scripture reading initiates conversation with God, inspires divine petitions, and illuminates deceitful hearts. Cornwall puts a high value on the use of the Scripture in prayer. He introduces a technique to encourage the experience of abundance: the use of imagination in reading and praying the Scriptures.<sup>18</sup> Cornwall invokes the Apostle Paul’s teaching as the biblical basis for his argument. Ephesians 3:20 states that “[God] is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.” Cornwall emphasizes the power of the human imagination by saying, “I prefer to read a book rather than see it portrayed on

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 141.

television: my imagination paints a broader picture than the screenplay can depict.”<sup>19</sup>

From his personal experience, Cornwall shows that imagination assists him greatly during Scripture reading and prayer.

The fourth section examines some of the great benefits from reading the Scripture and praying. In fact, though the title of this book implies that it is a book about prayer, it actually spends more time on the role of Scripture. Cornwall holds the Scripture as the most important ingredient for prayer because it allows people to pray with meaning, as praying with Scripture is more focused and elevated than praying without Scripture. Cornwall’s idea of the scriptural prayer is clear when he writes, “The portion of the Bible we pray is often God’s feelings being expressed through our emotion.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, praying the Scripture is to feel God’s heart when interacting with the Bible.

This book gives believers a chance to see the spiritual discipline of meditation from a different angle. The project participants will be practicing this method and will benefit from doing meditation practice with prayer. Again, this is one of the contributions of the book for this project; meditation practice will be enriched and invigorated when done with Scriptural prayer.

This book is biblical in that Cornwall emphasizes and values the content of the Scripture in his arguments. Even though Cornwall also values the “quick, unpremeditated expressions” as an essential part of prayer, he does not invite his readers to pray with whatever thought comes to mind, but instead lifts up Scripture as the ultimate source in

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 177.

prayer.<sup>21</sup> This is in contrast to Donald Whitney who writes that praying the Bible means going to the lines of the Scripture and talking to God about “whatever comes to mind.”<sup>22</sup> For Cornwall, the content of prayer matters and the Scripture and prayer go together. However, one of the weak points of the book is that it does not detail the methodology of praying with Scripture even though one may glean insights dispersed throughout the text.

### ***Renovation of the Heart by Dallas Willard***

The thesis of the book is that “Spiritual transformation actually happens as each essential dimension of the self is transformed to Christlikeness under the direction of a regenerate will interacting with constant overtures of grace from God.”<sup>23</sup> Dallas Willard examines the process of how a sinful human being is transformed into Christlikeness. He writes that it is mainly the work of the heart. He analyzes human life by breaking it into six elements: thought, feeling, choice, body, social context, and soul.<sup>24</sup> Then he spends many pages expounding on these concepts and their role in human transformation. Among them, he emphasizes willpower or choice because he considers it as the center governing power of the human being. Willard writes, “Thus will or spirit is ...the heart in

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>22</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 33-36. One of the most controversial arguments that Whitney makes is that Christians can pray with whatever comes to their minds while reading the Scripture even though the thoughts have nothing to do with the text. Many disagree because they think believers should pray with concepts or thoughts that are clearly in line with the Word of God.

<sup>23</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 232.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 32-39.

the human system: the core of its being.”<sup>25</sup> At the same time, he does not believe the basic dimensions are separable, though he does in some sense prioritize the will as the supreme value in organizing human life.

When stressing the point that transformation is the work of God, people tend to become very passive. Willard acknowledges this reality and asserts that people are meant to be active in the process. Humans are supposed to exercise their willpower in following Christ through the spiritual disciplines.

Willard then directs the readers’ attention to the problem of sin, the ruined condition of human beings. Jeremiah 17:9 says the human heart is “more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick.” Willard argues that transformation starts from knowing the heart’s true condition. Willard adds, “Without this realization of our utter ruin and without the genuine revisioning . . . no clear path to inner transformation can be found.”<sup>26</sup> Once one realizes his or her condition, Willard presents self-denial as the first action on the path of transformation.<sup>27</sup> The logic is that one must die to oneself so that Jesus can live in his or her heart. Willard sees this as of utmost importance for those who want to walk the path of spiritual formation.

After surveying the process of spiritual formation, Willard expounds on the six elements of human life. Willard emphasizes that human thoughts are the beginning point of change. The divine Spirit begins to shape the human will to align with that of God,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 64.

which will naturally lead to total formation. It starts from the heart but also requires the thinking process. Willard writes,

And so, we must apply our thinking to and with the Word of God. We must thoughtfully take that Word in, dwell upon it, ponder its meaning, explore its implications – especially as it relates to our own lives. What are we to do in the light of the facts of the gospel and the revelation of God and of human destiny contained in the Bible? We must “pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it” (Heb 2:1). We must thoughtfully put it into practice.<sup>28</sup>

Willard invites the reader to ponder the Word of God in meditation and contemplation for the sake of transformation. This practice ensures that the mind is filled with the Word of God and that one becomes more passionate about God. He again stresses the meditation practice by quoting from Thomas Watson: “The first fruit of love is the musing of the mind upon God. He who is in love, his thoughts are ever upon the object. He who loves God is ravished and transported with the contemplation of God . . . Do we contemplate Christ and glory?”<sup>29</sup>

Willard also examines the power of emotion and explores its effects on spiritual formation. Then he moves on to willpower, asserting that the will controls thought, and that by exercising willpower, human hearts can be transformed.<sup>30</sup> Willard encourages the believer to look unto Jesus, which is an appropriate spiritual discipline, one will overcome “the duplicities, entanglements, and evil intents that affects our will.”<sup>31</sup> The will power itself is not the transforming power. Rather, it

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 156.

functions as a bridge between human beings and Christ so that the Holy Spirit can do his work.

The most significant contribution of Willard's book to this project is the notion that by exercising one's willpower to intentionally meditate, believers fill their minds with the Word. Meditation and contemplation are great tools used to be transformed into Christlikeness. Another important contribution of the book is that the renovation of heart is still possible by the work of God and it is not dependent solely on human merit or effort. Even though the author does not spend much time writing specifically about the spiritual exercises of meditation and contemplation, one can easily connect Willard's ideas to the subjects that this project is addressing. Overall, this book is a great resource and is helpful since it describes the inner workings of the mind for human transformation.

***Shaped by the Word* by M. Robert Mulholland Jr.**

The thrust of this book is that spiritual transformation happens only as one reads the Bible in the right posture, that is, in a formative way and not in an informative way. *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* speaks of the transforming power of Scripture as the title indicates. However, the structure of this book is unique in that M. Robert Mulholland only begins to tell about the power of Scripture starting in chapter ten. Before this point, he simply lays out his theoretical arguments on how a person should practice a transformative reading of the Bible, emphasizing the posture and attitude one should take in facing the Word of God. The author considers this an essential element when reading the Bible. His methods and recommendations in

reading the Bible involve the concept of slow and deep thinking on the Word, which could be considered meditation and contemplation.

Mulholland asserts that believers need to ask the following question constantly when reading the Bible: “What is God seeking to say to me in all of this?”<sup>32</sup> In a nutshell, Mulholland wants to avoid being too cognitive, rational, and analytical while reading Scripture. In this way, like many other Christian writers, he explains that reading the Bible in the right posture allows the reader to hear from God in a way that leads to true change.<sup>33</sup>

To stress the role the Word of God has on human transformation, he writes that “We should be shaped by the Word, not by the perceptual frameworks of habit, relational dynamics and response mechanisms in the world.”<sup>34</sup> He connects this concept to the idea that humans have been made by the Word. Mulholland’s view of human beings is interesting in that he believes each person is “a word that God speaks into existence.”<sup>35</sup> The author explains that a person has a spirit which enables intimate communion with God. Since God made the first human in the image of God, people have his word, or image, in them. Mulholland’s logic here is that since the humans were made by the word, they need to be reshaped by the word again. Mulholland writes that human transformation requires the shaping work of the Word of God.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000). 20.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 37

Next, Mulholland moves on to examining one's posture when reading the Bible. He invites his readers to approach the Bible through formational reading rather than informational reading. An informational reading practice focuses on quantity over quality. Formational reading, on the other hand, takes time and requires deep thought. In informational reading, the reader takes control of the text as opposed to formational reading in which the reader is controlled by the text.

Mulholland spends the majority of the book explaining this proper reading posture because he believes the wrong posture prevents true transformation. This is true for scholars, theology students, and lifelong laypeople. Mulholland writes,

Do we come to the scripture seeking a technique, a methodology that will enable us to draw close to God – a functional mode; or do we come to the scripture to open, to yield, to submit, to humble ourselves, to bow ourselves in God's presence and allow God to speak to us and then to be obedient?" "Are we operating on a functional basis, somehow trying to get ourselves close to God ...; or are we operating on a relational basis, we are allowing God to draw us into genuine spiritual formation?"<sup>37</sup>

From chapter ten on, Mulholland describes how the reader can engage Scripture in a holistic way. By drawing from Wesley's guidelines for reading Scripture in chapter eleven, he argues that the power of Scripture does not come through simply finishing the texts, but by engaging the texts to know the whole will of God, so that the Spirit can use them to work upon our hearts.<sup>38</sup>

Mulholland offers various techniques that may help believers to encounter God through biblical texts. He emphasizes hearing God while meditating on the texts. He also suggests the "imagination technique" where he invites the reader to "imagine yourself to

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 127.

be a part of the scene, a participant in the story.”<sup>39</sup> He also prompts the reader to imagine detailed things like the wind, birds, smells, or facial expressions which make the story come alive and have a powerful impact on human hearts.

The informative way of reading the Bible is like trying to get closer to God on human merit instead of allowing God to initiate his work. The biggest contribution of Mulholland’s book to this project is the idea that meditation practice is not an easy task because it requires effort to think and feel deeply. It is a disruptive and intrusive act of the will, like many other spiritual disciplines. Meditation requires hard work because human hearts are deeply flawed due to the nature of sin.

This book provides important material about the postures that people should take for transformation to happen as they read the Bible. Its main message is the believers must let the Spirit do his work by submitting to him and renouncing their own wills. Essentially this book is about the attitude of the reader, however it also explains some techniques in detail. Therefore, this book is a good resource for those who think hearing God only happens in an encounter with God’s voice in a special supernatural way. Though this book does not discuss meditation directly, it is useful because hearing God through Scripture does require meditation of sorts.

Mulholland teaches the reader to read the Bible in a right attitude which involves meditation which leads to an encounter with the divine. The crux of the book is that hearing God through Scripture is emotional and spiritual work which can occur through the exercise of meditation. A major strength of Mulholland’s book is that he not only uses

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 150-153.

biblical theories but also draws from the experiences of those who have read the Bible in many different ways.

In another book, *Invitation to a Journey*, Mulholland offers a solution to the temptation to perform spiritual disciplines in our own strength for our own transformation. He encourages taking an inner posture of silence, solitude, and prayer.<sup>40</sup> Mulholland is very clear that the essence of spiritual discipline is taking the right posture, which lets the Holy Spirit work on behalf of believers. The repetition of this theme in *Shaped by the Word* has had an enormous impact on this meditation project. It is an excellent resource for the experimental small groups that I am working on.

***God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation*  
by David W. Saxton**

The Puritan Christian practice of filling one's mind with scriptural thoughts brought vitality back into dry spirituality and provided energy to reform the church. Likewise, Christians today need the practices of meditation and contemplation to revitalize the faith. Saxton emphasizes God's Word as the antidote for the current superficial Christianity and puts the practice of biblical meditation at the core of the spirituality we need today.<sup>41</sup> He describes the necessity of meditation by showing how the Puritans practiced the discipline of meditation. Saxton states, "The reformers and puritans regularly wrote, taught, and exhorted God's people to a life of meditation."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 157.

<sup>41</sup> David W. Saxton, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 1-2.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Saxton offers many interesting illustrations to emphasize the importance of this practice. For example, he compares meditation to chewing food for digestion; hearing sermons is like “eating a nutritious meal by swallowing each bite whole instead of carefully chewing.”<sup>43</sup> Saxton also refers to Puritan leaders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries such as Edmund Calamy and Thomas Watson.<sup>44</sup> He references these famous Puritan men to show the readers how they dealt with the practice of meditation. Saxton believes that the key to restoring delight in the Christian life is through the disciplines of meditation and contemplation on Scripture.

