LET GOD TRANSFORM YOUR MIND!

Experience God’s peace, empowering prayer, and spiritual growth as you reflect on His goodness from the pages of the Bible. In this booklet, you’ll learn how reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Word will transform your life. Gain wisdom and a deeper connection with God through rehearsing Scripture daily. Be refreshed by the Holy Spirit through the power of biblical meditation!

David Beaty is the pastor of River Oaks Community Church in Clemmons, NC. He earned a master of divinity and a doctor of ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. David has a passion for prayer, evangelism, and global missions. David and his wife, Anna, have two children who also participate in full-time ministry serving the body of Christ and reaching the lost.

To order more of Biblical Meditation or any of over 100 other titles, visit odb.org/discoveryseries.
My friend, Jim, was a remarkably disciplined person. He exercised daily, kept his weight in check, rarely missed a Sunday at church, and strictly followed a read-through-the-Bible-in-a-year plan. So I was surprised when he told me that he felt stagnant in his spiritual growth. Jim had been a Christian for ten years, and recalled his early years in the faith as times of joyful progress in knowledge of Scripture and prayer. “I felt like
I was learning something vital and important every time I heard a sermon or did my daily Bible reading,” he said. But now Jim felt like his spiritual practices were being done out of sheer discipline and duty rather than delight.

It was clear to Jim that life as a follower of Christ was based on faith and not feelings. He understood that spiritual growth often occurs through times of hardship, and that perseverance is a necessary part of spiritual maturity. Yet he longed to find more joy in his study of Scripture, and he especially wanted to develop a more fruitful prayer life.

“Do you ever meditate on Scripture?” I asked Jim.

“Meditate?” he replied. “I read something about meditation in a college philosophy course, but I thought that was something done in Eastern religions. It sounded weird to me.”

When I explained to Jim that meditation was actually a thoroughly biblical concept, and one that might help renew his love for Scripture and help guide him in his times of prayer, he was eager to learn more. What I shared with him is in the following pages. I share this with a prayer that it will deepen your joy in discovering God in the pages of Scripture.

David Beaty
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EDITORS: Tim Gustafson, J.R. Hudberg, Alyson Kieda, Peggy Willison
COVER IMAGE: © Shutterstock / Mangostar
COVER DESIGN: Stan Myers
INTERIOR DESIGN: Steve Gier

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What Is Biblical Meditation?

Jim’s initial concerns about meditation are quite common. Many people associate the word with transcendental meditation, a technique that is intended to achieve a state of inner peace. Others think of meditation as “mindfulness”—a heightened awareness of one’s own thoughts. But biblical meditation is not simply about focusing upon ourselves, or emptying our minds, or trying to achieve a state of calmness. Biblical meditation is pondering the words of Scripture with a
receptive heart, trusting the Holy Spirit to work in you through those words.

Let’s consider the key parts of this definition.

**Ponder:**

Biblical meditation is an act of “pondering.” This is different from simply reading or studying the Bible. Reading and study are important, and can even enable us to meditate properly by helping us to understand the original meaning of a verse or phrase in its context. But to ponder is “to weigh in the mind” or reflect upon something. By definition, it implies careful consideration and focused attention upon its object. But the biblical foundations for the concept suggest even more.

In the Old Testament, one of the key words translated as “meditate” is the Hebrew word hâgâh. It is used in Joshua 1:8, where God told Joshua to “meditate” on his law day and night. The word is also used in Psalm 1:2, where we are told of the blessed person whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.” In his commentary on Psalm 1, Allan Harmon writes, “The Hebrew word translated ‘meditates’ (hâgâh) implies something more than silent reflection. It means ‘to whisper or murmur’—a use that may point to the fact that reading was usually done aloud in biblical times.”

Another Hebrew word for meditation in the Old Testament is siyach. It is the word used in Psalm
119:97: “Oh how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.” Concerning this word, pastor David Saxton writes, “Siyach then means to lovingly rehearse or go over in one’s mind; but in contrast to hâgâh, siyach can be either spoken out loud or said silently in one’s heart.”

In the Old Testament then, “meditation” may have included repeated vocalization of God’s truth, rehearsal of it in the mind, and focused thought upon it after it was done being heard or read.

