

## **The Puritan Practice of Meditation**

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## The Puritan Practice of Meditation

*“Meditation applieth, meditation healeth, meditation instructeth.”* –Ezekiel Culverwell<sup>1</sup>

Spiritual growth is intended to be part of the Christian life of believers. Peter exhorts believers to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). The Heidelberg Catechism says that true Christians are members of Christ by faith and partake in His anointing. By Christ’s power they are raised up to a new life and have the Holy Spirit given to them as an earnest; by the Spirit’s power they “seek the things which are above (Col. 3:1). Spiritual growth is only to be expected, since “it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.”<sup>2</sup>

One hindrance to growth among Christians today is our failure to cultivate spiritual knowledge. We fail to give enough time to prayer and Bible-reading, and we have abandoned the practice of meditation. How tragic that the very word *meditation*, once regarded as a core discipline of Christianity and “a crucial preparation for and adjunct to the work of prayer,” is now associated with unbiblical “New Age” spirituality. We rightly criticize those who engage in transcendental meditation and other mind-relaxing exercises because these practices are connected with false religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and have nothing to do with Scripture. Such forms of meditation focus on emptying the mind to become detached from the world and to merge with the so-called Cosmic Mind, not to attach to, listen to, and to be active for a living, personal God. Yet, we can learn from such people the importance of quiet reflection and prolonged meditation.<sup>3</sup>

At one time, the Christian church was deeply engaged in biblical meditation, which involved detachment from sin and attachment to God and one's neighbor. In the Puritan age, numerous ministers preached and wrote on how to meditate.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, we will look at the Puritan art of meditation, considering the nature, duty, manner, subjects, benefits, obstacles, and self-examination of meditation.<sup>5</sup> With the Puritans as mentors, perhaps we can recover the biblical practice of meditation for our time.

### **The Definition, Nature, and Kinds of Meditation**

The word *meditate* or *muse* means to “think upon” or “reflect.” “While I was musing the fire burned,” David said (Ps. 39:3). It also means “to murmur, to mutter, to make sound with the mouth.... It implies what we express by one talking to himself.”<sup>6</sup> Such meditation involved reciting to oneself in a low undertone passages of Scripture one had committed to memory.

The Bible often speaks of meditation. “Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening,” says Genesis 24:63. Despite Joshua's demanding task of supervising the conquest of Canaan, the Lord commanded Joshua to meditate on the book of the law day and night so that he might do all that was written in it (Josh. 1:8). The term *meditation*, however, occurs more often in the Psalms than in all other books of the Bible put together. Psalm 1 calls that man blessed who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night. In Psalm 63:6, David speaks of remembering the Lord on his bed and meditating on Him in the night watches. Psalm 119:148 says, “Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.”<sup>7</sup>

Thinking, reflecting, or musing presupposes a subject on which to meditate. Formal meditation implies weighty subjects. For example, philosophers meditate on concepts such as matter and the universe, while theologians reflect on God, the eternal decrees, and the will of man.

The Puritans never tired of saying that biblical meditation involves thinking upon the Triune God and His Word. By anchoring meditation in the living Word, Jesus Christ, and God's written Word, the Bible, the Puritans distanced themselves from the kind of bogus spirituality or mysticism that stresses contemplation at the expense of action, and flights of the imagination at the expense of biblical content.

For the Puritans, meditation exercises both the mind and the heart; he who meditates approaches a subject with his intellect as well as his affections. Thomas Watson defined meditation as "a holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truths of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder upon them and apply them to ourselves."<sup>8</sup>

Edmund Calamy wrote, "A true meditation is when a man doth so meditate of Christ as to get his *heart* inflamed with the love of Christ; so meditate of the Truths of God, as to be transformed into them; and so meditate of sin as to get his heart to hate sin." He went on to say that in order to do good, meditation must enter three doors: the door of understanding, the door of the heart and affections, and the door of practical living. "Thou must so meditate of God as to walk as God walks; and so to meditate of Christ as to prize him, and live in obedience to him."<sup>9</sup>

Meditation was a daily duty that enhanced every other duty of the Puritan's Christian life. As oil lubricates an engine, so meditation facilitates the diligent use of

means of grace (reading of Scripture, hearing sermons, prayer, and all other ordinances of Christ),<sup>10</sup> deepens the marks of grace (repentance, faith, humility), and strengthens one's relationships to others (love to God, to fellow Christians, to one's neighbors at large).

The Puritans wrote of two kinds of meditation: occasional and deliberate. "There is a *sudden, short, occasional meditation* of Heavenly things; and there is a *solemn, set, deliberate meditation*," Calamy wrote. Occasional meditation takes what one observes with the senses to "raise up his thoughts to Heavenly meditation." The believer makes use of what he sees with his eyes, or hears with his ears, "as a ladder to climb to Heaven." That's what David did with the moon and stars in Psalm 8, what Solomon did with the ants in Proverbs 6, and what Christ did with well water in John 4.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Manton explained: "God trained up the old church by types and ceremonies, that upon a common object they might ascend to spiritual thoughts; and our Lord in the new testament taught by parables and similitudes taken from ordinary functions and offices among men, that in every trade and calling we might be employed in our worldly business with an heavenly mind, that, whether in the shop, or at the loom, or in the field, we might still think of Christ and heaven."<sup>12</sup>

Occasional meditation—or "extemporal" meditation<sup>13</sup>—is relatively easy for a believer because it may be practiced at any time, any place, and among any people. A spiritually minded man can quickly learn how to spiritualize natural things, for his desires run counter to the worldly minded who carnalize even spiritual things.<sup>14</sup> As Manton wrote, "A gracious heart is like an alembic [distillation apparatus], it can distil useful meditations out of all things it meeteth with. As it seeth all things in God, so it seeth God in all things."<sup>15</sup>

Nearly every Puritan book on meditation mentions occasional meditation. Some Puritans, such as William Spurstowe, Thomas Taylor, Edward Bury, and Henry Lukin, wrote entire books of occasional meditations.<sup>16</sup>

Occasional meditation has its dangers, however. Bishop Joseph Hall warned that when left unbridled, such meditations could easily wander from the Word and become superstitious, as was the case in Roman Catholic spirituality.<sup>17</sup> One's imagination must be reined in by sacred Writ.