In chapters two and three, Saxton discusses unbiblical forms of meditation and writes that the Roman Catholic methodology leans more toward mysticism. He writes that it is “a kind of existential encounter with God apart from His written revelation.”<sup>45</sup> Saxton disavows eastern religious meditation methods because they tend to emphasize transcendental experience,<sup>46</sup> which seeks a kind of mental vacuum. Saxton then moves on to the concept of biblical meditation which was practiced by the Puritans. He introduces seven Puritan definitions of meditation by Puritan theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who all wrote of the serious use of the mind. Interestingly, their definitions all have included the exercise of the mind or heart with the Word of God.

By quoting these great leaders of the past, Saxton proves that the Puritan way of spiritual exercise was associated with filling one’s mind with scriptural thoughts. He

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 18-20.

quotes Thomas Hooker who said “Meditation is a serious intention of the mind,” William Fenner and Thomas Watson who defined meditation as “the exercise of the mind,” and John Ball and Isaac Ambrose who said meditation is “a deep and earnest musing upon some point of Christian instruction.”<sup>47</sup> Through these references, Saxton demonstrates that meditation must be a work of the heart, which is the governing power of a human being. Saxton emphasizes the work of the heart in transformation as Dallas Willard does, who asserts in his book *Renovation of the Heart* that it is the work of the heart, or will, that brings about true transformation.<sup>48</sup>

Chapters four and five describe two different kinds of meditations, occasional meditation and deliberate meditation. Though he writes that each kind is useful, Saxton believes the more effective method is deliberate meditation which happens when one sits and intentionally practices a meditative reading of the Bible, compared to occasional meditation which is spontaneous.<sup>49</sup> In chapters six through eight, Saxton writes about when and where people should meditate. He also explores what the Puritan believers meditated on, which was God’s attributes: his love, his marvelous works, his plans, and other such lofty subjects.<sup>50</sup>

Saxton delves into the reasons for and benefits of meditation in chapters nine and ten. Meditation is the tool that God uses “to return one’s heart affection to the Lord.”<sup>51</sup> In

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>48</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 117-158.

<sup>49</sup> Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind*, 34.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 78-85.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 108.

a sense, these chapters are like a repetition of chapter one in that they all speak of the necessity of meditation. Saxton strongly urges every believer whose spiritual fervor has cooled and whose passion is lost to the practice of meditation and deep thinking on the Word. Saxton encourages believers to move from head knowledge into heart belief.

Fundamental to his argument is that there is a great need for meditation today to restore the passion and fervor that Christianity once had. The entire book points to this message. Even in chapters where the emphasis should be on the reasons and benefits of meditation, Saxton stresses again the importance of meditation for spiritual abundance. Overall, the message of the book is that “Meditation is more fun than movies and websites because it provides Christ’s joy and love.”<sup>52</sup> Such a bold statement motivates readers to put the ideas into action. This concept is crucial to the thesis of this project, therefore, this book has had a great impact. There is an urgent spiritual need for revival to regain spiritual vitality for the congregants of CCKC.

Saxton speaks of all spiritual practices from the Puritan perspective. The book would have been improved had it provided more detail on how meditation impacted the Puritans’ lives. Overall, this is a very helpful resource for those who need momentum for implementing meditation as a spiritual discipline.

***Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul by Jon L. Dybdahl***

In his book, Dybdahl first explores why there is generally so much hunger and longing in Christianity in the West, and in particular in the Seventh-day Adventist church. He then offers useful insights on important spiritual disciplines based on his

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 135.

analysis and personal journey toward spiritual satisfaction. According to Dybdahl, the major reason for this hunger is because there has been “absence of the divine” since the Enlightenment.<sup>53</sup> He argues that even Western theological education has emphasized theoretical, intellectual beliefs and doctrines rather than the spiritual life, as opposed to eastern religions which have focused heavily on the spiritual life. Dybdahl opines a similar process has been happening within the Adventist world. For example, Dybdahl writes, “Adventists have studied [Ellen White, a key pioneer of Adventism,] mostly for what she says to say about doctrinal belief and Christian lifestyle.”<sup>54</sup>

Chapters four and five discuss meditation and contemplation. However, the chapter titles are ‘Meditation and Prayer I & II’<sup>55</sup> which reveal that the author’s understanding is that these two practices are inseparable. Like Cornwall, he believes that they should always go together.

Dybdahl writes the biblical basis for practicing meditation is found in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, although there is no specific word for it in the New Testament. Dybdahl hints that when Jesus told his audience to consider the lilies of the field, his command cannot be followed without meditating deeply on the flower.<sup>56</sup> Then Dybdahl compares eastern methods of meditation with those of the West. The key difference is that Western Christianity’s meditation seeks “communion with a personal

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<sup>53</sup> Jon L. Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Gonzales, FL: Energion Publications, 2015), 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 51.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

God who enters and fills us at our invitation,” while in eastern religions, “God is present in everything, and God is an impersonal cosmic consciousness.”<sup>57</sup> By sharply contrasting the two distinct methods, Dybdahl helps the reader to choose and embrace the one which is clearly biblical.

On methodology of meditation, Dybdahl suggests practicing the following steps: first, believers should pick a passage of Scripture; then they should pay attention to place and posture; next, they should pray for God’s presence and guidance; then they must prepare to focus on God’s Word; they should repeatedly read, meditate on and respond to God’s Word; and finally, believers are to thank God for his guidance.<sup>58</sup> This particular approach is not well known among Adventist Christians.

His first edition of the same book received some criticism from Adventists because certain terms like “centering prayer” were quite foreign to them and they did not like other books he referenced. However, not much criticism was offered about the content of the book. Dybdahl published the second edition of the book with slight revisions such as adding paragraphs and Ellen White’s quotations and omitting the controversial selected bibliography at the back of the book. As of this writing, the Adventist community has not published any criticism of the second edition.

Dybdahl’s *Hunger* helps believers greatly in understanding the differences between Eastern and Western meditation. It differentiates Eastern elements from the Western Christian forms of the spiritual practice and equips believers to discern if there is any syncretism in their own practice. This book also provides information about a useful

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

method of visualization and imagination for meditation practice. It uses supporting text from Ellen White, one of the most influential people in the formation of the Adventist denomination.

### ***Christian Meditation by William Loveless***

The central theme of this article is that meditation is a lifestyle. Loveless shares his personal story of practicing meditation for fifteen years to emphasize that it cannot be fully understood unless one puts it into practice. In order to make an appeal, he speaks mostly from his personal experience. One of the main purposes of his work is to invite the believers to put ideas into action.

Unlike Saxton, Loveless argues the work of meditation is difficult. He writes that “It demands discipline, and it never becomes easy with the passing of time.”<sup>59</sup> He challenges the Christians to take a deep breath and prepare to do it. However, he also asserts that it is a lifestyle. Loveless offers suggestions for scheduling, writing, and other tips on the practice of meditation. He writes it is linked with other spiritual activities, like any of the disciplines. One of the most significant things about this work is that Loveless’ own journey and discovery of the benefits of meditation provide a practical encouragement for implementation.

When Loveless writes meditation is a lifestyle, he has two meanings behind the phrase.<sup>60</sup> First, meditation requires practicing for years to get the most benefit from it.

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<sup>59</sup> William Loveless, “Christian Meditation,” *Ministry: International Journal for Clergy* (January 1986): 10-12.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

Second, each session takes time, sometimes many hours, because a person should be recalling his or her past, parents, and circumstances in relation with the biblical text, which is the basis of Christian meditation. Loveless also introduces a visualizing technique so that one can feel connected with the text; he writes that “An important component in meditation is imagination.... Our God-given ability to see pictures in our mind is the vehicle on which all successful Christian meditation moves.”<sup>61</sup> Loveless invites the reader to do this because imagination psychologically helps patients to recover from illness. He encourages the reader to journey back in one’s mind to the biblical stories to meet the disciples, Moses, or Rahab, which will cause the stories to come alive with vividness.

Loveless then moves to the practical matters of meditation. His suggested procedure is as follows. First, he encourages “a period of quiet reflection on Scripture accompanied by muscle relaxing and breathing exercises.”<sup>62</sup> Then Loveless tells readers to focus on spiritual things. Loveless also teaches the importance of sharing in small groups. Before sharing with others, he asks people to rewrite the passage that they meditated on. Loveless experiences God speaking personally to him through the material he rewrites.

Next, Loveless provides a week’s worth of meditation material. From day one to day seven, it lists what to do step by step. On day one, the reader is to memorize the passage to be able to say it in their own words easily. Day two involves getting to the meaning of the passage with one’s eyes closed and repeating the text slowly to oneself.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Day three is application. Again, with eyes closed, participants think of the ways to apply the repeated text to their own situations. The participants are urged to write down specific insights. For day four, Loveless invites them to visualize one's everyday activities in relation with God. Before going to bed, individuals are encouraged to offer prayers to God for guidance regarding that day's events. From day five to day seven, participants repeat the activities from day four.<sup>63</sup>

This article is helpful in its acknowledgement that meditation is not an easy task. True meditation ought to affect a person's lifestyle. Though it may initially seem like this practice is static because it is simply a mental exercise, Loveless implies that it must actively engage one's mind and also help others; since meditation is a lifestyle change, its effects will be noticed by others.<sup>64</sup>

Although Loveless does not describe how to handle challenges or how to cope with distractions, his writing is a great resource for this project because the research shows that the mind and body have an intimate relationship. Therefore, meditation will bring about a healthier state of both mind and body. Furthermore, Loveless affirms "Abstract meditation is not enough. Christian meditation must also affect lifestyle; it must be active and helping."<sup>65</sup>

Each of the works explored above has shaped this project. All of the books influenced me in understanding the principles and practicalities of the spiritual disciplines of meditation and contemplation. This collection of works is challenging because

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 11.

meditation should be a lifestyle and should proceed naturally from the participants. Furthermore, the suggestions about using the imagination and journaling will be integrated into the project. These resources will help the participants experience a new, organized set of spiritual disciplines in their small groups.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGY OF MEDITATION WITH PRAYER

This chapter presents a biblical and theological foundation for the meditation and prayer as an effective way for character formation. It explains biblical passages related with meditation and prayer and their distinct traits. The Bible clearly states, “The heart of the righteous ponders” (Prv 15:28). This chapter also discusses about Ellen White’s work, because she plays a great role in Adventist beliefs. It especially examines her concepts on meditation and their relationships with character transformation.

#### Word Study

In the Old Testament, the word meditation or meditate appears twenty-six times. Two words have been used to refer to meditation, הָגָה *hagah* and שִׂיחַ *siach*. First, הָגָה (*hagah*) means “(a) to utter inarticulate sounds, as the roaring of the lion or the cooing of the dove: Isa 31:4 (b) to mutter or to whisper as in Isa 8:19 . . . (c) to speak, (d) particular kinds of speaking, e.g., praising or lamenting: Isa 16:7 (e) to reflect, think, meditate.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. Johannes Botterwek and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament Volume 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 323-324.

Contrary to the common concept today that meditation must be silent, this definition suggests *hagah* involves audible murmuring. Therefore, this word does mean to mutter a sound especially when reading.<sup>2</sup> However, *hagah* is not the word for “to say” in English; there is another word for that. What is remarkable is that *hagah* is sometimes used to express the feelings of the human soul.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that when this word is associated, it brings some human sentiment with it. As this word has broad nuances, this word has been translated into many English words like imagine, mourn, or mutter in the Old Testament. Second, *siach* also is translated into various English words like commune, complain, declare, or muse. This word means to ponder, to converse, or to utter.<sup>4</sup> The word *siach* also has the connotation of verbal utterance like *hagah*. Mostly this word was used in the Psalter.

### **Selected Samples of Meditation Texts**

Below is an examination of several Psalms to fully comprehend the deeper meaning of *hagah* and *siach* where the words mostly appear in the entire Bible. Having a correct understanding of biblical meditation is the key to healthy spirituality. This keeps believers from falling into Eastern ways of meditation, which involves the emptying of the mind.