The word “meditate” is found less frequently in the New Testament, and most modern translations use words like “think” or “consider” to convey the idea of pondering or reflecting upon something. For example, in Philippians 4:8, the apostle Paul lists things upon which believers are to “think.” He uses a form of the word “logizomai,” a Greek word found forty times in the New Testament that means “think [about], consider, ponder, let one’s mind dwell on.”

The word logizomai also had mathematical connotations and was primarily used to refer to calculations, or evaluations based on calculations. In Philippians 4:8, therefore, another possible translation of the form of logizomai used could be, “take account of.” In essence, in Philippians 4:7–9 Paul calls believers to shape their lives in response to, or taking account of, praiseworthy realities.

With this background, we can understand that biblical meditation involves our minds. By focused
thought upon God’s truth, we reflect upon the meaning of words or phrases.

This should not be misunderstood to mean a “head knowledge” separable from the rest of a person. In Philippians 4:7, Paul refers to a person’s “heart,” a central Old Testament term for the center of a person (see Proverbs 4:23), and the word “mind,” which also referred to the center of a person’s will and feelings. Philippians 4:7–9 makes it clear that our lives are inevitably shaped by the realities our hearts dwell on.

Meditating on God’s words is an ancient practice—one that’s long been a vital component of a vibrant relationship with God. As Christians, we would be wise to embrace this God-given discipline.

The Words of Scripture:

Biblical meditation is distinct from other forms of meditation because the focus of our “pondering” is Scripture. Our goal is not to empty our minds—though striving to identify and, with the help of the Spirit, rid ourselves of thoughts that are not pure and right (see Philippians 4:8) could be a part of meditation—but to renew them by focusing on God’s words. Meditation occurs when we rehearse and reflect upon a word, or words, found in the Bible.

Systematic reading and study of the Bible is of great value in laying the groundwork for meditation. It’s important that we consider individual passages in
light of their place in the whole story of Scripture—how the Old and New Testaments fit together to unveil the entirety of God’s plan for us in Jesus Christ. Careful study helps us to unlock the riches found in each biblical book. And understanding, as much as we can, the meaning of a verse in its larger context is necessary before we meditate upon individual verses.

The Bible as a whole unveils God’s full plan for salvation. Knowing how the parts relate to each other and the big arch of the story is necessary for understanding the individual parts. However, this does not mean that we need to be Bible scholars to benefit from meditating on Scripture, merely students of the Bible.

Along with reading and study, memorization of Scripture is a great support to meditation. The Old Testament concept of “muttering” or repeated vocalizing of Scripture was likely an aid to memorization in a time when ordinary people did not have access to Scripture, and so relied upon their recollections of words that had been read aloud. Still today, memorization is an invaluable way to reflect upon and benefit from a verse of Scripture throughout the day.

But while memorization is a great support to meditation, the two are not the same. In the Bible, God’s words are sometimes compared to physical food (“When your words came, I ate them” Jeremiah 15:16). If the reading, hearing, and memorization
of God’s words could be compared to the intake of physical food, we can think of meditation as the slow chewing of that food to make sure all of the nutrients are available to the body. Meditation allows us to receive more of the nutrients and spiritual strength found in a verse or phrase of Scripture.

**With a Receptive Heart:**

Biblical meditation calls for an attitude of receptivity toward God and his Word. We must approach our times of meditation with expectant faith, trusting that God will speak through sacred Scripture to give us what we need. Jesus has promised that those who seek will find (Luke 11:9), and we can trust that God will reward those who seek him with a better understanding of his will and his ways (Hebrews 11:6).

> The practice of meditating on Scripture is not the hope that God will reveal something new to you, but so that we can think about and understand the meaning of the passage. The practice is not intended to end with “God spoke to me . . .” rather in understanding and gratitude that God revealed himself in Scripture.

Receptivity to God includes not merely openness to his encouragement but also to his correction. Meditating on the words of Scripture may lead to the awareness of something in our lives that is out of step with God’s will and his ways. A receptive heart is one that is ready to listen and engage with the Lord’s loving correction as the Spirit guides and convicts us.
Tusting the Holy Spirit to Work in You:

The Spirit of Christ is our great Helper and Teacher in meditation. The Spirit guided the writers of Scripture to give us the words of God (2 Peter 1:20–24), and illumines the minds of believers to understand those words. Jesus promised his followers that his Spirit would:

- dwell with us and be in us (John 14:17).
- teach us (John 14:26).
- bear witness to others about Jesus Christ (John 15:26).
- guide us into all truth (John 16:13).
- glorify Jesus Christ (John 16:14).