Puritans differed among themselves in how far to go with such meditation. In *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation*, U. Milo Kaufmann said there were two divergent traditions in Puritan meditation. He said that Joseph Hall, a moderate Puritan in theological orientation though not in church polity, led the way in developing literature on meditation among the Puritans through his work, *Art of Divine Meditation*, first published in 1606. Hall reined in imagination in meditation by confining it to the content of the Word. That greatly influenced Isaac Ambrose and Thomas Hooker, who wrote in the 1650s, and John Owen and Edmund Calamy, who wrote a generation later. Kaufmann asserted that, unlike Roman Catholic writers, most Puritans were "not likely to meditate upon events in the life of Christ but rather upon doctrines or specific propositions of Scripture."<sup>18</sup>

According to Kaufmann, Richard Sibbes and Richard Baxter broke out of this tradition in recommending meditation on the sacraments and heaven. Sibbes, particularly, asserted that though the soul can receive much hurt from unbridled imagination, it can also "have much good therby." Representing heavenly things in earthly terms, such as presenting the kingdom of heaven in terms of a banquet and union with Christ as a

marriage, offered “a large field for our imagination to walke in. . . with a great deal of spirituall *gaine*,” Sibbes wrote.<sup>19</sup> Kaufmann believed that Baxter, in emphasizing imagination by comparing objects of sense with objects of faith, was moved by Sibbes’s *Soules Conflict*. In turn, John Bunyan was encouraged to write *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, in which he applied his imagination to a wide variety of topics affecting the believer’s spiritual pilgrimage.<sup>20</sup>

Though Kaufmann’s assessment has grains of truth, he has too little feeling for the Puritan fear of allowing imagination to have free reign beyond Scripture. The Puritans rightly feared the excesses of Anselm, Ignatius of Loyola, and other Roman Catholics in visualizing gospel stories—particularly the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ—to open imagination through the five senses.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Kaufmann’s negative assessment of Hall and Ambrose failed to take into account the remarkable freedom that both writers gave to scriptural imagination and use of the senses.<sup>22</sup> Hall’s *Contemplations* and Ambrose’s *Looking Unto Jesus* freely indulged in meditation without trespassing the boundaries of Scripture. That balance is critical in Puritan tradition, and as such, the Puritans serve as mentors on how we can use sanctified imagination.<sup>23</sup>

The most important kind of meditation is daily, deliberate meditation, engaged in at set times. Calamy said deliberate meditation takes place “when a man *sets apart*... some time, and goes into a private Closet, or a private Walk, and there doth solemnly and *deliberately meditate of the things of Heaven*.” Such deliberation dwells upon God, Christ, and truth like “the Bee that dwells and abides upon the flower, to suck out all the sweetness.” It “is a reflecting act of the soul, whereby the soul is carried back to it self,

and considers all the things that it knows” about the subject, including its “causes, fruites, [and] properties.”<sup>24</sup>

Thomas White said deliberate meditation draws from four sources: Scripture, practical truths of Christianity, providential occasions (experiences), and sermons. Sermons are particularly fertile fields for meditation. As White wrote, “It is better to hear one Sermon only and meditate on that, then to hear two Sermons and meditate on neither.”<sup>25</sup>

Some Puritans divided deliberate meditation into two parts: meditation that is direct and focuses on the meditated object, and meditation that is reflective (or “reflexive”) and focuses on the person who is meditating. Direct meditation is “an act of the contemplative part of the understanding,” whereas reflective meditation is “an act of conscience.” Direct meditation enlightens the mind with knowledge, while reflective meditation fills the heart with goodness.

Deliberate meditation can be dogmatic, having the Word as its object, or practical, having our lives as its object.<sup>26</sup> Thomas Gouge combined several aspects of deliberate meditation in writing, “A set and deliberate Meditation, is a serious applying of the mind to some spiritual or heavenly subject, discoursing thereof with thy self, to the end thine heart may be warmed, thine affections quickened, and thy resolutions heightned to a greater love of God, hatred of sin, &c.”<sup>27</sup>

Richard Baxter said that “set and solemn” meditation differs from “occasional and cursory” meditation much as set times of prayer differ from spontaneous prayers uttered in the midst of daily business.<sup>28</sup> Both kinds of meditation are essential for godliness; they serve both the needs of the head and the heart.<sup>29</sup> Without heart application, meditation is



no more than study. As Thomas Watson wrote, “Study is the finding out of a truth, meditation is the spiritual improvement of a truth; the one searcheth for the vein of gold, the other digs out the gold. Study is like a winter sun that hath little warmth and influence: meditation . . . melts the heart when it is frozen, and makes it drop into tears of love.”<sup>30</sup>

### **The Duty and Necessity of Meditation**

The Puritans stressed the need for meditation. They said that, first, our God who commands us to meditate on His Word. That should be sufficient reason alone. They cite numerous biblical texts (Deut. 6:7; 32:46; Ps. 19:14; 49:3; 63:3; 94:19; 119:11, 15, 23, 28, 93, 99; 143:5; Is. 1:3; Luke 2:19; 4:44; John 4:24; Eph. 1:18; 1 Tim. 4:13; Heb. 3:1) and examples (Melchizedek, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, David, Mary, Paul, Timothy). When we fail to meditate, we slight God and His Word and reveal that we are not godly (Ps. 1:2).

Second, we should meditate on the Word as a letter God has written to us. “We must not run it over in haste, but meditate upon God’s wisdom in inditing, and his love in sending it to us,” wrote Thomas Watson.<sup>31</sup> Such meditation will kindle our affections and love for God. As David said, “I will lift up my hands also to thy commandments, which I have loved, and I will meditate in thy statutes” (Ps. 119:48).

Third, one cannot be a solid Christian without meditating. As Thomas Manton said, “Faith is lean and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation on the promises; as David saith, Ps. cxix. 92, ‘Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.’”<sup>32</sup> Watson wrote, “A Christian without meditation is like

a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost.”<sup>33</sup>

Fourth, without meditation, the preached Word will fail to profit us. Reading without meditation is like swallowing “raw and undigested food,” wrote Scudder.<sup>34</sup> Richard Baxter added, “A man may eat too much but he cannot digest too well.”<sup>35</sup>

Watson wrote, “There is as much difference between the knowledge of a truth, and the meditation of a truth, as there is between the light of a torch, and the light of the sun: set up a lamp or torch in the garden, and it hath no influence. The sun hath a sweet influence, it makes the plants to grow, and the herbs to flourish: so knowledge is but like a torch lighted in the understanding, which hath little or no influence, it makes not a man the better; but meditation is like the shining of the sun, it operates upon the affections, it warms the heart and makes it more holy. Meditation fetcheth life in a truth.”<sup>36</sup>

Fifth, without meditation, our prayers will be less effective. Manton wrote, “Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the word and prayer, and hath respect to both. The word feedeth meditation, and meditation feedeth prayer; we must hear that we be not erroneous, and meditate that we be not barren. These duties must always go hand in hand; meditation must follow hearing and precede prayer.”<sup>37</sup>

Sixth, Christians who fail to meditate are unable to defend the truth. They have no backbone and little self-knowledge. As Manton wrote, “A man that is a stranger to meditation is a stranger to himself.”<sup>38</sup> “It is meditation that makes a Christian,” said Watson.<sup>39</sup> “Thus you see the necessity of meditation,” wrote Archbishop James Ussher, “we must resolve upon the duty, if ever we meane to goe to heaven.”<sup>40</sup>

Finally, it may also be added that such meditation is an essential part of sermon preparation. Without it, sermons will lack depth of understanding, richness of feeling, and clarity of application. Bengel’s directive to students of the Greek New Testament captures the essence of such meditation: “*Te totam applica and textum; rem totam applica ad te*” (Apply your whole self to the text; the whole matter of it, apply to yourself).