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<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Vol 1. (Leiden, the Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1994), 237.

<sup>3</sup> Botterwek and Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament Volume 3*, 323.

<sup>4</sup> James Strong, “Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary.” *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2010), 273.

## Psalm 1:1-2

This first Psalm begins like the beatitude “Blessed are” the ones... in Matt 5. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Ps 1:1-2, KJV). The Hebrew word for Blessed here is אֵשֶׁר (*esher*), not בָּרַךְ (*barak*) which is more common in other parts of the Bible. The word *barak* connotes a blessing pronounced in a liturgical setting, but *esher* originally has the connotation of steps or travel. So, one can easily sense that this Psalm starts talking about a journey or a lifestyle in contrast with just simple blessing.<sup>5</sup>

So, verses 1 and 2 in the first Psalm are in contrast. They show the different lifestyle of the righteous and the wicked. What is interesting is that it tells first about the deeds that a righteous person should not do. A careful look at the verses shows such a person will not do three things: walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the sea of scoffers. Here this person progressively walks towards evil.<sup>6</sup> As Rolf A. Jacobson writes, its movement is from static to dynamic, stating “Perhaps the idea is that sin is a temptation that one first tries out, later becomes accustomed to, and finally becomes a habit or lifestyle.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Brueggemann & William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Declaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 60-61.

Having introduced three things not to do, the Psalmist now tells what a blessed person does. Surprisingly it is just one thing: to meditate the law of God. Instead of enumerating the opposite three behaviors of the righteous person, the writer highlights only the one characteristic of meditation. This tells the importance of meditation to those who may think meditation is a static and passive work. Here it tells that the spiritual discipline of meditation is the core element in a righteous person. It alludes that meditation does not end by itself but leads to other good deeds. The reader might think it is okay simply not to do those three things the evil person does, but Psalms teaches that one should purposefully or positively meditate the law of God.

The word for meditation, *hagah* here could have the sense of uttering in a low tone as noted above. Even if a person speaks a little loud, it does not mean that he or she is not meditating. According to Rabbi Avrohom Feuer, “The term *hagah* may be used with reference to speech provided it articulates deeply held personal thoughts weighing heavily on a person’s mind rather than casual thoughtless remarks.”<sup>8</sup> He suggests that the word connotes “a developed thought ready for expression.”<sup>9</sup> Rolf A. Jacobson asserts that the word *hagah* was translated into meditation mostly, but this word does not mean “a strictly internalized, cognitive exercise;” on the contrary, it was rumination and a verbal utterance because in the ancient world the Bible would have been read aloud.<sup>10</sup> This word

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<sup>8</sup> Avrohom Chaim Feuer, *Tehillim: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1999), 60.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Declaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 61.

*hagah* seemed to have stronger sense of verbal expression than internal thinking while they both are related in that spoken words are directly from the inner thoughts.

Therefore, what matters is not the volume of the voice but the volume of the thought in the hearts. The meditator in Psalm 1 meditates on the תורה ( *torah*) of God. Scholars have different views on what the *torah* here is. Many believe that the *torah* here means the Pentateuch in the Old Testament.<sup>11</sup> However, Gerald H. Wilson argues that this word has more general sense of guidelines or instruction because in wisdom literature, it is used more often with that nuance.<sup>12</sup> Rolf A. Jacobson also disagrees that *torah* here is the specific law of God “because of traditional negative connotations with legalism.”<sup>13</sup> So to him, the word’s general meaning of instruction best fits here in this text.<sup>14</sup>

Whether the word *torah* here refers to the law of God or general guidance, these two things are not contrary to each other. In fact, the law of God and his guidance are in the same trajectory. The one who delights in the law of God will meditates and vice versa. What surprises is to meditate on *torah* is the way to happiness. The *torah* usually has the impression of rigidity and hard to keep, but here it is the source of happiness and delight.

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<sup>11</sup> Brueggemann and Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *The NIV Application Commentary Psalms Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 95-96. John Eaton also shares this position. He argues the word *torah* is the teaching of the Lord to impart guidance. John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 62.

<sup>13</sup> Declaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 61.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

For the reason of meditation, Psalm 1:1-2 alludes that to meditate on the divine things is a way to happiness and this is the reason why one needs to meditate. Artur

Weiser argues this text is associated with the human will to do God's will. He writes:

Hence we may assume that the meaning of the advice to meditate on the law day and night is not so much that of asking men to become versed in the law by acquiring knowledge of it in a more formal manner, as is still being done today by the orthodox Jew, but rather that of a warning challenging man to yield constantly to the will of God and let that will always pervade his whole being until it becomes his second nature and fills his whole life as the only meaning of that life. It is the essence of the will of God as he is represented in the Bible – and this is already true of the OT.<sup>15</sup>

A person will gain delight and joy with proper meditation practice. It penetrates hearts and propels a person to act. Transformation happens through meditation (Rm 12:1). Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston assert, “When a person meditates (*hagah*) on I AM's *torah* day and night, a figure for constancy, one is transplanted from one's ego-centered world into a God-centered world that serves others.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, this thinking process becomes the true source of human transformation. Since people live in the world of distraction, they need to be redirected to focus on the word of God constantly through meditation practice. This world increasingly makes it more difficult to concentrate on one thing, with a constant demand of busyness and multitasking. The great Puritan Thomas Watson writes:

Meditation is the concoction of Scripture: reading brings a truth into our head, meditation brings it into our heart... Meditation without reading is erroneous; reading without meditation is barren. The bee sucks the flower, then works it in the hive, and so turns it to honey; by reading we suck the flower of the Word, by

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<sup>15</sup> Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, Translated by Herbert Hartwell from the German *Die Psalmen* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 104.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston with Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 139.

meditation we work it in the hive of our mind, and so it turns to profit. Meditation is the bellows of the affection: ‘while I was musing the fire burned’ (Ps 39:3). The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word, is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.<sup>17</sup>

Watson well expresses the importance of meditation and its role. Psalm 1 speaks about the results of such a person who knows the importance of meditation and puts it into practice. Such a person is like “a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither” (Ps 1:3). Such a person’s character and behaviors are formed through meditation. Therefore, these passages from the Psalms speaks to the importance and effect of meditation as a practice.

#### Psalm 5:1-3

Psalm 5 is a prayer for help. It sounds as if an innocent person cries out the unfairness. Verses 1-2 say “give ear to my words, O LORD, Consider my groaning. Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, For to You I pray” (Ps 5:1-2). While the word *hagah* (Consider) is used, this text involves lots of sounds. John Goldingay emphasizes that the first three clauses deal with real audible sounds, meaning they are real utterances.<sup>18</sup> This is a helpful text to notice that the Hebrew word for meditation involves actual utterance.

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<sup>17</sup> Gerald Mick, ed., *The Digital Puritan*, vol. V, No.2 (Westfield, IN: Digital Puritan Press, 2015), ebook: Chapter 5.

<sup>18</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Vol 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2006), 127-128.

## Psalm 19:14

This psalm begins with words of praising the Creator. Psalm 19 is David's song and it reveals the object of meditation is the created world. Psalm 19 tells of the relationship of the two revelations between the world we see (vv 1-6) and the world we read (vv 7-11).<sup>19</sup> Traditionally, as Rolf A. Jacobson pinpoints, this psalm is divided into three sections: verses 1-6 which focus on God's creation, verses 7-10 which focus on *torah*, and the last part verses 11-14 which tell of the servant who speaks the psalm; therefore, since each part speaks its own theme, this whole psalter looks like it has been "constructed out of either two or three different parts... each was written by a different author in different time."<sup>20</sup> They call the first part a creation hymn and the second part a *torah* hymn. Goldingay agrees and gives many reasons why they were separate texts; for example, when describing the same concept like rejoicing of the sun and the hearts in verses 5 and 7, two different words are used and each part uses a different hymnic style.<sup>21</sup>

This does not mean that each of these sections are completely independent; each distinct part makes up of one big theme in unity. God's creation in the first part and *torah* in the second part do have a relationship – they are not totally separate themes. One must receive the created world with five senses open wide and study about it. The law of God and the created world are closely related in fact. This texts paradoxically teaches the reader that law and creation are combined. They both speak of the same wisdom and love

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<sup>19</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Biblical Meditation for Spiritual Breakthrough: 10 Biblical Ways to Meditate and Draw Closer to the Lord* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 40.

<sup>20</sup> Declaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 203.

<sup>21</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, 285.

of the creator. The created world was made with the law of love. The spirit of law is love. Therefore, to meditate on the world is to find the law of love in it.

The psalmist depicts the law of God in nature up until verse 6 and then connects it with *torah* given to humanity from verse 7. In fact, Christ also extracts heavenly lessons from the created nature as seen in the imagery of parables like the vine and the branches or the sower and the seeds. People must meditate on the nature of God. Psalm 8, though the word meditation is not used, provides a source of meditating on the nature of God as David describes the stars, animals, and all sorts of created beings. They must also meditate on the law of God. By doing that they fill their hearts with such themes and become acceptable to God.

The word meditation that appears in verse 14 can be considered, by its location, as the conclusion of Psalm 19. So, the writer makes a plea to God to accept his petition as an acceptable sacrifice. The word *tamim* used here in verses 7 and 13 are priestly words. Originally this word means “unblemished” lamb when offering sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> Especially the word acceptable in Leviticus 22:17-20 is used to mean sacrifice. Therefore, the word meditation in this text is very much associated with acceptable sacrifice to the Lord. To sacrifice one’s thoughts is to sacrifice oneself. This is also connected with the same theme in Rom 12:1-2 in the New Testament, where it talks about living sacrifice.

#### Psalm 63:5-6

This Psalter talks about the time of meditation. The writer puts that he meditates in the night watches. It means to meditate all the time. The object of meditation is God

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<sup>22</sup> Declaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 212.

himself here. Verse 2 says the psalter looks for God in the sanctuary to see his power and glory. This verse implies that a person needs to study and know to understand God's Word before meditating. In this context, "The person may need to study the biblical sanctuary to understand its meaning and purpose. Then it would be a place for fruitful meditation," writes Scott Griswold.<sup>23</sup> What they put in will bear fruit during quiet meditation. Here acknowledgement and enlightenment become a very important part in the process of meditation. To meditate properly one needs to understand its meaning before proceeding to appreciation and praise.

#### Psalm 77

This Psalm written by Asaph shows that meditation was done when he was in a time of disturbance (Ps 77:3-6). It is noteworthy to recognize that the psalmist meditates in the time of distress. Meditation is not something that people do when they are happy only. Verses 11 and 12 tell that he will remember and meditate on God's works and wonderful deeds. Surely this activity will help deliver the distressed meditator from that condition. In this sense, this prayerful meditation is like an antidote to a distressed heart.

#### Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is not only the longest chapter in the entire Bible but also is located at the center of the Bible. This chapter begins with the same word (*esher*, "blessed") as Psalm 1, echoing chapter 1. As explained earlier, this word connotes the attitude or

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<sup>23</sup> Scott Griswold, "Comparison of Biblical and Buddhist Meditation with Reflections on Mission," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, Vol. 10 (2014): 2.

conduct of the righteous. Psalms 119 is the chapter that the word *siach* appears the most in the Bible. It appears in verses 15, 23, 48, 78, 97, and 99.

Psalm 119:15 says the psalmist meditates on the precepts. Verse 99 says the result of meditation on the law and precepts is revealed: wisdom is increased. Because the divine truth come from the law, the practitioner becomes wise as in Psalm 1:2 and 2 Timothy 3:15. When considering this psalm as a whole, the word *siach* here “probably refers to the reading or reciting of the precepts in a low-tone, as in 1:2, although the verbs are different.”<sup>24</sup> Not only do the Psalms provide an understanding of meditation but also many written sources to meditate on. For example, Psalm 41:3 is good for a sick person to ponder and Psalm 31:11 for a person who is rebuked. This whole psalter is a collection about meditation.