It is important to know that the Holy Spirit only dwells within those who are followers of Jesus Christ (see Romans 8:9, 15–16). The Spirit’s work in not-yet-believers is to convict them of sin and show them their need of the forgiveness that is provided through faith in Jesus (see John 16:8–11). Those who have received God’s salvation and the gift of Christ’s Spirit can trust the Holy Spirit to help us better understand Scripture and apply it to our lives. While the Spirit certainly guides us in reading and study of the Bible, meditation provides further opportunity for God to teach, correct, encourage, and guide us through Scripture. As we give focused attention to a word or phrase in God’s Word, the Holy Spirit often helps us to see it in a new light, gaining insights we might have missed by hurriedly reading through...
a passage. Christ’s Spirit is our great Helper in meditation, and we need to trust the Spirit to work in us through the words of Scripture.

The Spirit’s *salvation oriented work* in non-believers is to **convict of sin**. However the Spirit is active in the world today in a variety of ways. The description of the Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2 refers to the Spirit’s work in maintaining creation.

As we consider how the Spirit of Christ may work in us through the words of Scripture we are pondering, it may be helpful to ask:

- What does this teach me about God?
- What does this teach me about myself?
- How might this transform my life and/or thinking?

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The Benefits of Biblical Meditation

Greater Love for God

One day, the gospel of Matthew tells us, Jesus was approached by a Pharisee who was an “expert” in Jewish law (Matthew 22:35). As a Pharisee, he probably thought of himself as exceptionally knowledgeable about God’s truth, and a person who was far more faithful to God than the average citizen. This man decided to put Jesus to the test, perhaps expecting to expose the inferior knowledge of the itinerant Nazarene teacher or to trap him in some contradiction. So he asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in
the Law?" Jesus gave him a clear and definitive answer: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:34–38).

Jesus’s reply to the lawyer has provided us with the highest possible goal for our spiritual growth—to love God with all that we are. Biblical meditation can help us grow toward this highest of goals. God has given us the Scriptures to reveal himself to us so that we might know him better and love him more. As we seek to enjoy fellowship with God by pondering the words of Scripture, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to experience greater depths of his love. The Spirit also strengthens us by helping us more fully grasp “how wide and long and high and deep” Christ’s love is, deepening our roots in his love (Ephesians 3:18–19). Biblical meditation is an avenue to more fully experience “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus included the 2nd greatest command as well. “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Jesus is clear that these are linked and needed to understanding Scripture.

Love-Motivated Obedience

When Jesus talked about love for God, he linked it with obedient action. He said to his followers, “If you love me, keep my commands” and “whoever has
my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me” (John 14:15, 21). True love for God is expressed by sincere obedience to God’s will and ways as revealed to us in Scripture. Meditating upon Scripture is one of the best ways to internalize the truth of God’s Word and be strengthened by Christ’s Spirit to obey it.

A beautiful example of the benefit of meditation in enabling obedience is given to us in the book of Joshua. Joshua was the assistant to Moses, whom God used to free the Israelites from slavery. After Moses’s death, Joshua was called to lead hundreds of thousands of Israelites to the Promised Land (Joshua 1:1–2). When commissioning Joshua with this task, God commanded him to be “strong and courageous” and to carefully obey his law as revealed to Moses. He then gave Joshua this mandate to prepare him for his daunting task:

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. —Joshua 1:8

By keeping God’s law in his mouth and meditating upon it, Joshua would be strengthened to lead faithfully. His ongoing meditation would help enable his obedience to God.

Meditation upon Scripture strengthens us for obedience by strengthening our love for God and others. For the Christian, obedience to the teachings of Scripture is not the path to salvation, but a love-motivated
response to the One who has saved us. Our obedience to God flows from a motive of loving gratitude. Biblical meditation can strengthen us for love-empowered obedience, especially in areas in which we are weak.

Meditation is one way to allow God to truly enter the realities of our lives. As we allow Scripture to soak into our souls and prayerfully listen, the Spirit brings awareness of what’s in our hearts and lives. It allows us to bring all of ourselves into God’s presence and transforming love.

For example, a person who struggles with gossip, slander, or other forms of wrong speaking might meditate on Ephesians 4:29, which states: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Through focused reflection upon this verse, Christ’s Spirit can strengthen us.