### **The Manner of Meditation**

For Puritan authors, there were requisites and rules for meditation. Let us consider what they wrote about the frequency and time of meditation, preparation for meditation, and guidelines for meditation.

#### *Frequency and Time*

First, divine meditation must be frequent—ideally, twice a day, if time and obligations permit; certainly at least once a day. If Joshua, as a busy commander, was ordered by God to meditate on His law day and night, shouldn’t we also delight in meditating on God’s truth every morning and evening? Generally speaking, the more frequently we meditate on the Triune God and His truth, the more intimately we will know Him. Meditation will also become easier.<sup>41</sup>

Lengthy intervals between meditations will hinder their fruit. As William Bates wrote, “If the bird leaves her nest for a long space, the eggs chill and are not fit for production; but where there is a constant incubation, then they bring forth: so when we

leave religious duties for a long space, our affections chill, and grow cold; and are not fit to produce holiness, and comfort to our souls.”<sup>42</sup>

Second, set a time for meditation and stick to that time, the Puritans advised. That will put brackets around duty and defend you “against many temptations to omission,” wrote Baxter.<sup>43</sup> Let it be the most “seasonable time” for you, when you are most alert and not stressed by other obligations. Early morning is an excellent time, because your meditations then will set the tone for the remainder of the day (Ex. 23:19; Job 1:5; Ps. 119:147; Prov. 6:22; Mark 1:35). Still, for some, evenings may be more fruitful (Gen. 24:63; Ps. 4:4). The busyness of the day is behind them, and they are ready to rest in “the bosom of God by sweet meditation” (Ps. 16:7).<sup>44</sup>

Use the Lord’s Day for generous doses of meditation time. In their *Directory for the Publique Worship of God*, the Westminster divines advised “that what time is vacant, between, or after the solempne meeting of the congregation in publique, be spent in reading, meditation, and repetition of sermons.”<sup>45</sup> Thomas Gouge admonished, “Had you ever tasted of the sweetness of this duty of Divine Meditation, you would finde little time for vain talk, and idle discourses, especially upon the Lords day.”<sup>46</sup> Baxter asked, “What fitter day to ascend to heaven than that on which our Lord did arise from earth, and fully triumph over death and hell, and take possession of heaven for us?”<sup>47</sup>

Use special times as well for meditation. According to the Puritans, those include the following: “1. When God doth extraordinarily revive and enable thy spirit. 2. When thou art cast into perplexing troubles of mind, through sufferings, or fear, or care, or temptations. 3. When the messengers of God do summon us to die; when either our grey hairs, or our languishing bodies, or some such-like forerunners of death, do tell us that

our change cannot be far off.”<sup>48</sup> 4. “When the heart is touched at a Sermon or Sacrament, or observing of any judgement or mercy, or act of Gods providence, [for then] it is best striking when the Iron is hot (Ps. 119:23).”<sup>49</sup> 5. “Before some solemn duties, as before the Lord’s supper, and before special times of deep humiliation, or before the Sabbath.”<sup>50</sup>

Third, meditate “ordinarily till thou doest find some sensible benefit conveyed to thy soul.” Bates said that meditating is like trying to build a fire from wet wood. Those who persevere will produce a flame. When we begin to meditate, we may first garner only a bit of smoke, then perhaps a few sparks, “but at last there is a flame of holy affections that goes up towards God.” Persevere “till the flame doth so ascend,” Bates said.<sup>51</sup>

There will be times when the flame does not ascend. You must not then carry on indefinitely. “Neither yield to laziness, nor occasion spiritual weariness: the devil hath advantage upon you both ways,” Manton wrote. “When you torture your spirits after they have been spent, it makes the work of God a bondage.”<sup>52</sup>

Most Puritans did not advise a specific amount of time to be spent on meditation. However, James Ussher recommended at least one hour per week, and Thomas White suggested, “considering the parts of Meditation are so many, viz. Preparation, Considerations, Affections, Resolutions, &c. and none of them are to be past slightly over, for Affections are not so quickly raised, nor are we to cease blowing the fire as soon as ever it beginneth to flame, until it be well kindled, half an hour [each day] may be thought to be the least for beginners, and an hour for those that are versed in this duty.”<sup>53</sup>

### *Preparation*

Puritan writers suggested several ways to prepare for effective meditation, all of which depend “much on the frame of thy heart”:

1. Clear your heart from things of this world—its business and enjoyments as well as its internal troubles and agitations. Calamy wrote, “Pray unto God not only to keep out outward company, but inward company; that is, to keep out vain, and worldly, and distracting thoughts.”<sup>54</sup>

2. Have your heart cleansed from the guilt and pollution of sin, and stirred up with fervent love for spiritual things. Treasure up a stock of scriptural texts and spiritual truths. Seek grace to live out David’s confession in Psalm 119:11, “Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

3. Approach the task of meditation with utmost seriousness. Be aware of its weightiness, excellence, and potential. If you succeed, you will be admitted into the very presence of God and feel once again the beginning of eternal joy here on earth.<sup>55</sup> As Ussher wrote, “This must be the thought of thy heart, I have to doe with a God, before whom all things are naked, and bare, and therefore I must bee careful to not speake foolishly before the wise God, that my thoughts be not wandring. A man may talk with the greatest Prince on earth, his mind otherwise busied; Not so come to talk with God; his eye is on the heart, and therefore thy chief care must be to keep the rudder of thy heart steady. Consider the three persons in the Trinity are present.”<sup>56</sup>

4. Find a place for meditation that is quiet and free from interruption. Aim for “secrecy, silence, rest, whereof the first excludeth company, the second noise, the third motion,” wrote Joseph Hall.<sup>57</sup> Once a suitable place is found, stick with that place. Some Puritans recommended keeping the room dark or closing one’s eyes to remove all visible

distractions. Others recommended walking or sitting in the midst of nature. Here one must find his own way.

5. Maintain a body posture that is reverent, whether it be sitting, standing, walking, or lying prostrate before the Almighty. While meditating, the body should be the servant of the soul, following its affections. The goal is to center the soul, the mind, and the body upon “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).<sup>58</sup>

### *Guidelines*

The Puritans also offered guidelines for the process of meditation. They said to begin by asking the Holy Spirit for assistance. Pray for the power to harness your mind and to focus the eyes of faith on this task. As Calamy wrote, “I would have you pray unto God to enlighten your understandings, to quicken your devotion, to warm your affections, and so to bless that hour unto you, that by the meditation of holy things you may be made more holy, you may have your lusts more mortified, and your graces more increased, you may be the more mortified to the world, and the vanity of it, and lifted up to Heaven, and the things of Heaven.”<sup>59</sup>

Next, the Puritans said to read the Scriptures, then select a verse or doctrine upon which to meditate. Be sure to pick out relatively easy subjects to meditate on at the beginning, they advised. For example, begin with the attributes of God rather than the doctrine of the Trinity. And consider subjects one at a time.