#### Joshua 1:8

God told Joshua to take the promised land. He encourages Joshua to be strong and courageous (Jo 1:6,7,9). Here God instructs Joshua that he will get prosperity and success by doing the things in verse 8 (putting the law in his mouth and meditating on it day and night). Joshua is told to do that and God takes initiative and Joshua follows him. What this text teaches is that even though Joshua was told by God to take the land, he has to obey the instruction (to meditate on the law [*torah*]) first before doing anything. God teaches here the discipline of meditation is a medium which brings true success because it

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<sup>24</sup> A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, New Century Bible: Based on the Revised Standard Version, Introduction and Psalms 73-150, Vol 2. (Somerset, England: Oliphants, 1972), 813.

makes Joshua obey. Indeed, Joshua is a successful leader due to his intimate relationship with God.

### **Meditation in the New Testament**

The Greek word for meditation, μελετάω (*meleto*), means “to care for; to bestow careful thought upon, to give painful attention to.”<sup>25</sup> It appears three times in the New Testament: in 1 Timothy 4:15, Mark 13:11, and Acts 4:25. The Greek word *meleto* implies many meanings like “to meditate, reflect upon, plan.”<sup>26</sup> 1 Timothy 4:15 must be given more attention than others. Here, Paul summarizes what he was presenting in the previous chapters. He considers the impact Timothy’s behaviors give to people. Paul admonishes Timothy, by saying “meditate upon these things.” He urges him to consider the things he mentions earlier like reading and exhortation. Even though the same word was not used, Paul urges the Philippian believers, in imperative form, to consider the virtues such as truth, purity, righteousness, love and good report (Phil 4:8). He meant the Holy Spirit would work on their hearts.

Whether the word *melete* is used or not in the New Testament, one can learn that the New Testament regards meditation as an activity of thinking deeply and pondering on divine matters. The New Testament does not teach about different methods about meditation and prayer, rather it emphasizes its necessity. It could involve some verbal

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<sup>25</sup> William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 313.

<sup>26</sup> James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D. *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of The Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 56.

utterance or maybe not. What is important in the New Testament is not the sound but focusing the thought on God and his works and providence.

Since this activity of meditation and prayer is a way of conversation with the Divine, it should include some insight or enlightenment that will bring feeling or emotion too. In the New Testament scriptures, there are many texts that teach the reader to meditate without using the word for meditation in the texts. For example, Jesus taught think about the lilies and birds (Lk 12:27) as Solomon taught to think of the ants and shephanim in the Old Testament (Prv 30:26). They all invite the reader to think deeply, find insight, and appreciate their maker, God. A person cannot find enlightenment without thinking those things deeply.

Mary ponders on the special event and circumstance around her baby to be born (Lk 2:19). This is the attitude of a spiritually-alerted person. Here the word “pondering” is *συμβάλλω* (*sumballo*) which originally means “to throw together.”<sup>27</sup> One can infer from this it could mean to bring together in one’s mind, ponder, or reflect. Mary had put things together to see what is going on in regard to her special revelation from God.

The Bible invites the reader to use their brains to think about God, his wonderful and fearful works and his character. This is the very activity that fills one’s heart with God. Therefore, where Bible study often focuses on the intellectual and cerebral, meditation involves one’s heart and emotions

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<sup>27</sup> Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, 429.

## Ellen White's Principles of Meditation

In order to understand Ellen G. White's approach to spiritual disciplines and meditation practice and prayer, it is helpful to look at the major themes that appear in her books. These themes will show her understanding of spirituality and theology and her interest in prayer. According to George R. Knight, the main themes that run through White's writings are practical Christianity and the development of Christian character along with others such as God's love, the great controversy, and Jesus the cross.<sup>28</sup> White believed that the gospel had real power to change believers from the inside out. The power of the genuine gospel will impact people's hearts.

The key to White's spirituality was very Christ-centered so the ultimate goal for spirituality is to be like Jesus. The Christians must be reminded that they are "to aim at being like Jesus in their daily life. They are to emulate His character."<sup>29</sup> This is White's central theme, but at the same time, she does not endorse that anyone can be equal to Christ's character. Therefore, one can say that the principle of genuine spirituality to White, as shown by Christ as the rule model for the followers, is Christ-centeredness. Not only meditation with prayer but other spiritual disciplines are crucial in pursuit of Christlikeness throughout her writings. She affirms Jesus' secret power comes from intimate communion with God in such spiritual practices.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> George R. Knight, *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Life, Writings, and Major Themes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996), 109, 123.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>30</sup> Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Silver Spring, MD: The Ellen G. White Estates, Inc., 2010), Kindle: 51-58.

## The Necessity of Meditation with Prayer

Ellen White explains in *The Ministry of Healing* that Jesus was involved with five spiritual practices: meditation, searching the scripture, prayer, praise of singing, and guidance or knowing God's will.<sup>31</sup> Emphasizing the necessity of having personal time with God, she writes, "All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. In them is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and they need to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God."<sup>32</sup>

The reason people experience a deficiency of revival and seasons of destitution in their faith is because they neglect meditation, according to White.<sup>33</sup> This is meeting God by experience. She asserts that head knowledge alone will not cause transformation but only by taking the life of Jesus as theirs through Bible study and meditation with prayer it will transformation ensure.<sup>34</sup>

On the methodology of meditation, White concretely suggests that one needs to go slowly. Jesus is not in a hurry while he engages in ministry. Similar to Mulholland's assertion that the first nature of formational reading is quality time meeting God in the text,<sup>35</sup> White states,

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<sup>31</sup> Jon L. Dybdahl, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, Ed. Denis Fortin & Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1192-1193.

<sup>32</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1947), 83.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word*, 55.

We should carefully study the Bible, asking God for the aid of the Holy Spirit, that we may understand His word. We should take one verse, and concentrate the mind on the task of ascertaining the thought which God has put in that verse for us. We should dwell upon the thought until it becomes our own, and we know “what saith the Lord.”<sup>36</sup>

Her understanding of meditation practice is also habitual practice. She asserts “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ.”<sup>37</sup> Here she urges the believers to make it an everyday activity. White also teaches that the Bible reader must consider point by point the accounts of Jesus’ life.

She adds imagination to her methodology of meditation by saying “Let the imagination vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones of His earthly life.”<sup>38</sup> Numerous times, Ellen White suggests one needs to use the imagination when meditating and contemplating on the things of God. She writes, “Let us in imagination go back to that scene, and, as we sit with the disciples on the mountainside, enter into the thoughts and feelings that filled their hearts.”<sup>39</sup> Although the use of imagination has been advocated by many current authors such as Cornwell, Mulholland, and Richard Foster, it can be traced back to Ignatius Loyola’s imaginative prayer in the sixteenth century.

White uses the word contemplation interchangeably with meditation. While some believe that meditation involves the seeker’s efforts like focusing on a passage of the scriptures or works of God and contemplation involves God’s action in communication

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<sup>36</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 390.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Ellen White, *Thought from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 2018), ebook: Chapter 1.

with human beings,<sup>40</sup> White uses both words to mean to ponder on God's history, works and providence as mentioned in following selection:

The imagination has here a fruitful field in which to range. The intelligent mind may contemplate with the greatest satisfaction those lessons of divine truth which the world's Redeemer has associated with the things of nature.<sup>41</sup>

The benefits of meditation are great. Students may learn more from one simple meditation than many hours or days reading other writes sometimes.

### **The Way of Transformation: Spiritual Disciplines**

Apostle Paul urges the believers to "Train yourself to be godly" (1 Tm 4:7, NIV). The process can be seen by other people. In order to achieve that goal, one must have the heart for it. Including Jesus, all great leaders in the Scripture like Moses, David, and Paul had to go through heart-shaping circumstances. The ultimate goal of spiritual formation is linked with character formation. Even if it looks very difficult to bring about true transformation, it is still possible through the power of Christ. Willard defines Christian Spiritual Formation as

the process through which those who love and trust Jesus Christ effectively take on His character... They come more and more to share His vision, love, hope, feelings, and habits. This formation process of "conformation to Christ" through discipleship to Him is impossible without the grace of God. But it is not therefore passive. Grace is opposed to earnings, not to effort. ... Becoming Christlike never occurs without intense and well-informed action on our part.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Carl McColman, "Catholic Meditation and Contemplative prayer: What's the difference?" *Patheos*, (December 18, 2015), accessed Oct 24, 2018, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlmccolman/2015/12/catholic-meditation-and-contemplative-prayer-whats-the-difference/>.

<sup>41</sup> Ellen White, *Testimony to the church*, vol 4 (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 2018), 579.

<sup>42</sup> Dallas Willard, "The Human Body and Spiritual Growth," *Renovare*, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://renovare.org/articles/the-human-body-and-spiritual-growth>.

For human transformation, it must be the work of the heart.<sup>43</sup> Willard asserts that the VIM model (Vision, Intention, and Means) is a universal transformation principle and the same process applies to believers who want to be like Jesus.<sup>44</sup> He is very clear that in order to achieve spiritual transformation, one must start from the vision for the kingdom of God.<sup>45</sup> The vision is brought by the truth, and the truth is the Word; as Jesus prays, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (Jn 17:17). Therefore, the means of sanctification is the Word.

Regarding Jesus’ teaching of the kingdom of God, Willard focuses on the present aspect of the Kingdom of God now.<sup>46</sup> To him, the time and place to live his kingdom is now and here. This is the vision we, as Christians, have. The transformation we pursue is not something we will achieve after death but now and here. This message is a very powerful and yet challenging vision to all followers of Christ.

John’s gospel has insight on this. John writes, “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (Jn 5:25). John offers a compelling vision of how to live in the eschatological period of life. John affirms that judgement or eternal life is not approaching us from a distance but rather it is something that we experienced now; those who meet Jesus now have life now. However, John does not emphasize the present reality

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<sup>43</sup> Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xi.

<sup>44</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 82-85.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 28, 47.

of salvation only. He also claims that the ultimate resurrection and salvation will be finally fulfilled in the future (Jn 5:28-29). Therefore, the believers enjoy the salvation and life in faith.

The human will take the key role in genuine transformation. Willard highlights the human will or intention in transformation. There are those who say they intend to do something but never decide to put it under their control.<sup>47</sup> Even though it is the work of the Holy Spirit, Willard argues there are many available means of spiritual formation that people can actually do. He writes that “I can... retain my thinking by study and meditation on Christ himself and on the teachings of Scripture about God, his world, and my life — especially the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels . . . I can also help my thinking and my feelings by deep reflection...”<sup>48</sup> However, without intention, none of these can be completed.

The Bible is the Word of God that reveals God’s thoughts or will. When the believers read the Scripture, they encounter the thoughts and ideas of God towards us. Because their thoughts are corrupted, they need to be aligned to his pure thoughts. All believers are invited to remember “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jer 17:9, NIV). Because humans cannot control their impure thoughts, help can only come from God by grace so their thoughts are washed with his as they accept the Holy Spirit’s promptings through meditation on the things of God.

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<sup>47</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 88.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91.

## **Meditation and Other Spiritual Disciplines**

One of the most neglected spiritual disciplines is hearing God. In general, hearing can be harder than speaking. Even in our conversation with others, people find it difficult to hear from others because they are self-centered. Only when a person listens to God's voice can one's direction be changed. This change cannot be wrought alone. God speaks to different people in different ways, so there are various ways to hear from God. The first way to listen to God is to read the Bible attentively. This is the method to hear him speaking through the written Word of God. (Of course, God's voice could be heard directly in an audible sound as he did in the past more often.) The second is by the Holy Spirit giving impression to human hearts. He speaks to the hearts through people, events, and circumstances leaving strong impressions. God uses the human capability of intellect, including books, sermons, and religious literature.

The loudest voice of God is none other than the Bible itself. The Scripture itself is revealed as God's will and God's words. Even though it is the written words of God, God can still speak through the Bible. Therefore, Paul says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work"(2 Tm 3:16-17). God may speak by letting the reader apply a certain truth to his personal life. When a person meditates on the Word of God, the Holy Spirit speaks stronger in various ways. Therefore, the scope of God's Word is not only the Bible itself, but it is much wider.