The person struggling with unforgiveness might meditate upon Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” As we reflect upon the words of Scripture, we open ourselves to God’s pouring his truth, strength, and love into our souls. Our response to God’s love is a growing desire to live by his truth through the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Renewal of Our Minds
Will was a college student who’d come to faith in Christ while on a retreat with a campus Christian fellowship.
He was part of a weekly Bible study with a group of guys and was enjoying his new circle of Christian friends. One evening, he waited until everyone else had left the Bible study so he could have a one-on-one talk with the group leader. Will explained that he felt guilty and defeated because he continued to struggle with thoughts and feelings of lust. Prior to the retreat, he had spent countless hours viewing pornography on his computer. Now, he often felt tormented by his inability to get his thoughts off of the images that had been planted in his mind. “I would give anything to have never started watching that stuff,” Will said. “Is there anything that can help me transform my thought life?”

While any change is difficult, there is hope. The fact is that we all struggle with thoughts, words, and images that we wish had never entered our minds. Hurtful ideas or images can cause us real pain, while also contributing to lust, greed, or anger. But the Spirit can use Scripture to renew our minds so that we are transformed (Romans 12:2). When we meditate upon Scripture, we invite Christ’s Spirit to mold the way we think.

**“Sanctified” in John 17 is the same word as “holy.”** In John, when the word is used to describe people, it is always related to God’s mission. Jesus (John 10:36) and his disciples are described as sanctified. Believers have been “set apart” to witness and draw others into life with God through their unity, and through their commitment to live according to the truth (vv. 20–23).

Jesus prayed that his followers would be sanctified (set apart) by the truth of God’s Word (John 17:17).
The cleansing of God’s Spirit is greater than the contaminating thoughts that have settled in our minds. It may take time, but continued biblical meditation can change the way we think and live.

**Empowering Prayer**

Those who study the topic of prayer may encounter the name of a Scottish pastor who lived in the first half of the nineteenth century. Robert Murray M’Cheyne died at the age of twenty-nine, but was widely known for the richness of his devotional life. M’Cheyne taught others the immense value of uniting Scripture with prayer. He wrote:

> Turn the Bible into prayer. Thus, if you are reading the first psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you, and kneel and pray: “O Lord, give me the blessedness of the man,” etc. “Let me not stand in the counsel of the ungodly,” etc. This is the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible and of learning to pray.⁴

Biblical meditation is one of the best ways we can unite Scripture with prayer. As we ponder the words of Scripture with receptive hearts, the Holy Spirit will often show us ways we need to change in light of those words. A verse that speaks of love for our neighbors may prompt us to pray, “Lord, please make this a reality in my life.” A verse that promises God’s wisdom may stir us to ask, “Lord, please give me wisdom for the issue I will face today.”

As we meditate on a verse or phrase from Scripture,
we’ll often see biblical truth that we need to apply in our lives. As Christ’s Spirit brings that truth to light for us, we can participate in the Spirit’s work of changing us as we pray for that truth to be applied. This can bring fresh vitality to our prayer lives and enable us to pray with greater confidence.

**Experiencing God’s Peace**

Margie was a 28-year-old wife, mother of twins, and CEO of a small web design firm. She freely acknowledged that she was a type-A personality who’d rather go without food for a day than put aside her smartphone for twenty-four hours. But an increasing inability to get to sleep at night, along with a diagnosis of high blood pressure, prompted Margie to ask the women in her small group to pray for her. After prayer, one of her friends asked, “Have you ever tried meditating on Bible verses? I’ve found that can really help me to experience more of God’s peace.” Margie agreed to schedule several minutes each day to reflect upon Scriptures—without her phone in the room. This would hopefully allow her to distance herself from the stress of the day and lead to better sleep.

Because meditation calls for focused attention on what God has revealed, it helps to calm our souls in God’s presence. The prophet Isaiah pointed to the soul-steadying benefit of focused trust in God when he wrote: “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you” (Isaiah 26:3). In Psalm 119 we read, “Great peace have
those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble (v. 165). One of the wonderful benefits of biblical meditation is a greater experience of God’s peace in the midst of a stress-filled world.

**Catalyst for Spiritual Growth**

*Follow Me* by Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson records the results of a study on spiritual growth. The authors found that personal spiritual practices were “very powerful catalysts” for spiritual growth. But among the various practices surveyed, which included prayer, solitude, and Bible reading, one stood out as having much more impact on a person’s spiritual growth—“Reflection on Scripture.” Regardless of the level of one’s spiritual maturity, the study found that, “I reflect on the meaning of Scripture in my life” was the spiritual practice that was most predictive of growth.