In addition, select subjects that are most applicable to your present circumstances and that will be most beneficial for your soul. For example, if you’re spiritually dejected, meditate upon Christ’s willingness to receive poor sinners and pardon all who come to

Him. If your conscience troubles you, meditate on God’s promises to give grace to the penitent. If you’re financially afflicted, meditate on God’s wonderful providences to those in need.<sup>60</sup>

Now, memorize the selected verse(s), or some aspect of the subject, to stimulate meditation, strengthen faith, and serve as a means of divine guidance.

Next, fix your thoughts on the Scripture or a scriptural subject without prying further than what God has revealed. Use your memory to focus on all that Scripture has to say about your subject. Consider past sermons and other edifying books.

Use “the book of conscience, the book of Scripture, and the book of the creature”<sup>61</sup> as you consider various aspects of your subject: its names, causes, qualities, fruits, and effects. Like Mary, ponder these things in your heart. Think of illustrations, similitudes, and opposites in your mind to enlighten your understanding and enflame your affections. Then let judgment assess the value of what you are meditating upon.

Here’s an example from Calamy. If you would meditate on the subject of sin, “Begin with the description of sin; proceed to the distribution of sin; consider the original and cause of sin, the cursed fruits and effects of sin, the adjuncts and properties of sin in general and of personal sin in particular, the opposite of sin—grace, the metaphors of sin, the titles given to sin, [and] all that the Scripture saith concerning sin.”<sup>62</sup>

Two warnings are in order. First, as Manton wrote, “Do not bridle up the free spirit by the rules of method. That which God calleth for is religion, not logic. When Christians confine themselves to such rules and prescriptions, they straiten themselves, and thoughts come from them like water out of a still, not like water out of a fountain.”<sup>63</sup> Second, if your mind wanders, rein it in, offer a short prayer for forgiveness, ask for



strength to stay focused, read a few appropriate Scriptures again, and press on.

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

Next, stir up affections, such as love, desire, hope, courage, gratitude, zeal, and joy,<sup>64</sup> to glorify God.<sup>65</sup> Hold soliloquies with your own soul. Include complaints against yourself because of your inabilities and shortcomings, and spread before God your spiritual longings. Believe that He will help you.

Paul Baynes, in discussing meditations as a “private meanes” of grace, compared it first with the power of sight to affect the heart, then with the process of conception and birth: “Now look as after conception, there is a travell to bring forth & a birth in due season: so when the soule by thought hath conceived, presently the affections are tickled and excited, for the affections kindle on a thought, as tinder doth, when a sparke lighteth on it. The affections moved, the will is stirred and inclined.”<sup>66</sup>

Now, following the arousal of your memory, judgment, and affections, apply your meditations to yourself to arouse your soul to duty and comfort, and to restrain your soul from sin.<sup>67</sup> As William Fenner wrote, “Dive into thy own soul; anticipate and prevent thy own heart. Haunt thy heart with promises, threatnings, mercies, judgements, and commandments. Let meditation trace thy heart. Hale thy heart before God.”<sup>68</sup>

Examine yourself for your own growth in grace. Reflect on the past and ask, “What have I done?” Look to the future, asking, “What am I resolved to do, by God's grace?”<sup>69</sup> Do not ask such questions legalistically but out of holy excitement and opportunity to grow in Spirit-worked grace. Remember, “Legal work is our work; meditation work is sweet work.”<sup>70</sup>

Follow Calamy's advice, "If ever you would get good by the practice of meditation, you must come down to *particulars*; and you must so meditate of Christ, as to apply Christ to thy soul; and so meditate of Heaven, as to apply Heaven to thy soul."<sup>71</sup> Live out your meditation (Josh. 1:8). Let meditation and practice, like two sisters, walk hand in hand. Meditation without practice will only increase your condemnation.<sup>72</sup>

Next, turn your applications into resolutions. "Let your resolutions be firm and strong, not [mere] wishes, but resolved purposes or Determinations," wrote White.<sup>73</sup> Make your resolutions be commitments to fight against your temptations to sin. Write down your resolutions. Above all, resolve that you will spend your life "as becomes one that hath been meditating of holy and heavenly things." Commend yourself, your family, and everything you own to the hands of God with "sweet resignation."

Conclude with prayer, thanksgiving, and Psalm singing. "Meditation is the best beginning of prayer, and prayer is the best conclusion of meditation," wrote George Swinnock. Watson said, "Pray over your meditations. Prayer sanctifies every thing; without prayer they are but unhallowed meditations; prayer fastens meditation upon the soul; prayer is a tying a knot at the end of meditation that it doth not slip; pray that God will keep those holy meditations in your mind for ever, that the savour of them may abide upon your hearts."<sup>74</sup>

Thank the Lord for assistance in meditation, or else Richard Greenham warned, "we shall be buffeted in our next meditation."<sup>75</sup>

The metrical versions of the Psalms are a great help in meditation. Their metrical form facilitates memorization. As God's Word, they are a proper subject for meditation. As a "complete anatomy of the soul" (Calvin), they afford abundant material and

guidance for meditation. As prayers (Ps. 72:20) and as thanksgiving (Ps. 118:1), they are both a proper vehicle for meditation and a fitting way to conclude it. Joseph Hall wrote that he found much comfort in closing his meditations by lifting up his “heart and voice to God in singing some verse or two of David’s Psalms—one that answers to our disposition and the matter of our meditation. In this way the heart closes up with much sweetness and contentment.”<sup>76</sup> John Lightfoot added, “Singing God’s praise is a work of the most meditation of any we perform in public. It keeps the heart longest upon the thing spoken. Prayer and hearing pass quick from one sentence to another; this sticks long upon it.”

Finally, don’t shift too quickly from meditation to engagement with things of this world, lest, as Thomas Gouge advised, “thereby thou suddenly quench that spiritual heart which hath in that exercise been kindled in thine heart.”<sup>77</sup> Remember that one hour spent in such meditation is “worth more than a thousand sermons,” Ussher said, “and this is no debasing of the Word, but an honour to it.”<sup>78</sup>

### **The Subjects of Meditation**

The Puritans suggested various subjects, objects, and materials for meditation. The number after each entry represents the number of Puritan writers I found who called for meditation on that subject. This list follows the traditional loci of Reformed systematic theology.