Willards writes, “While the Bible is the written Word of God, the word of God is not simply the Bible.”<sup>49</sup>

When speaking about the meditation, Bruce Demarest writes, “So we prayerfully ponder, muse, and 'chew' the words' of Scripture... the goal is simply to permit the Holy Spirit to activate the life-giving Word of God so that something more of our lives is transformed to bring us, every day, a little closer to the image of Christ.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, a believer must read and meditate on the Word attentively and respond to God in prayer for the crucial discernment power to recognize His voice. When the soul is free from distractions, Christ’s followers can make the voice of God more distinct as they wait mindfully.

The spiritual discipline of meditation does not go alone. It connects with other disciplines like prayer and Scripture reading and memorizing, fasting, worship, singing etc. This is a natural process. One of the most important disciplines associated with meditation is prayer. As Campbell McAlpine argues, “Part of meditation is praying with Scripture.”<sup>51</sup> Meditation and prayer are both linked closely to each other; you cannot detach them. It is a natural response to God when a seeker hears genuinely his voice.

Whitney believes that meditation is one of the methods that leads to prayer. He states, “Meditation is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer.”<sup>52</sup> One of the

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<sup>49</sup> Dallas Willard, *Hearing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1993), 185.

<sup>50</sup> Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999), 133.

<sup>51</sup> Campbell McAlpine, *The Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Tonbridge, UK: Sovereign World, 2002), 128.

<sup>52</sup> Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 86.

important points Whitney makes is that Bible study and prayer are not disconnected or separate. Meditation can be used to link the Word and prayer together.

### **Meditation and Human Body**

Ian Gawler, an Australian doctor who writes much about mind-body medicine, was cured from cancer himself by doing meditation.<sup>53</sup> He claims that meditation activity can literally and scientifically heal the body because of the connections between the mind and body. Specific chemicals in the brain are released based on the different states of mind and feeling which affect the body as they travel to cells of the immune system. According to Gawler, the key point is “It is not only a matter of how many immune cells you have, it is a matter of how actively and effectively these cells are functioning... Clearly an active, vibrant immune system made up of the appropriate number of cells is a strong prerequisite for both good health and active healing.”<sup>54</sup> With feelings of hope or love, specific messenger molecules released from the brain can have greater impacts on one’s immune cells.

Neuroplasticity is the term that describes neuron cells’ ability to reorganize themselves by forming new neural connections over the course of a lifetime. Prior to the development of neuroscience, people believed that brain cells did not grow after becoming fixed in adulthood. However, it is now widely accepted that “The brain is constantly changing and rewiring itself. In fact, the way that we consistently think,

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<sup>53</sup> Ian Gawler, *You Can Conquer Cancer: A New Way of Living* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2013), 41.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

behave and react will ‘wire’ itself into our brain.”<sup>55</sup> Habitual meditation activity has been linked with “increased cortical thickness in a subset of cortical regions.”<sup>56</sup> While emphasizing to health principles, Philip G. Samaan also comments on this mind and body connection: “God created us as totally integrated being, indivisible. The body, the mind, and the spirit are so inextricably interconnected that whatever affects one affects the others.”<sup>57</sup> The experience of meditating on the Scriptures can affect the human body; passive thoughts can have an effect in such a way that the love of Christ and forgiveness impacts the bodies.

People are invited by God to use their governing power, the will, to depend on God when they get distracted by many wandering thoughts; they must exercise this ability. Since the mind and body are inseparable, doing mental exercises trains the bodies. Overtime, it builds a person’s habit. Willard states, “Spiritual disciplines are designed to disrupt bad habits and replace them with good habits.”<sup>58</sup>

Experiencing God in the Scripture has a similar effect as if we experienced God in reality. David R. Hamilton experimented and found that the human brain reacted the same way regardless of whether it was imagining or experiencing something in the real world. In either case, the brain releases the same stress hormones like cortisol and

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<sup>55</sup> Paul Bedson, “Neuroscience and Mindfulness Meditation,” *Living Well Magazine*, (summer 2017), accessed October 4, 2018, <https://gawler.org/neuroscience-and-mindfulness-meditation/>.

<sup>56</sup> Sara W. Lazar et al., 2005. “Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness.” *Neuroreport*. 2005 Nov 28; 16(17): 1893–1897. Also read about the similar effect of meditation in Luders E. et al., “The Underlying Anatomical Correlates of Long-term Meditation.” *Neuroimage*. 2009 Apr 15;45(3):672-8.

<sup>57</sup> Philip Samaan, *Christ’s Way to Spiritual Growth* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1995), 172.

<sup>58</sup> Dallas Willard, *Living in Christ’s Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 121.

adrenaline; he tested a group of people who play the piano and another group who imagine playing the piano. People who practiced playing the piano everyday showed 53 percent change in muscle, while those who imagine playing the piano experience 35 percent muscle change in three months.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, what people imagine really has an effect on the human brain.

Psalm 1:2-3 teaches one needs to meditate day and night; such a person is “like a tree firmly planted by streams of waters.” One may wonder how to meditate day and night, which means twenty-four hours. Jim Downing asserts that when one goes to bed with the Word of God, he or she let the brain work on it unconsciously. “When a person sleeps, his conscious mind rests while his subconscious mind continues to function in order to keep the body’s organs working. But the conscious and the subconscious are in a closed-circuit relationship, so whatever the conscious was working on prior to his falling asleep will be transmitted to the subconscious.”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it is possible to meditate on the word of God day and night literally in this way. Instead of watching TV or worrying too much, reading the word of God before bed can be of benefit. Just like the disciples on the Emmaus road, practicing meditation can regain a burning passion in the church for the Word of God.

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<sup>59</sup> David R. Hamilton. “Does Your Brain Distinguish Real from Imaginary?” *David R Hamilton PHD: Using Science to Inspire*, (October 30, 2014), accessed September 23, 2014, <http://drdavidhamilton.com/does-your-brain-distinguish-real-from-imaginary/>.

<sup>60</sup> Jim Downing, “How to Meditate on Scripture Day and Night,” *Navigators* (Mar 13, 2006), accessed on Oct. 23, 2018, <https://www.navigators.org/how-to-meditate-day-and-night/>.

## **Summary**

A person's true transformation starts from the heart as God takes initiative and he or she participates in the process throughout the circumstances of life. The core of the heart's work is the spiritual discipline of meditation with prayer. Theologically, the psalmists invite the readers to practice meditating on the law of God and his nature day and night. Jesus calls disciples to follow him as he meditated. One of the pioneers of Adventism, Ellen White, persuades the believes to make a habit of training themselves with spiritual disciplines like meditation and prayer, which is conversational communion with God. By all these processes, one can truly be transformed into the likeness of Jesus even on this earth. This is the vision and aim for CCKC.

PART THREE  
MINISTRY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER 4

### CRAFTING A NEW MINISTRY INITIATIVE

This chapter explores the plan for the pilot program. It describes the goals that this program is designed to achieve to have an impact on the participants. It also discusses how the participants might eventually reshape their hearts and minds according to the law of God. Following are the goals, methods, and design of the actual program, as well as the chronological process for this community to experience character transformation to be more like Jesus.

This spiritual experiment with a pilot group consists of two sections. Section one encompasses seminar-style meetings which are open to anyone who wants to join at any time, as opposed to section two which includes actual meditation and prayer practice in closed small group settings, launched immediately after section one. Section one is a four-week series of seminars on the various spiritual disciplines dealing with their necessity, methods, and reasons. Section two is a forty-day period of discipline exercise, comprised of specific disciplines of meditation with prayer.

The purpose of this pilot program is to confirm the participants' identification as God's children, facilitate passion for the gospel once again in the hearts of the believers

at CCKC, and nudge them towards a more intimate loving relationship with God. This pilot program is a space where participants work out the vision and teachings of Christ together in their lives. Mark Scandrette describes this as “an experiment inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus in which a group of people commit time and energy to a set of practices and reflect on how these experiences can shape the ongoing rhythms of life.”<sup>1</sup> There has never been a fresh and innovative program like this at CCKC. To obtain the best outcome, appropriate goals are set before designing the actual process of sections one and two.

### **Setting the Goals for Spiritual Disciplines**

According to Dallas Willard’s VIM model mentioned in the previous chapter, true change cannot be obtained without vision. The program emphasizes the vision of personal transformation. The first goal of this project is that the participants understand a firm biblical foundation for spiritual disciplines and gain conviction of their effects. It is particularly important to educate CCKC members about how the genuine spiritual disciplines work because some have an unfavorable opinion about spiritual disciplines since they look like an obligation done to obtain salvation. For some, the word discipline bears a negative connotation.

For some CCKC members to whom spiritual disciplines are suspect, they may need to heed what Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:8: “Bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Scandrette, Class Note from “Practicing the Way of Jesus,” Fuller Theological Seminary, Oct. 2015.

for the life to come.” Since CCKC is not familiar with spiritual formation, the definition of spiritual formation as a process is introduced and emphasized during the session so as not to mislead them into thinking it is attainable in a short period of time. Participants learn God forms the heart when striving for godliness. Dallas Willard’s definition of spiritual formation, which was discussed in the previous chapter is also examined.

The participants first learn it is possible to be transformed in this life through spiritual exercises. This is very important because people sometimes think it is against God’s grace to put effort into transformation into his likeness. However, God’s grace must be manifested by good works with which human will and effort are associated. Reproducing the character of Christ in believers is achievable because it is done through God’s power. If there is any positive change in the words and actions of the participants, then it is a sure sign of the Holy Spirit’s work on that person.

Regarding the process of this sanctification, human effort alone accomplishes nothing, but the importance of human effort must not be diminished. In sum, sanctification happens through perfect collaboration between the divine power and human will. Donald S. Whitney stresses the same point by writing, “Although God will grant Christlikeness to us when Jesus returns, until then He intends for us to grow toward it. We aren’t merely to wait for holiness; we’re to pursue it.”<sup>2</sup> Without training to be godly on the human part, one cannot truly grow spiritually.

Another goal for this initiative is that the people of CCKC realize there are many dangerous forms of meditation and contemplation and are able to know the difference

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 2.

between biblical meditation and non-biblical practices. The Christian meditation practice is different in philosophy from Eastern practices. In some sense, the biblical spiritual discipline of meditation appears much simpler, because seemingly fancier Eastern meditation practices employ many more techniques and levels. The participants learn from this project that what matters is more of the heart focusing on God and his Word than fashion.

Some believe they cannot do the will of God because they have not seen him or heard from him. This pilot initiative also aims to teach that the will of God is plainly revealed in the written Word of God. It is a time to realize the true reason why they could not follow the will of God was not because they did not know it, but rather because they were weak in their intentions. This project seeks to help the members overcome ignorance toward God's will and poorly developed habits through the vision and intention of spiritual formation.

This pilot program also intends to inspire the participants to embrace this new meditation with transformative prayer. By sharing the biblical model of John, Elijah, and Paul who have been sanctified, they will be motivated to be conformed likewise. This heartfelt vision to resemble Christ will help the participants regain their lost passion.

This will serve as a catalyst to burn their hearts with the Word and flames of devotion so they experience the joy of conversing with God. When a believer discovers God for the first time, every word is sweet but soon loses its fervor and suddenly things are not like before. In this time of lukewarm spirituality (like the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:14-22), it is rare to witness warmth. This happens because of superficiality. To solve this problem, the participants are invited to read the Bible deeply through

meditation and prayer in solitude. David says, “My heart was hot within me. While I was musing the fire burned; Then I spoke with my tongue” (Ps 39:3). The word musing here is linked with meditation in that he said his musing helped his heart heat up. Likewise, when a person muses on the Word, his or her heart will get even hotter.<sup>3</sup>

This program is not only to rebuild affection but also to form small habits of reducing time spent watching TV or on the internet. While media can be artistic, touching, and emotional, this project seeks to affirm the participants could have a similar experience in their time with God by becoming overcome emotionally, crying or delighting over Scripture. Meditation is different from Bible study in that it focuses on internalization and personalization of the text.<sup>4</sup> It is time for the old text to become alive again using the five senses. It is not about exegesis or analysis (these must be done beforehand). Richard Foster writes, “Smell the sea. Hear the lap of water along the shore. See the crowd. Feel the sun on your head and the hunger in your stomach. Taste the salt in the air. Touch the hem of his garment . . . We enter the story not as passive observers, but as active participants.”<sup>5</sup> In this way, the participants are able to live the experience as biblical characters indirectly yet realistically. This detailed thought and imagination makes one feel present in the story. The human brain does not differentiate the real situation from what is happening in one’s imagination, as discussed in the previous chapter.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 30.