The authors write:

> There’s great significance in the word *reflection*. Reflecting on Scripture implies a contemplative process, one of thoughtful and careful deliberation. . . This is not about skimming through a Bible passage or devotional in a mechanical way. This is a powerful experience of personal meditation that catalyzes spiritual growth, starting at the very beginning of the spiritual journey.\(^5\)

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5 Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Follow Me* (Burlington, IL: Willow Creek Association), 41, 114.
After explaining the concept of biblical meditation to my friend, Jim, and pointing out some of the benefits, he seemed eager to add the practice to his daily devotional time. “I think I understand the concept,” Jim said. “It’s not necessarily the amount of Scripture that you read, but the amount you process and apply. I guess sometimes less is more, even when it comes to reading the Bible!” Jim’s only question was whether he could practice meditation in the “right way.” I assured him that there was no standard technique for how to meditate on a
Bible verse, but I thought that a few practical suggestions might be helpful when beginning this practice.

**Where to Start**

Begin by selecting a verse or phrase of Scripture. Be sure you have read the surrounding verses so that you can understand the verse or phrase in its context. It may be helpful to write the chosen verse on a 3” x 5” card or highlight it on your phone or electronic device. Begin by reading it over several times, trying to memorize it as best you can. Then slowly contemplate the verse word by word, thinking about each word and what it conveys about God, his plan, and his work in your life. Do the words reveal something about God? About ourselves? How can we respond to or pray about what these words mean? As appropriate, pray as you ponder the words of this verse.

**Let’s Try It**

Let’s begin with a well-known verse that you may have heard many times. The twenty-third psalm is often recited in churches and read at funerals, but meditation may help us more fully grasp its truths. Psalm 23:1 reads:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing.*

With a prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit, we begin pondering this verse word by word.

*The Lord*

God is revealing himself as *the* Lord. He is not one
of many, but the only Lord and ruler over all. “Lord” reminds us of his great sovereignty, his authority, and his reign over all things.

*is my shepherd*

Why has God chosen to reveal himself to his people as “shepherd”? This speaks to us of his care, guidance, and love. But God is not simply a shepherd; he is “*my* shepherd.” That means he cares for me. He is willing and able to guide me. He watches over me with concern for my well-being.

*I lack nothing.*

What do these words of assurance mean? The Spirit might comfort my heart by reminding me that because the Lord who reigns over all is my shepherd, I can rest assured that he will provide everything I need in life. I will not lack anything needed to follow him and do his will. He is all-powerful. He cares for me and takes responsibility for guiding me, so I can rest in his care with confidence.

What can I pray in light of Psalm 23:1? Do I need to ask for help trusting the Lord more? Do I need to pray about some situation in which I need his shepherd-like care? Should I thank and praise him for his care in the past as well as the future?

Let’s try another verse—one that is less familiar to many people, found in the book of the Jude, a brief letter that’s the second-to-last book in the New Testament. Jude 24 reads:
Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy. (ESV)

The first thing we might notice in reading the verse in its context is that it is only the first half of a long sentence. It is part of a doxology—a statement giving glory to God. The doxology of verses 24 and 25 concludes the book of Jude. After reading the verse over several times, we begin to prayerfully ponder it word by word.

To him

This reminds us that all honor for what follows is due to the Lord (verse 25 clarifies this for us). We are reminded that our hearts and mouths should be filled with praise “to him.”

who is able to keep you from stumbling

As I reflect on these words, I remember that I am prone to failing in many ways. Maybe a recurrent sin comes to mind, but God is able to keep me from this. The words “who is able to keep you” remind me that my trust in living a more faithful life must be in him. I cannot keep myself from stumbling, but he can!

We depend on God and the Holy Spirit for our spiritual growth, but that does not mean we are not involved. Paul writes about growing in Jesus-like character traits and refers to them as the Spirit’s fruit (Galatians 5:22–23). He also encourages the Colossians to “clothe” themselves (Colossians 3:12–14). Meaning they take an active part in developing those traits.
The words,

**and to present you blameless**

cause me to ask, *How could God possibly present me blameless before his throne in light of all my sins?* The answer is found in the completeness of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The One who suffered for my sin now keeps me from stumbling. These words continue to direct my focus Godward.