#### *Prolegomena*

- the sacred Word of God (3)
- the defense of Christianity (1)

#### *Theology proper*

- the nature and attributes of God (7)

the works and providences of God (7)  
the glory of God as man's chief end (4)  
the majesty of God (3)  
the mercies of God (3)  
God as Creator (2)

*Anthropology*

the sinfulness of sin and our personal sin (9)  
the corruption and deceitfulness of the heart (5)  
the fall in Adam and estrangement from God (4)  
the vanity of man (4)  
the value and immortality of the soul (3)  
the frailty of the body (2)  
the uncertainty of earthly comforts (1)  
the sin of covetousness (1)  
the contrast between God and man (1)

*Christology*

the passion and death of Christ (8)  
the love of Christ (5)  
the person of Christ (4)  
the mystery and wonder of the Gospel (4)  
the natures of Christ (2)  
the offices of Christ (2)  
the life of Christ (2)  
the states of Christ (1)

*Soteriology and the Christian Life*

the promises of God (7)  
self-examination for experiential evidences of grace (5)  
the rich privileges of believers (3)  
the grace and person of the Holy Spirit (3)  
the benefits of faith (2)  
sanctification (2)  
prayer (2)  
the commandments of God (2)  
the admonishments and threatenings of God (2)  
the danger of apostasy (1)  
the small number of the saved (1)  
spiritual dangers (1)  
love, joy, hope (1)  
the Sabbath (1)  
self-denial (1)

*Ecclesiology*

the ordinances of God (5)

the Lord's Supper (4)  
baptism (2)  
hearing and reading the Word (2)  
the joys and sorrows of the church (1)

*Eschatology*

heaven (10)  
death (8)  
judgment (7)  
hell (7)  
eternity (5)

The Puritans called these subjects the plain, powerful, useful truths of God. Some Puritans, such as Joseph Hall, offered more detailed lists than others. Hall listed eighty-seven subjects upon which to meditate, as well as a paragraph with each on how to do so.

They include:

fame and greatness, ignorance, depravity, holy living, gossip, evil companions, God's promises, love of the world, contentment, hypocrisy, happiness, love of the world, companions, heaven and earth, work and pain, riches, heaven and hell, death, affliction, godly warfare, sin, success, growing in grace, pride, hatred of sin, prejudice, covetousness, prayer, love, blasphemy, nobility, prayer, temptation, the use of means, worship, happiness, obedience, repentance, ambition, conceit, the shortness of life, self-examination, adversity, affliction, faith and philosophy, pleasure, sin, faithful friends, schism and truth, grief and worry, fear, the heathen and the Christian, the light of the eye, the mind and the heart, heartfelt religion, hurting ourselves, the heart and the tongue, the use of time, cares, providence, love, displeasure, friendship, bargain hunting, reproof, envy, worldly pleasures, following good examples, time, enjoyment, good works, fruitfulness, foolishness, doing good, hermitage, a happy life, heavenly correction, heavenly hunger, repentance, spiritual warfare, strength in trials, heavenly-mindedness, humility, death, purpose in life, good from evil, madness, and the practice of meditation itself.<sup>79</sup>

Clearly, for the Puritans, some topics ought to be focused on more than others. This led John Owen to say, "If I have observed anything by experience, it is this: a man may take the measure of his growth and decay in grace according to his thoughts and meditations upon the person of Christ, and the glory of Christ's kingdom, and of His love."

For the Puritans, probably the most important theme for meditation was heaven—the place where God is supremely known and worshiped and enjoyed, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, and where the saints rejoice as they are transcribed from glory to glory. “Meditation is the life of most other duties: and the views of heaven is the life of Meditation,” wrote Baxter.<sup>80</sup> Heaven was the supreme subject for meditation for these reasons:

\_ Christ is in heaven now and our salvation consists of union through the Holy Spirit with Christ. He is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Christ, the center of heaven, ought to be the center of all our faith, hope, and love.

\_ We can only live as Christians in the present evil age if we have the mind of Christ—that is, if we are genuinely heavenly-minded, seeing our earth and this age from the perspective of heaven.

\_ Heaven is the goal of our pilgrimage. We are pilgrims on the earth, journeying in faith, hope, and love toward heaven to be with Christ.<sup>81</sup>

The Puritans taught that meditations on heaven and other subjects take priority on three occasions. First, special meditation is necessary in conjunction with worship, particularly with regard to the sermon. “God requires you to hear Sermons, requires you to meditate on the Sermons you hear,” wrote Calamy.<sup>82</sup> As James Ussher wrote, “Every sermon is but a preparation for meditation.”<sup>83</sup>

Good sermons not only inform the mind with sound doctrine but also stir up the affections. They turn the will away from sin and toward loving God and one’s neighbor. Meditation enlarges and directs the affections through the reception of the Word of God in the heart from the mind. When people stop meditating on sermons, they stop benefiting from them.

Richard Baxter wrote, “Why so much preaching is lost among us, and professors can run from sermon to sermon, and are never weary of hearing or reading, and yet have such languishing, starved souls, I know no truer or greater cause than their ignorance and

unconscionable neglect of meditation.” Some hearers have spiritual anorexia, Baxter said, for “they have neither appetite nor digestion,” but others have spiritual bulimia—“they have appetite, but no digestion.”<sup>84</sup>

Conscientious Puritans often took sermon notes to help facilitate meditation. In my own congregation, an elderly Christian woman decided to emulate that practice. Every Sabbath evening she spent an hour on her knees with notes from the sermons of the day, praying and meditating her way through them. She often said that was the best part of her Sabbath.

Second, to rightly receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, a believer is expected to meditate on the Lord Jesus as the sacrifice for his sin. As Thomas White wrote, “Meditate upon your preparatory, concomitant and subsequent duties: Meditate upon the love of God the Father, upon the love of God the Son, Jesus Christ, consider the excellency of his person, the greatness of his sufferings, and how valid they be to the satisfaction of Gods Justice, and so likewise to consider of the excellency, nature, and use of the Sacrament.”<sup>85</sup>

Calamy listed twelve subjects for meditations during the sacrament: “the great and wonderful love of God the Father in giving Christ; the love of Christ in giving himself; the heinousness of sin; the excellency of this Sacramental feast; your own unworthiness; your spiritual wants and necessities; the cursed condition of an unworthy receiver; the happy condition of those that come worthily; the Sacramental Elements [bread and wine]; the Sacramental actions [how the minister’s actions represent Christ]; the Sacramental Promises; what retribution to make unto Christ for [the gift of His Supper].”<sup>86</sup> Some Puritan divines, such as Edward Reynolds, wrote entire treatises to help

believers during the Lord's Supper.<sup>87</sup> John Owen showed how preparation for the Lord's Supper involved meditation, examination, supplication, and expectation.<sup>88</sup> Every believer was expected to share in that preparation.<sup>89</sup>

Third, every Sabbath was a special season for meditation. It was a time of spiritual nourishment for the God-fearing who stocked up on spiritual goods for the week to come. Hence the Sabbath was fondly called "the market day of the soul."

Finally, Puritans such as Nathanael Ranew, who wrote extensively on meditation, gave various directions to believers, depending on their spiritual maturity. Ranew wrote chapters for "young Christians newly converted," "more grown and elder Christians," and for "old Christians." The older the Christian, the greater the expectation for more profound meditations.<sup>90</sup>

### **The Benefits of Meditation**

The Puritans devoted scores of pages to the benefits, excellencies, usefulness, advantages, or improvements of meditation. Here are some of those benefits:

\_ Meditation helps us focus on the Triune God, to love and to enjoy Him in all His persons (1 John 4:8)—intellectually, spiritually, aesthetically.

\_ Meditation helps increase knowledge of sacred truth. It "takes the veil from the face of truth" (Prov. 4:2).

\_ Meditation is the "nurse of wisdom," for it promotes the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:8).