This pilot program offers tools for the participants to put the principles of meditation with prayer into action and to taste and see the beauty of meeting God in many different ways when incorporating it into their daily spiritual walks. Jesus says, “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is . . . wise” (Mt 7:24-27, NIV).

One of the aims is to witness changes in the participants’ behaviors. First, participants start deliberately reading the Bible every day. People tend to read it at a fast pace and they are satisfied with that. The greatest foe of meditation is hurriedness and hastiness. It makes one’s heart a place lacking peace and inner quietness so the voice of the Holy Spirit is difficult to hear. The participants learn they will not develop peace of mind overnight. There may be little to gain at the beginning of the practice. However, spiritual growth does eventually happen even without realizing its vivid effects.

During this pilot practice, as part of meditation, participants are asked to think upon the providence of God in their lives. They are asked to look back at the past and how their lives have been formed through the people, events, and circumstances they have encountered. They are given time to write about those times when God’s hands were clearly felt or seen in their different stages of life. By pondering upon those things, they can sense and be reminded of God’s guidance.

### **Actual Procedure of Meditation with Prayer**

What follows is the actual process of this project for the participants to follow step by step. Some methods presented here are optional, but required to move through all the stages unless there is a specific reason.

The first step is to pray. Participants are invited to pour their hearts out to God to be encouraged and touched clearly as they engage in this practice for the next forty days, believing all Scriptures have been inspired by God. The human will is weak and one must be imbued with the help and power of the Holy Spirit to pray more ardently. They are to ask for divine power and imagine God is right before them and picture he wants to speak to their hearts with insight, understanding, and enlightenment. They should pray also to receive the discerning ability to hear the voice of God and obey it.

Next, participants are encouraged to read the assigned text for that day. The participants are asked to plan the whole month's schedule prior to the start of their meditation practice. Instead of choosing texts from just anywhere, one should plan his or her schedule either according to themes or books. For a beginner, it would be wise to avoid difficult books like the prophets. Individuals decide how much to read based on their immediate needs.

Next, meditators are instructed to read repeatedly to dig deeper into the text. Especially with familiar passages, it is easy to miss important points. Ironically, the more familiar one is with the text, the more careful attention needs to be given. Participants can emphasize different words in the passage. For example, John 11:25, could be read like this:

*I* am the resurrection and the life.  
I *am* the resurrection and the life.  
I am *the* resurrection and the life.  
I am the *resurrection* and the life.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 56-57. Emphasis original.

The purpose of reading this way is not to omit any point.

Next, participants should read the Scriptures creatively. They are invited to visualize and imagine themselves in the story and into the situation of the day. They can think of the background of the story, the environment, the history, and society. They are invited to visualize in detail how characters are dressed and how their voices sound. As discussed earlier in this chapter, one cannot “smell the sea, [or] hear the lap of water along the sea” without using imagination.<sup>7</sup>

This will take time. It is good practice for participants to use the five senses to hear the voice and see facial expressions. This may not be described directly in the Bible; it must come as if seeing a movie or even in more detail than watching a real scene. Gordon D. Fee asserts, “Because God chose to speak in the context of real human history, we may take courage that these same words will speak again and again in our own ‘real’ history, as they have throughout the history of the church.”<sup>8</sup>

During the meditation time, one should go back to read texts as necessary and loudly from time to time to help the participants concentrate on the meaning of the text. Participants may listen to dramatized recordings of the text that use sound effects like waves and wind as a storytelling experience and opportunity to refresh the mind so the reader suddenly becomes the listener. In a group setting, they can read as if they are part of the story, each one taking part in the conversation.

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<sup>7</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Disciplines*, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 20.

Memorizing a verse or phrase helps believers keep the words in their minds. At this step, they may need study the text using a commentary, biblical maps, a biblical dictionary, or another version of the Bible. For this particular stage, participants are asked to read the book *Messiah* by Jerry Thomas.<sup>9</sup>

Next, meditators are instructed to read purposefully. At this step, they are asked to focus on the meaning of a passage point by point to look behind the conversation in the story, think of the meaning and sensation between the lines, and try to know the reason why such words were spoken. Sometimes the Bible just reveals a few words. For example, “I have no husband” (Jn 4:17) or “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1:46). One is invited to think using the six important questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. Such reading may require contrast and comparison in the process.

Afterwards, it is pertinent to see how a certain concept in the text, as well as how all Scripture points to Jesus. Luke explains, “He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Lk 24:27). Many texts allude to the messianic life, death, and mission, and participants can direct their reading toward the centrality of Jesus.

Then, participants rewrite the text in their own words. This method asks each person to paraphrase the text with pen and paper or on the keyboard. By doing this, one may find it easier to pay attention to the points while maintaining the flow of thoughts.<sup>10</sup>

Individuals are called to respond. The participants encounter the large and small realizations they received from the text. Many times, with spiritual discernment, those

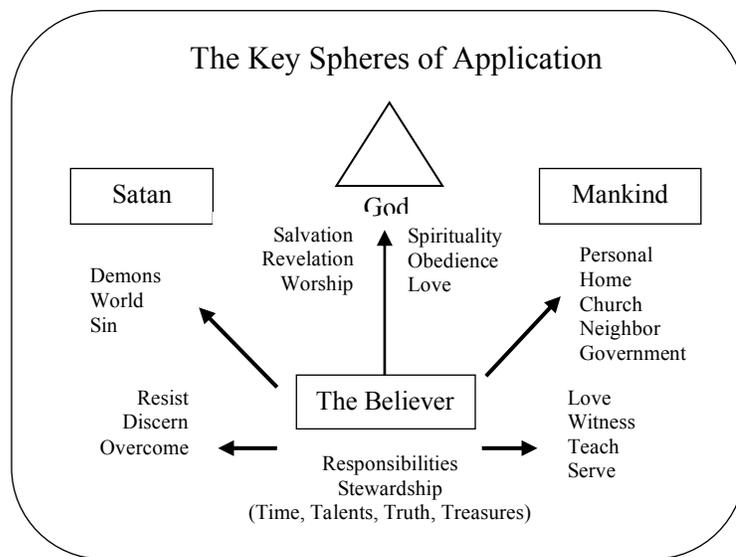
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<sup>9</sup> Jerry Thomas, *Messiah* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 57.

moments are the times when the Holy Spirit arouses understanding. Then it is time to take it to God in prayer, responding to the voice speaking to their hearts. This is the moment when they weave the biblical story and their personal story together and get passionately touched. They must take it to God. They need to pour out their hearts to God, committing to him fully.

Jensen claims this prayer is a true human response to the divine: “The purpose of reading and reflecting on Scripture is response, responding, and applying the passage to our own lives. So, we naturally turn to the third aspect of meditation and the ultimate purpose of the Word.”<sup>11</sup> So, when the participants are turning their hearts to God in prayer over the texts, they are exerting power three dimensionally to borrow and adapt Hampton Keathley’s concept, illustrated in the diagram below.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Irving L. Jensen, *How to Profit from Reading the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 52.

<sup>12</sup> J. Hampton Keathley, III. “Biblical Meditation” *Bible Org*, (June 21, 2004), accessed Sep 28, 2018, [https://bible.org/article/biblical-meditation#P76\\_9557](https://bible.org/article/biblical-meditation#P76_9557).

The one who prays with meditation gets closer to God and to neighbors while distancing themselves from Satan's influence. Naturally, the one who prays is aligned to God's plan in using their time, talents, and stewardship (sometimes without notice).

Keathley continues saying there are three confessions of reaction: first, confession as a sinner (Ps 139: 23-24), second, experiencing reaction of faith (a growth in faith), and third, the response of obedience (1 Sm 15:22-23).<sup>13</sup> It is natural for a human to respond with confession in divine presence. This binds together God and the one who prays.

Moving forward, participants are asked to journal their insights. Often, insights will vanish if they are not written down. Therefore, one must get ready to jot down whenever an insight comes up. It also serves as a reminder when they look back at their notes to see how God spoke to them.

Meditators are encouraged to take one or two thoughts with them throughout the day. It is difficult to remember too many thoughts. The participants are therefore invited to choose one or two to focus on throughout the day.

Next, enrollees are encouraged to read the next day's portion before going to bed to trigger their brains as they sleep. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, in this way, one can think about God's Word both day and night. They are then encouraged to keep this lifestyle for forty days. It is extremely important to make this a habit. The repetition of small tasks is the only way to accomplish great tasks.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## Helpful Tools to Facilitate the Project

Distraction is the most common, and yet difficult hindrance to meditation practice. One of the most important factors in this practice is to make personal space to be alone with God. In this space, one can more easily focus on spiritual concepts. It is best to have a personal retreat center where one can disconnect from the routines of everyday life. If a retreat center is not available, participants are invited to find the best quiet place to enjoy solitude. To prevent distractions, putting away the cell phone and computer is highly recommended.

Many people do not even recognize they are filled with countless messages and information every day. Most of these messages are related to concerns about themselves their children, finances, and other things of this world. During the time of solitude, participants have time to jot down on post-it notes the things that are occupying their mind and place each one on a white board. They will be categorized by many areas of life. Humans cannot focus on the Word of God while holding all these preoccupations. The participants should practice departing from their worries and concerns to look unto the Lord in solitude. This exercise of solitude impacts people because they are influenced by the information they see and hear.

A solitary place is a space where one is disconnected from TV, CDs, books, telephone, the internet, and other sources of distraction. Instead of hearing the noise of cars or other people, participants are trained to hear the wind, birds, and see the mountainside occasionally. The participants experience disconnectedness from their own accomplishments or relationships. To experience this, the project will launch in the quiet mountain side of Leoni Meadow, California, so participants can spend time with God

with a zeal and effort that they have not had before. As part of the pilot program, they are required to have one personal spiritual retreat in solitude.

The best place to practice the spiritual discipline of solitude is to have a personal spiritual retreat in a remote place for a day or two. Participants may find a retreat center where they do not know anybody or simply a campsite where no one else is around. Retreat centers or prayer gardens are great places to listen to the voice of God. Once a site is selected and visited, meditators may look around to get familiarized. They can simply sit and rest to identify what comes to the mind. They can pray to God, meditate on the Word, feel the presence of God, and just enjoy their time. They are encouraged to try to listen for the still, small voice of God. According to Richard Peace, amid many thoughts and ideas, God's voice "has a sense of otherness to it, much like a mystical experience."<sup>14</sup> To avoid mistakes in discerning the voice of God, Peace presents three tests: Word of God, the community of God, and the fruit of God.<sup>15</sup> Participants can journal those thoughts and return home.

For those who cannot find the time and place for a retreat, there are alternative ways to practice solitude in everyday life. Individuals can post a note on their desks to remind them to slow their pace and make space to listen to God's voice. Even before getting out of bed in the morning, they can try feeling the presence of God. They can make the first thought of the day of God. They can thank God for his protection during the night and devote themselves completely to God's hand. Participants are encouraged

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Peace, *Noticing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 57.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

to act according to the indication of God's providence for that day. It is good practice to eat meals slowly, chewing the food well before swallowing. This practice causes one to act slowly. They can choose a slower route. Solitude may be practiced in a traffic jam. Finally, meditators can go to bed with thoughts and reflections to reconnect with God.<sup>16</sup>

Even while reading the Bible, people get distracted by many other thoughts. These times of distraction are often the times without insight or understanding. When believers get distracted, there is no need to worry, but simply return to the passage.

Believers are encouraged to focus on a small portion of text. Instead of trying to cover as many points as possible, they should focus on just a few. The object of meditation is always Christ and his character, his plan and works, and the grandeur of his world. Meditators can consider their personal life story and how God has guided in the past. Then, they can take a single word or phrase from the text and think deeply on memories of it.