\_ Meditation enlarges our faith by helping us to trust the God of promises in all our spiritual troubles and the God of providence in all our outward troubles.<sup>91</sup>



\_ Meditation augments one's affections. Watson called meditation "the bellows of the affections." He said, "Meditation hatcheth good affections, as the hen her young ones by sitting on them; we light affection at this fire of meditation" (Ps. 39:3).<sup>92</sup>

\_ Meditation fosters repentance and reformation of life (Ps. 119:59; Ez. 36:31).

\_ Meditation is a great friend to memory.

\_ Meditation helps us view worship as a discipline to be cultivated. It makes us prefer God's house to our own.

\_ Meditation transfuses Scripture through the texture of the soul.

\_ Meditation is a great aid to prayer (Ps. 5:1). It tunes the instrument of prayer before prayer.

\_ Meditation helps us to hear and read the Word with real benefit. It makes the Word "full of life and energy to our souls." William Bates wrote, "Hearing the word is like ingestion, and when we meditate upon the word that is digestion; and this digestion of the word by meditation produceth warm affections, zealous resolutions, and holy actions."<sup>93</sup>

\_ Meditation on the sacraments helps our "graces to be better and stronger." It helps faith, hope, love, humility, and numerous spiritual comforts thrive in the soul.

\_ Meditation stresses the heinousness of sin. It "musters up all weapons, and gathers all forces of arguments for to presse our sins, and lay them heavy upon the heart," wrote Fenner.<sup>94</sup> Thomas Hooker said, "Meditation sharpens the sting and

strength of corruption, that it pierceth more prevailingly.”<sup>95</sup> It is a “strong antidote against sin” and “a cure of covetousness.”

\_ Meditation enables us to “discharge religious duties, because it conveys to the soul the lively sense and feeling of God’s goodness; so the soul is encouraged to duty.”<sup>96</sup>

\_ Meditation helps prevent vain and sinful thoughts (Jer. 4:14; Matt. 12:35). It helps wean us from this present evil age.

\_ Meditation provides inner resources on which to draw (Ps. 77:10-12), including direction for daily life (Prov. 6:21-22).

\_ Meditation helps us persevere in faith; it keeps our hearts “savory and spiritual in the midst of all our outward and worldly employments,” wrote William Bridge.<sup>97</sup>

\_ Meditation is a mighty weapon to ward off Satan and temptation (Ps. 119:11,15; 1 John 2:14).

\_ Meditation provides relief in afflictions (Is. 49:15-17; Heb. 12:5).

\_ Meditation helps us benefit others with our spiritual fellowship and counsel (Ps. 66:16; 77:12; 145:7).

\_ Meditation promotes gratitude for all the blessings showered upon us by God through His Son.

\_ Meditation glorifies God (Ps. 49:3).<sup>98</sup>

In short, as Thomas Brooks wrote, “meditation is the food of your souls, it is the very stomach and natural heat whereby spiritual truths are digested. A man shall as soon live without his heart, as he shall be able to get good by what he reads, without

meditation.... It is not he that reads most; but he that meditates most, that will prove the choicest, sweetest, wisest, and strongest Christian.”<sup>99</sup>

### **The Obstacles of Meditation**

Puritan leaders frequently warned people about hindrances to meditation. Here is a summary of their responses to such obstacles:

*Obstacle #1:* Unfitness or ignorance. Such say they “cannot confine their thoughts to an object.” Their “thoughts are light and feathery, tossed to and fro.”

*Answer:* Disability, ignorance, and wandering thoughts offer no exemption from duty. Your “loss of ability” does not imply God’s “loss of right.” Truth be told, you are probably unfit because you have neglected meditation and have not loved the truth.

“Sinful indispositions do not disannul our engagements to God, as a servant’s drunkenness doth not excuse him from work,” Manton wrote.<sup>100</sup> Remedy your problem by getting “a good stock of sanctified knowledge” and by “constant exercise” of that knowledge, leaning all the while on the Holy Spirit for assistance. You will find meditation becoming easier and sweeter in due course.

*Obstacle #2:* Busyness. Such say “they are so harassed by the employments of this world, that they cannot spend time in this duty solemnly, and seriously.”

*Answer:* True religion is not performed merely in leisure time. Great busyness should move us to more meditation, as we then have more needs to bring before God and to meditate upon.

*Obstacle #3:* Spiritual lethargy. Such admit that though they may have good intentions, their soul is prone to divert itself from meditation.

*Answer:* Matthew 11:12 says heaven is the reward of “the violent [who] take it by force.” Why are you lazy in spiritual pursuits that can reap eternal rewards when you are not lazy in pursuing secular work in this world, which produces only temporary rewards? Spiritual “drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags” (Prov. 23:21b). As Manton said, “It is better to take pains than to suffer pains, and to be bound with the cords of duty than with the chains of darkness.”<sup>101</sup>

*Obstacle #4:* Worldly pleasures and friendships. Such say they don’t want to be righteous overmuch and hence do not wish to abandon vain entertainment and friends.

*Answer:* “The pleasures of the world discompose our souls, and unfit our bodies for the duties of meditation. . . . Remember this, the sweetness of religion is incomparably more than all the pleasures of sense,” wrote Bates.<sup>102</sup>

*Obstacle #5:* Adverseness of heart. Such say they don’t like to be yoked to such a difficult task. Burdened with guilt, they fear being alone with God.

*Answer:* “Get your conscience cleansed by the hearty application of the blood of Christ,” Manton advised, then yoke yourself to the means of grace, including meditation (Ps. 19:14).<sup>103</sup>

The consequences of omitting meditation are serious, Calamy warned. It leads to hardness of heart. Why do the promises and threatenings of God make so little impression on us? It’s because we fail to meditate upon them. Why are we so ungrateful to God for His blessings? Why do His providences and afflictions fail to produce godly fruit in our lives? Why do we fail to benefit from the Word and sacraments, why are we

so judgmental of others, why do we so feebly prepare for eternity? Isn't it largely due to our lack of meditation?<sup>104</sup>

We must discipline ourselves to meditate. Most Puritan pastors said that. Yet comparatively few people, even in Puritan times, saw this as their duty. "Many are troubled," wrote Baxter, "if they omit a sermon, a fast, a prayer in public or private, yet were never troubled that they have omitted meditation, perhaps all their life-time to this very day."<sup>105</sup>

### **Conclusion: Meditation as Self-Examination**

Puritan meditation was more than a particular means of grace; it was a comprehensive method for Puritan devotion—a biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and practical art. Its theology was Pauline, Augustinian, and Calvinistic. Its subject matter was drawn from the book of Scripture, the book of creation, and the book of conscience. As William Bridge said, "Meditation is the vehement or intense application of the soul unto some thing, whereby a man's mind doth ponder, dwell and fix upon it, for his own profit and benefit," which, in turn, leads to God's glory.<sup>106</sup>

Typically, Puritans concluded their treatises on meditation by calling readers to self-examination, which consists of:

#### (1) Trial

- Are your meditations motivated by the exercise of "a lively faith"? Real meditation is inseparable from the exercise of faith. Do you ever meditate as Samuel Ward describes: "Stirre up thy soul in [meditation] to converse with Christ. Looke what

promises and priviledges thou dost habitually believe, now actually thinke of them, roll them under thy tongue, chew on them till thou feel some sweetnesse in the palate of thy soule. View them joyntly, severally: sometimes muse on one, sometimes of another more deeply. This is that which the Spouse calls walking into the Gardens and eating of the Fruites, which in plaine terms, I call using of Faith, and living by Faith.”<sup>107</sup>

- “Are these spiritual thoughts in thy heart, productive of holiness in thy life?”