Believers are encouraged to repeat the meditation activity once again after some time has passed to help them realize anything not encountered the first time. The Scripture becomes food to participants' hearts and, as discussed in Chapter three, can strengthen neuron receptors in the brain, creating patterns and habits of Christlikeness. However, these individuals are not to just repeat any words without deliberate thought, so as to not fall into a pattern of "meaningless repetition" (Mt 6:7).

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<sup>16</sup> John Ortberg, Laurie Pederson, and Judson Poling, *Growth: Training vs. Trying: Pursuing Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 51.

## Promotion of the Program

To promote the pilot program, I will deliver a sermon to cast the vision for this project. Preaching is the most important part of the worship service for the believers at CCKC. I will preach a series of three sermons on the subject of spiritual discipline and its necessity, roles, and benefits. During the sermons, each discipline will be introduced. One of the reasons for this introduction during the sermons is to allow the entire congregation to hear the message. While some women's ministry teams have been engaged in spiritual disciplines in the past, many others have been disconnected with such disciplines. They, too, need to be familiarized with those activities.

The Sabbath School will be another method of promotion. The collaborators will meet with the Sabbath School coordinator and provide the information so she can also promote it. Usually Sabbath School coordinators are looking for any special features or programs to fill their time. Collaborators can show the project booklets and explain the process to draw people's attention to the project.

The collaborators themselves promote the program. The collaborators also help with small group settings, fellowship, and with debriefing. Invitation cards for the project are sent digitally to the congregation. I will also talk about the ministry project repeatedly and publicly, explaining it will be launched soon. When the project begins, nearly the whole community should be aware of it.

## **Identifying Collaborators**

Four collaborators are designated to take care of two small groups. The collaborators are helpful because they can also recruit, share their vision with others, and

give good advice on conducting the program. Two collaborators help with each small group's activity. I plan to share my vision and have regular conversations with them over the course of the process.

An announcement posted on the church board reads: "Looking for collaborators who will help pastor Andrew's DMin project. This project will explore the spiritual disciplines of meditation with prayer in solitude to regain the passion we have lost. The project will take about ten weeks. Those who wish to serve as small group leaders should contact Pastor Huh. All materials will be confidential and there is no fee for this activity. Thank you." Along with this advertisement, the main method of recruiting collaborators is by personal contact since I know the church members well.

### Launching and Leading the Program

Once it is launched, the participants commit to the full process and understand attendance is crucial. If people could freely come and go during the session, it would be very hard to lead because of the inconsistency and disruption. Unlike some other small group activities that go on year-round, this is a five-week program. Because this program has a specific starting point and an ending point, the commitment is clear to participants. This helps members concentrate and move forward toward the goal. The small group meets once a week at the church, except for the first group meeting at the retreat center.

Six weeks before launching the pilot program, I plan the actual guidelines the participants will follow. Four weeks before the launching date, collaborators are recruited and trained on the first section of the project (the definition and necessity of spiritual disciplines). The pilot program is in a small group setting because small groups are great

mission fields where lay leaders work. In a small group, all pastoral leadership spheres (mission, fellowship, teaching, etc.) can be explored and interwoven, and it opens the door to non-believers to come into circles of Christianity more easily. Additionally, inner healing is done more effectively in small groups and participants can more easily share their hearts with others in smaller groups.

### **Completing the Course: Sharing the Joy of Experiment**

After the program, the participants have time to debrief and share about their experiences. They are asked to give feedback via questionnaires. This serves as a tool to assess their spiritual growth over the course of the project. Personal interviews are also conducted as necessary.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

This chapter outlines the implementation of the project and evaluates the whole process. It discusses how the small group program of meditation practice with prayer in solitude went. Some reflection of the participants' experience based on the survey of questionnaires and interviews is analyzed. It also explores the difficulties and challenges of the project along with successful results. This chapter concludes with a member follow-up plan.

#### **Pilot Project Summary**

The theological research was compiled from 2015 to 2016 and practical programs were partially carried out at GKC in 2016 and 2017 prior to the actual implementation at CCKC in the summer of 2018. All of these were conducted at the church, in homes, and at a retreat center. One of the best places for personal devotion was at the retreat center located in the mountains. For small group activities, the best place was the church classroom because it was easier for the members to gather together there, as opposed to in a remote place or private homes.

One of the key factors of implementation was to have well-prepared collaborators who could not only share the vision, but also support in every step of the program like recruiting, fellowship, and building up the spiritual atmosphere. The ultimate goal of the project was to plant the heart of Christ into the participants, with smaller goals to work toward that end. Some of these goals were fulfilled while others were not met. This chapter analyzes the project's achievements and failures.

Prior to the experiment, the participants expressed they thought spiritual disciplines such as meditation, contemplation, and solitude were too passive and not interesting, but by the end of the project these views had changed. Even when it did not feel like there was much improvement in personal growth or as a whole church, it was my responsibility to remind the participants transformation is possible and it requires their effort.

One of the project's findings was that transformation takes time. It took time to prepare to implement this program and it also takes time for the participants to be conformed to Christ. Even Christ took time to change his disciples' hearts on earth and the Holy Spirit had to continue to mold them after Christ's departure. Therefore, this task should not be seen as a one-time event, but an ongoing practice. However, this experimental program's aim is not to experience total change in a certain given period of time, but to taste enough transformation that an ongoing program of disciplines and formation would be desired. For the community at this particular church that is overcome with individualism and consumerism, where it seems the first love with Christ has been lost, this pilot program has done its job to introduce contemplation instead of quickly

acquiring information to let the participants taste the goodness found even in the slow pace of transformation.

### **Project Timeline**

This pilot program began three years ago in the fall of 2014 after I took the course *Spirituality and Ministry* at Fuller Seminary in 2014. While continuing to read related books and articles, I took another class in 2015 (Practicing the Way of Jesus) focusing on the practicalities of spiritual disciplines. Then, I implemented what I learned with the small group members at GKC the following year. As I continued research and studies, I collected important materials on the project topic and continued to implement them in ministry.

Among many small group activities, the project outlined in this paper was administered at CCKC in the summer of 2018. The key to success was first to have personal devotional time with God and to recruit the right collaborators to help the project. I spent time devotionally on my own as well as with the collaborators, trusting God brought the team together to guide them. Three individuals in the church chose to be collaborators.

The team shared many thoughts and ideas to understand the current apathy in the congregation and concluded the lack of individual spirituality really mattered, so they focused on how to enhance the spirituality of the congregation. They noticed church members felt God's word was not comfortable; while they welcomed God as savior, to take him as a personal Lord felt like a burden. The team leaders began praying for the community and the project, using the spiritual discipline of meditation with prayer in the

early spring of 2018. At last, the leadership team agreed to launch the initiative program for the transformation of this little community.

At the first leadership meeting, the staff shared the vision and goals of the spiritual discipline program. The ten-week preparation period was explained. From the second meeting, we started discussing the details of the project, like the place, schedule, and materials. We initially set the place and time to launch the program on April 20, 2018 at a retreat center at Leoni Meadows, Grizzly Flat, California, for three days. However, this original plan had to be altered because many members were not able to be present or would have to leave early. The leadership team decided to postpone the launch until the Fall of 2018. However, this plan was changed again because some important members of the congregation were scheduled to travel overseas this Fall, so the pilot program was launched successfully in July 2018 and lasted for two months. Twenty-five people attended the first session, and thirteen people stayed for the second. All programs concluded at the end of September 2018.

Twenty-three out of twenty-five participants are long-term believers. Two were visitors. Most of them were female Christians in their fifties or sixties. Few young people in their thirties and forties have attended. This is basically because the church members are almost all elderly, as described in chapter one.

As the pilot small group started, the members became very close to one another since it was a closed group activity and they felt a special bond even outside of their small groups. A group of thirteen people was too large, so they had to divide it into two for many activities. Some had additional meetings by themselves to go deeper with Bible

study. Participants reported a large impact on their individual lives and frequently would talk about the experience to others, desiring a second session of the project to start.

I prepared the three series of sermons on the spiritual disciplines and delivered them in June 2018. This was to educate the congregation about the definition, the necessity, and benefits of various spiritual disciplines. Prior to this series, I preached sermons on the Gospel of John from January until July of 2018. The fourth Gospel was chosen because of its emphasis on spirituality. John's purpose is to make the reader stay connected with Jesus despite his impending departure to heaven and to enhance their spirituality. John himself writes, "These have been written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn 20:31). So, this was a timely message for CCKC in light of the leadership changes in 2016-2017.

The survey questionnaires and interviews were conducted from September 29 through October 13, 2018. The participants freely shared their experiences with others when they met for the last time. They had a chance to express verbally in the small group what was good and what was difficult. They have been provided with individual questionnaires to show their understanding of the spiritual disciplines and how their habits and intentions have been changed since they participated in the program, so they can compare before and after the project.

#### Facilities Other than Church

This spiritual discipline of meditation and prayer was designed to launch at a retreat center at Leoni Meadows, Grizzly Flat, California to maximize the effects of

having it in a retreat format. Although the ongoing practice would be carried out at the church building and personal spaces, this one-time event would be held at the retreat center. Retreat formats involve many elements that facilitate the activity like lectures, silence, closeness, and special events. By design, it is a unique setting set apart from everyday routines.

The collaborators helped build the spiritual atmosphere in the retreat setting. The retreat helped the participants experience closeness and served as the best time to share personal testimonies on how God has blessed them through disciplines in their lives in the past. This openness created positive impact on others who had not been deeply involved with spiritual activities.

At the retreat, a lecture would be delivered by a guest speaker on the theme of spiritual disciplines to help the participants understand the disciplines. Silence is another essential element of the retreat. The depth of the retreat experience comes from silence. It provides an opportunity to encounter God because it is detached from the everyday rhythms of life. This encounter with God quenches members' hunger. This encounter with God means hearing the voice of God in the Word while meditating upon it. The retreat setting can help participants sense a stronger impression or prompting of the Holy Spirit on their hearts because they become more receptive when their minds are detached from the many distractions of the world.

## **Leadership Identification and Training**

The collaborators are more than just helpers. They are engaged in designing the program together, giving advice, and leading the program. They shared the vision with members and positively encourage people whenever there is doubt or lack of knowledge.

I was the leader, pastor, and the coach of the project. One of the collaborators was very relational and helped the group to be successful by providing snacks, necessary supplies, and showing care and loving connection; she was personally very interested in the Bible study and had been waiting for a meeting like this for long time. Another collaborator helped the group with his musical talent and by creating a positive atmosphere. While many thought this would be a series of serious meetings, it turned out to be social as well, and this collaborator was the motivator and cheerleader who helped people relax with his humor and presence. Leaders are crucial because the followers are watching them to emulate. As the author of Hebrews writes, people will consider “the result of their conduct and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7-8).

## **Assessment Plan**

One of the tools to assess the project is to use personal survey questionnaires. The survey consists of three parts: Bible reading, prayer life, and meditation. This was to take a look at the effects of meditation and see how it connects to other spiritual disciplines. The survey results are outlined below to compare the participants’ understanding or outcome of the practice before and after the program.

In some sense, it is difficult to objectively survey a believer’s spirituality, especially for such a short period of time. This assessment is, necessarily, very subjective

because it is based on self-feeling and understanding. This project is not designed to bring about the total change of a believer in this short period of time. Instead, it is to help a person head towards the direction of transformation. It examines how the habitual reading of the Scriptures and patterns of prayer life affect the participants spiritually and behaviorally in regard to transformation. In addition to the survey, I conducted personal interviews with the participants to explore the change the project brought about.

### **Data Results and Interpretative Analysis**

This part reviews and analyzes the data collected before and after the two-month program. If there is any positive change in the participants' spiritual walk, it is because of God's blessing. Even small improvements provide insight on how the project can be adapted when offered next time.

After the program was over, the survey sheets were distributed anonymously and explained one by one to the participants on September 29, 2018. The pre- and post-surveys provided thirteen questions to assess the participants' accomplishments. The questions on the forms were related to the three areas of the goals (cognitive, affectionate, and behavioral). The questions were made in the forms of statements to find out more about their spiritual life (prayer life, Bible reading, and worship) and participants responded on a scale of one to ten (one being "not at all likely" and ten being "extremely likely"), along with some short answer essay questions. Special attention was taken to ensure the participants could clearly understand all the questions.