Remember, “To be weary of the thoughts of God is to degenerate into devils” (James 2:19).<sup>108</sup>

## (2) Reproof or exhortation

- To the unbeliever: When God made you a rational creature, did He intend that you should use your thoughts for selfish and sinful purposes? Why isn’t God in all your thoughts? “Hast thou not a God and a Christ to think of? And is not salvation by him, and everlasting glory, worthy of your choicest thoughts? You have thoughts enough and to spare for other things—for base things, for very toys—and why not for God and the word of God?” Manton asked.<sup>109</sup>

- To the believer: Neglecting meditation should “strike us with fear and sorrow.” How degrading it is to God when we turn our meditation from Him to sinful objects! If the farmer meditates upon his land, the physician upon his patients, the lawyer upon his cases, the storeowner upon his wares, shouldn’t Christians meditate upon their God and Savior?<sup>110</sup>

The Puritans would say to us: “If you continue to neglect meditation, it will dampen or destroy your love for God. It will make it unpleasant to think about God. It

will leave you open to sin so that you view sin as a pleasure. It will leave you vulnerable and fragile before trials and temptations of every kind. In short, it will lead to a falling away from God.”<sup>111</sup>

“No holy duties will come to us,” Ranew wrote, “we must come to them.”<sup>112</sup> Let us heed Watson’s exhortation, “If you have formerly neglected it, bewail your neglect, and now begin to make conscience of it: lock up yourselves with God (at least once a day) by holy meditation. Ascend this hill, and when you are gotten to the top of it, you shall see a fair prospect, Christ and heaven before you. Let me put you in mind of that saying of Bernard, ‘O saint, knowest thou not that thy husband Christ is bashful, and will not be familiar in company, retire thyself by meditation into the closet, or the field, and there thou shalt have Christ’s embraces.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to “Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations,” in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 184.

<sup>2</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism*, Questions 32, 45, 49, 64.

<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 14-15.

<sup>4</sup> See bibliography attached.

<sup>5</sup> Few studies have been done on Puritan meditation. Louis Martz, who established the intimate connection between meditation and poetry, wrote a critical chapter on Richard Baxter’s view of meditation (*The Poetry of Meditation* [New Haven: Yale, 1954]). U. Milo Kaufmann showed the importance of Puritan meditation in shaping Bunyan’s *Pilgrim Progress* (*The Pilgrim’s Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* [New Haven: Yale, 1966]). Barbara Lewalski sharpened the focus on the contributions of a distinctively Protestant form of meditation (*Donne’s “Anniversaries” and the Poetry of Praise, the Creation of a Symbolic Mode* [Princeton: University Press, 1973] and *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* [Princeton: University Press, 1979]). Norman Grabo effectively challenged Martz’s thesis that Calvinistic thinking prevented Protestantism from developing the art of meditation until the mid-seventeenth century (“The Art of Puritan Devotion,” *Seventeenth-Century News* 26, 1 [1968]:8). Frank Livingstone Huntley too neatly categorized Protestant meditation as philosophically Platonic, psychologically Augustinian, and theologically Pauline and Calvinistic in contrast to Roman Catholic meditation as Aristotelian and Thomistic (*Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study With the texts of The Art of Divine Meditations [1606] and Occasional Meditations [1633]* [Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1981]). Simon Chan provided a fresh historical appraisal of Puritan meditation, covering a larger body of texts than those previously examined and moving beyond a literary view (“The Puritan Meditative Tradition, 1599-1691: A Study of Ascetical Piety” [Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1986]). He argued that Puritan meditation progressively moved in a more methodical direction in the second half of the seventeenth century. A book examining the theological and practical assessment of Puritan meditation has yet to be written.

<sup>6</sup> William Wilson, *OT Word Studies* (McLean, Va.: MacDonald Publishing Co., n.d.), 271.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Psalm 4:4; 77:10-12; 104:34; 119:16,48, 59, 78,97-99.

<sup>8</sup> *Heaven Taken by Storm* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 23. For similar definitions by other Puritans, see Richard Greenham, “Grave Covnsels and Godly Observations,” in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithfvll Servant of Iesvs Christ M. Richard Greenham*, ed. H. H. (London: Felix Kingston for Robert Dexter, 1599), 37; Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption: The Ninth and Tenth Books* (London: Peter Cole, 1657), 210; Thomas White, *A*

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- Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation with Instances of the several Kindes of Solemn Meditation* (London: for Tho. Parkhurst, 1672), 13.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Art of Divine Meditation* (London: for Tho. Parkhurst, 1634), 26-28.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. 154.
- <sup>11</sup> Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 6-10.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1874), 17:267-68.
- <sup>13</sup> Huntley, *Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 73.
- <sup>14</sup> *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 14-15.
- <sup>15</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 17:267. Cf., “A gracious heart, like fire, turns all objects into fuel for meditation” (*The Sermons of Thomas Watson* [Ligonier, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990], 247).
- <sup>16</sup> William Spurstowe, *The Spiritual Chymist: or, Six Decads Of Divine Meditations* (London: n.p., 1666); Thomas Taylor, *Meditations from the Creatures* (London, 1629); Edward Bury, *The Husbandmans Companion: Containing One Hundred Occasional Meditations, Reflections, and Ejaculations, Especially Suited to Men of that Employment. Directing them how they may be Heavenly-minded while about their Ordinary Calling* (London: for Tho. Parkhurst, 1677); Henry Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1669).
- <sup>17</sup> Huntley, *Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 74.
- <sup>18</sup> (New Haven: Yale, 1966), 126. Kaufmann quotes Thomas Hooker’s strong rejection of imagination, “To preserve our minds from windy and vain imaginations, is to have our understandings fully taken up with the blessed Truths of God as our dayly and appointed food” (*The Application of Redemption: The Ninth and Tenth Books*, 232).
- <sup>19</sup> Cited in Kaufmann, 144-45.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-251.
- <sup>21</sup> Peter Toon, *Meditating as a Christian* (London: Collins, 1991), 175-78; *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Anthony Mottola (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964).
- <sup>22</sup> Huntley, *Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 44-54.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 99-100.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 22-23; *Works of Greenham*, 38.
- <sup>25</sup> White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation with Instances of the several Kindes of Solemn Meditation* (London: for Tho. Parkhurst, 1672), 17-20.
- <sup>26</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 17:268.
- <sup>27</sup> *Christian Directions, shewing How to walk with God All the Day long* (London: R. Ibbitson and M. Wright, 1661), 65.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1998), 553. Cf. White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 14.
- <sup>29</sup> Henry Scudder, *The Christian Man’s Calling* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.), 103-104. Cf. *The Works of William Bates* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1990), 3:113-65.
- <sup>30</sup> *Gleanings from Thomas Watson* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 106.
- <sup>31</sup> *Sermons of Thomas Watson*, 238.
- <sup>32</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 17:270.
- <sup>33</sup> *Sermons of Thomas Watson*, 238.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Christian’s Daily Walk*, 108.
- <sup>35</sup> *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 549.
- <sup>36</sup> *Sermons of Thomas Watson*, 239.
- <sup>37</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 17:272.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.
- <sup>39</sup> *Sermons of Thomas Watson*, 240.
- <sup>40</sup> *A Method for Meditation: or, A Manuall of Divine Duties, fit for every Christians Practice* (London: for Joseph Nevill, 1656), 21.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 96-101.
- <sup>42</sup> *The Works of William Bates* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1990), 3:124-25.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 555.
- <sup>44</sup> *The Works of William Bates*, 126-27. Thomas Watson makes the strongest case for morning meditations (*Sermons of Thomas Watson*, 250-54).
- <sup>45</sup> See “Of the Sanctification of the Lord’s Day,” *Directory for the Publique Worship of God*.
- <sup>46</sup> *Christian Directions, shewing How to walk with God All the Day long* (London: R. Ibbitson and M. Wright, 1661), 66-67.
- <sup>47</sup> *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 560.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 561-63.
- <sup>49</sup> William Fenner, *The Use and Benefit of Divine Meditation* (London: for John Stafford, 1657), 10.
- <sup>50</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 17:298.
- <sup>51</sup> *The Works of William Bates*, 3:125.
- <sup>52</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 17:299.