Specific statements can illustrate the various reactions of the participants. The first three statements concern the spiritual disciplines. The first one reads, "I understand

the spiritual disciplines definitely help me with sanctification.” 73 percent of people showed an increase over the course of the project. While about 20 percent of people were not sure if the disciplines really helped them, the majority expressed the spiritual disciplines were helpful in their formation.

The next statement read, “I have a strong desire to have a personal spiritual retreat in a remote place.” 58 percent expressed they wanted to have a personal retreat some other time when there was a chance. For the others, this spiritual discipline project did not lead them to decide to go on a personal retreat.

The first statement regarding the discipline of Bible reading reads, “I read the Bible regularly.” This simple statement is to know if the participants currently have a habit of Bible reading. The majority of people indicated three before the project, but they went up to five after the project. Also, 50 percent of people read the Bible as a simple habit. For the statement, “I share with others what I have gained in insight from the Bible study,” the most common answer was zero to two, followed by three to four. There is only one person out of thirteen who replied that he shared his insights with others every day. This shows this discipline of meditation has not yet fully taken effect on the participants’ outer behaviors.

The next statement was, “The Bible is the most authoritative book for me when I make a decision.” 80 percent of the participants responded positively marking at eight or nine. This implies that people accept the Bible as the sole authority even though they do not always live in line with the teaching. 10 percent responded with ten.

The survey included statements about meditative practice. For the statement, “The meditation practice on the Word, his works, and his guidance on my past really gave me

spiritual strength,” most participants who gave 3.5 before the project gave 7.5 after the sessions. The most dramatic change was seen on this sentence—only 10 percent experienced no change. 92 percent of the members increased by 3.5 points; almost all the participants have enjoyed and gained spiritual strength through the discipline of meditation. One of the findings was that those who have, in some way, already experienced the discipline of meditation did not show a big difference even after the pilot project.

The following statement was to see if the members have been emotionally touched by the project: “I have been engaged with an emotional touch that led to tears or joy during the meditation practice.” Exactly 60 percent of the participants responded undeniably by indicating an increase of one or two degrees. 40 percent reported there was not much difference. There was one person who exposed a dramatic difference going from two to eight, and this person seemed not to have been involved with this kind of activity before. This statement demonstrated meditation can touch participants’ hearts emotionally. A final sentence read, “I pray believing my prayer really affects others.” 60 percent of people showed some positive improvement while another 40 percent did not show any change at all.

Several realizations surface through this project. Overall, the participants reported an increase on their spirituality since they responded with a two to three degree increase after the project. Those who had not been involved with such spiritual activities before displayed a more dramatic change. However, it is difficult to measure this by number, as it is very subjective. Another finding is those who have been faithfully maintaining

spiritual health well did not show great increases, but those who were less-disciplined showed either a lot of improvement or no improvement at all.

As the leader of the project, I learned I have to pray more for the believers' hearts. One of the byproducts of this practice was that repeated meditation on the same text gave it more profound meaning. Many insights the reader has not gleaned at the first reading were gained after a repeated time of meditation practice.

As shown in the survey results and personal interviews, the meditation practice does not just end with itself. It is closely linked with other practices like Bible reading or prayer. For this project, a prayer band, a small group of people who prayerfully support a project together, was not really initiated as planned. The option was instead left up to each individual and their willingness to consistently pray.

### **Feedback**

Here are some more detailed reactions from the participants: "Now that I have done the test, I have a story to tell to people." "The Bible stories became more vivid because they put themselves into the accounts." "I had a strong feeling when absorbed in the story." "I have the whole picture of Jesus' life and teaching." "As I have spent more time with God in the Bible, I spend less time watching TV." "I resolve not to talk behind someone's back."

One of the participants said she got some ladies in her neighborhood together and shared with four or five people what was covered in the seminar. It was a unique experience to hear someone willing to form her own small group to share the message. Some were curious about other genres of Bible meditation or shared what to do when

distracted during the practice. Some expressed meditation was more effective when walking.

Because of the timing and scope of the project, the pilot program did not achieve a habit of biblical meditation with prayer. A habit will be formed over time, but in general, the participants tasted transformation and the beauty of spiritual disciplines and said it was good. It is my hope that as thoughts become words and words become actions, actions would become habits that form character in the lives of this congregation.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This project began from my personal desire to experience God more deeply and to extend it to groups of people in the church in a new way. Having completed the project, I have acquired confidence in using the tools of spiritual disciplines, especially the meditative techniques and Bible reading tools explained herein. This project not only helped me to be more spiritually mature, but also equipped me to be a better leader. However, due to the network of collaborators and participants, as well as the desire to lead it successfully, I also experienced stress.

The greatest purpose of this study was to ignite a fire in the hearts of congregants at CCKC to regain their passion. Reviewing the participants' feedback, there is some evidence this outcome was achieved. While I admit spirituality cannot be measured with numbers, people did begin speaking about spiritual disciplines in their conversations in the church. This means there is an increase of interest. From the surveys and interviews, enough ground has been laid for further work to be done.

The project participants have realized the spiritual disciplines are really great tools God has instituted for them to utilize. If there was no effect, it is important for them to understand it was because they have not spent enough time on them (not because the disciplines cannot produce any good fruits of the Holy Spirit). Another finding was that there was a big difference between the believers who had already engaged in the disciplines and the believers who had just started in their achievements. However, humans are all imperfect disciples who need lifetime correction via spiritual disciplines.

It is also revealed that those who think they know much are the ones least likely to be changed. In a sense, when a person gets closer to Jesus through the intimate

relationship of meditation and prayer, their own sinful nature becomes more apparent. Spiritual disciplines are the tools to help them realize who they really are. The more they comprehend their nature, the more they seek Christlikeness through various disciplines.

There were three individuals who voluntarily gave testimonies on the blessings they received from reading the Bible slowly with all the techniques they learned during the Sabbath school time at the church. They reported the difficulty of practicing this alone and the fruitfulness of practicing together as a group, guided by a pastor. Although there was a clear sign of improvement, it has not turned into a movement within the congregation.

Reflecting on the project, I feel the most needed area of improvement would be the participants' lack of strong intention to be changed. Once a believer discovers and knows the will of God through the spiritual discipline of Bible reading, he or she must then give themselves up before Christ. However, it is very difficult to do that. It becomes a spiritual battle in a sense. Those who struggle to choose between the will of God and the will of themselves felt distressed but receive benefits through sincere prayer for help after all. So, no matter how strong an emphasis has been given here, those who only participated out of curiosity were not deeply engaged in the activity and therefore, their results were not great. In the future, this point has to be stressed more strongly. The participants should make up their minds to lay down their lives and adapt to Christ's heart to be transformed.

The nature of this project is not only for CCKC, but for every single follower of Christ during this troublesome time. Meditation and prayer are the basic communication methods. By involving themselves, the participants get to know Jesus more through the

spiritual disciplines. Jesus says, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn 17:3).

David W. Saxton writes, “Meditation is compared to chewing food, and hasty reading is like swallowing it.”<sup>1</sup> Thomas Watson asserts meditation is like rumination, saying Christians who do not meditate are not clean, reminding us the animals who did not ruminate in the Old Testaments were considered unclean.<sup>2</sup> In relation to this comparison, I encouraged the participants to practice chewing well when eating meals. This training turned out to be difficult because everybody was busy and used to eating hastily. Slowing down to remember the task is difficult and takes practice.

From doing personal interviews, some expressed their hearts were burning as they experienced Jesus in the texts. Overall, this project was still successful despite a few mistakes along the way. Although one of the biggest pitfalls is that the participants did not practice it every day, they have at least received a taste of it, helping them take even one small step.

To an athlete, basic physical strength is the foundation of building oneself into a stronger and well-trained person. Such basic physical strength is compared with the spirituality of a believer. It is the basis of God’s work and eventually leads to growth both for the individual and for the church as a group. Even though this particular project is finished, this ministry will go on continually for the rest of my life. I need to teach myself

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<sup>1</sup> David W. Saxton, *God’s Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Christian on the Mount: A Treatise Concerning Meditation* (Malvern Classics, 2013), Kindle: 82.

and others to be more equipped as teachers so they, too, can go out and educate other disciples as spiritual coaches.

It was truly a privilege to conduct this project and witness the good change in the participants' hearts. This project offered them the opportunity to discover themselves and learn more about God. The participants in this project and others at CCKC will grow continually through ongoing various spiritual disciplines as they pursue Christ's character.

## APPENDIX A

Use the scale below to respond to each statement. Answer the best fit number by placing the circle.

1. Spiritual disciplines are increasingly important to me.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

2. I understand that spiritual disciplines help me with sanctification definitely.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

3. I have strong desire to have personal spiritual retreat in a remote place.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

4. I read the Bible to hear from God every day.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

5. I share with others what I have learned from the Word.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

6. The Bible has authority and gives a great impact on my important decisions.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

7. I have been emotionally touched while I am reading and meditating on the Word of God. (tears, )

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

8. I enjoy the fellowship with God alone when I practice meditation.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

9. I find strength through meditating on his Word, works and God's hand on my past.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

10. My worship is meaningful more and more.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

11. I realize my sinful nature and still grieve over my sin.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

12. I delight in the voluntary church activities, and express it.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

13. I can forgive others easily.

(0)---(1)---(2)---(3)---(4)---(5)---(6)---(7)---(8)---(9)---(10)

## APPENDIX B

### Course Schedule (Reading Material)

|    | Passage Text             | Messiah by E.G. White                |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1  | Mk 2                     | Ch 6 We Have Seen His Star           |
| 2  | Lk 2:45-51               | Ch 8 The Passover Visit              |
| 3  | Mt 3:13-17               | Ch 11 The Baptism                    |
| 4  | Mt 4:1-11                | Ch 12 The Temptation                 |
| 5  | Jn 1:19-51               | Ch 14 We have Found the Messiah      |
| 6  | Jn 2:1-11                | Ch 15 At the Marriage Feast          |
| 7  | Jn 3:1-17                | Ch 17 Nicodemus                      |
| 8  | Jn 4: 1-42               | Ch 19 At Jacob's Well                |
| 9  | Lk 7:19-28               | Ch 22 Imprisonment and Death of John |
| 10 | Mt 5                     | Ch 23 The Kingdom of God is at Hand  |
| 11 | Mt 11:28-30              | Ch 34 The Invitation                 |
| 12 | Mk 4:35-41               | Ch 35 Peace, Be Still                |
| 13 | Mk 6:32-44               | Ch 39 Give Ye Them to Eat            |
| 14 | Mk 6:45-52               | Ch 40 A Night on the Lake            |
| 15 | Mt 15:21-28              | Ch 43 Barriers Broken Down           |
| 16 | Mt 17:1-8                | Ch 46 He was Transfigured            |
| 17 | Lk 9:46-48, Mt 17:22-27  | Ch 48 Who is the Greatest?           |
| 18 | Jn 7:1-15                | Ch 49 At the Feast of Tabernacles    |
| 19 | Jn 8:12-59               | Ch 51 The Light of Life              |
| 20 | Jn 10:1-30               | Ch 52 The Divine Shepherd            |
| 21 | Lk 10: 25-37             | Ch 54 The Good Samaritan             |
| 22 | Mt 19:16-22; Mk 10:17-22 | Ch 57 One Thing Thou Lackest         |
| 23 | Lk 10:38-42              | Ch 58 Lazarus, come Forth            |
| 24 | Mk 10:32-45              | Ch 60 The Law of the New Kingdom     |
| 25 | Lk 19:1-10               | Ch 61 Zacchaeus                      |
| 26 | Mt 26:6-13               | Ch 71 A Servant of Servants          |
| 27 | Lk 22:7-18               | Ch 78 Calvary                        |
| 28 | Mt 27:31-53              | Ch 81 The Lord is Risen              |
| 29 | Mt 28:2-4                | Ch 82 Why Weepest Thou?              |
| 30 | Lk 24:13-33              | Ch 83 the Walk to Emmaus             |
| 31 | Jn 21:1-22               | Ch 85 By the Sea Once More           |

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