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- <sup>53</sup> Ussher, *A Method for Meditation: or, A Manuall of Divine Duties, fit for every Christians Practice* (London: for Joseph Nevill, 1656), 30-31; White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 29.
- <sup>54</sup> Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 173.
- <sup>55</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 58.
- <sup>56</sup> *A Method for Meditation*, 32-33.
- <sup>57</sup> *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 80-81.
- <sup>58</sup> *The Works of William Bates*, 136-39; Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 567-70.
- <sup>59</sup> Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 172.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-68.
- <sup>61</sup> *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 2:417.
- <sup>62</sup> Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 178-84. Cf. Gouge, *Christian Directions, shewing How to walk with God All the Day long*, 70-73.
- <sup>63</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 17:281.
- <sup>64</sup> Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 579-90.
- <sup>65</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 24.
- <sup>66</sup> *A Help to True Happinesse* (London, 1635).
- <sup>67</sup> *The Works of William Bates*, 3:145.
- <sup>68</sup> *The Use and Benefit of Divine Meditation*, 16-23.
- <sup>69</sup> Ussher, *A Method for Meditation*, 39.
- <sup>70</sup> *The Works of William Bridge* (Beaver Falls, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 3:153.
- <sup>71</sup> Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 108.
- <sup>72</sup> *The Sermons of Thomas Watson*, 269, 271.
- <sup>73</sup> *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 53.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.
- <sup>75</sup> *The Works of the Reverend and Faithfull Servant of Iesvs Christ M. Richard Greenham*, 41.
- <sup>76</sup> *The Art of Meditation* (Jenkintown, Penn.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972), 26-27.
- <sup>77</sup> *Christian Directions, shewing How to walk with God All the Day long*, 70.
- <sup>78</sup> *A Method for Meditation*, 43.
- <sup>79</sup> *The Art of Meditation*, 37-60. Due to its detail, I have not included Hall's list in my listing above.
- <sup>80</sup> *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 702.
- <sup>81</sup> Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 95-96. For how to meditate on heaven, see White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 281-94; Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 620-52; *The Select Works of Thomas Case*, 1-232 (second book).
- <sup>82</sup> *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 4.
- <sup>83</sup> *A Method for Meditation*, 49.
- <sup>84</sup> *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 549-50.
- <sup>85</sup> *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 88.
- <sup>86</sup> *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 88-96. Cf. *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 17:288-97.
- <sup>87</sup> "Meditation on the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Last Supper," in *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), 3:1-172.
- <sup>88</sup> *The Works of John Owen*, 9:558-63.
- <sup>89</sup> Cf. *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Questions 171, 174, 175.
- <sup>90</sup> *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 280-321.
- <sup>91</sup> Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 40-42.
- <sup>92</sup> *The Sermons of Thomas Watson*, 256.
- <sup>93</sup> *The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates*, 3:131.
- <sup>94</sup> *The Use and Benefit of Divine Meditation*, 3.
- <sup>95</sup> *The Application of Redemption*, 217.
- <sup>96</sup> *The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates*, 3:135.
- <sup>97</sup> *The Works of the Rev. William Bridge*, 3:133.
- <sup>98</sup> Cf. *The Whole Works of the Rev. Oliver Heywood*, 2:276-81.
- <sup>99</sup> *The Works of the Rev. Thomas Brooks*, 1:8,291.
- <sup>100</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 6:145.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 17:283.
- <sup>102</sup> *The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates*, 3:122-23.
- <sup>103</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 17:285. Cf. Hooker, *The Application of Redemption*, 230-40.
- <sup>104</sup> Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 28-40.
- <sup>105</sup> *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 549.
- <sup>106</sup> *The Works of William Bridge*, 3:125.
- <sup>107</sup> *A Collection of Sermons and Treatises* (London, 1636), 69-70.
- <sup>108</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton*, 7:480.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 6:145.

<sup>110</sup> Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 58-75.

<sup>111</sup> Edmond Smith, *A Tree by a Stream: Unlock the Secrets of Active Meditation* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1995), 36.

<sup>112</sup> *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation*, 33.

<sup>113</sup> *The Sermons of Thomas Watson*, 241-43.

“Meditation applieth, meditation healeth, meditation instructeth.” –Ezekiel Culverwell<sup>1</sup> Spiritual growth is intended to be part of the Christian life of believers. In the Puritan age, numerous ministers preached and wrote on how to meditate.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, we will look at the Puritan art of meditation, considering the nature, duty, manner, subjects, benefits, obstacles, and self-examination of meditation.<sup>5</sup> With the Puritans as mentors, perhaps we can recover the biblical practice of meditation for our time. The Definition, Nature, and Kinds of Meditation The word meditate or muse means to “think upon” or “reflect.” “While I was musing the fire burned,” David said (Ps. 39:3). It also means “to murmur, to mutter, to make sound with the mouth.” After defining what meditation is, He shows the readers what the Puritans has to say about meditation. First, the Puritans has thought through these matters very carefully and thoroughly. He showcases two kinds of meditation to the readers – “occasional and deliberate meditation. One can be done when one has a spare moment or two, the other are extended time purposely planned to think through about a certain bible verse. To practice biblical meditation “means to think personally, practically, seriously, and earnestly on how the truth of God’s Word should look in [one’s] life” (2). Properly pursued, such meditation “imprints and fastens a truth in the mind” and “drives a truth to the heart” (6, quoting Thomas Watson).