The next phrase,

**before the presence of his glory with great joy**

brings to mind the day when I will stand before him. Without Jesus, I could not exist in “the presence of his glory.” Yet the One who presents me has done such a remarkable work in saving me that I can be there “with great joy.”

What new thoughts has meditation upon Jude 24 brought to mind? Am I moved to praise the Lord with greater gratitude for all he has done for me? Do I have a deeper appreciation for the salvation Jesus has provided for me? What does verse 24 reveal about God? About myself? How should I respond? How can I pray in light of this?

Now let’s try meditating on a longer passage of Scripture. We will need more time to meditate upon a lengthier section of God’s Word, and it may be helpful to do this over a period of several days. Allow enough time for a passage of several verses. After choosing a passage of Scripture, read it slowly two or three
times. Then focus on the passage, phrase by phrase, considering its message and how it speaks to your life. Continue this practice for several days.

As you return to your chosen passage each day, make notes about the ideas and questions that arise from your time with the passage. What is the passage teaching you about God? What does it tell you about yourself? Does it call you to respond in some way? How can you pray about what you have learned?

Consider Psalm 121, a short psalm of only eight verses. After reading the psalm slowly two or three times, meditate more deeply by prayerfully pondering it, phrase by phrase or verse by verse.

VERSE 1:

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?*

To begin, I might meditate on possible reasons why the psalm begins this way. I might also consider how it speaks to me about my dependence upon God.

VERSE 2:

*My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

Here, I might ask what foundational truth about God is being emphasized, and what that truth means in my life.

VERSE 3:

*He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber;*
As I meditate on these words, I might ponder the ways God has watched over and helped me during hard times.

VERSE 4–5:

indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

What am I facing now in which this assurance of God’s constant watch is particularly comforting?

VERSE 6:

the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

How can I understand verse 6 in light of verse 5?

VERSE 7:

The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;

As I ponder these words, what assurance comes to me?

VERSE 8:

the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

How does this verse move me to humble myself before God? To worship him? To pray? How does the repeated idea of the Lord watching over me (vv. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8) make me understand his presence with me?

Record your insights as you meditate on Psalm 121 over several days.

Now, let’s try with Philippians 2:1–11. Read this
passage slowly two or three times, then ponder it verse by verse.

VERSE 1:

*Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,*

Reflect upon each short phrase in this verse. What does each reveal about the benefits of being “in Christ”? Is there one of these benefits I need to experience more fully?

The phrase “in Christ” is shorthand for believers’ union with Christ through the Spirit, and is arguably the central paradigm in the New Testament for salvation. Scripture reveals that Christ took on creation’s brokenness, including human sin and suffering, and carried it all through death into life (Colossians 1:17–27). Through our union with Christ, believers too can survive death to rise with Christ into resurrection life (Romans 6:1–5, 2 Corinthians 5:16–19).

VERSE 2:

*then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.*

What action is called for on my part? How do I need to change to better conform to each of these three phrases?

VERSE 3:

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.*
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,

Take some time to think about the idea of valuing. How do I treat the things I value? How might this look to value someone in my life—to treat them like the things I value?

VERSE 4:

not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.

Does this verse characterize the ways I typically relate to my family, friends, or co-workers? How does it call me to grow?

VERSE 5:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Where and how does my mind separate from what I know to be a reflection of Christ? Trusting the Spirit to lead, how can I change?

VERSE 6:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

What was the last situation where I found myself at an advantage? How did that impact the way I looked at the situation? What are some situations I can give up an advantage for the good of another?

VERSE 7:

rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
Servants are by definition primarily concerned with the well-being of another. Who in my life can I show concern for in the way I act toward them?

VERSE 8:

*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Contemplate the great humility and love of Jesus Christ in coming to earth as a human being in order to die on the cross. What feelings, if any, come to mind and heart when I think of this?

VERSE 9:

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,*

If because of Jesus’s actions, God exalted him, how can I exalt him because of those actions?

VERSE 10:

*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

Knees bow in recognition of authority. If Jesus is my authority, how might this impact the way I do my job or how I view my country?

VERSE 11:

*and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

How does my recognition of Jesus as Lord bring
glory to God the Father? How do I separate and unite these two persons of the Trinity?

Why is the example of Jesus’s suffering and honor presented as an example of the “mind” or attitude God wants for me?

As you reflect and pray over this theologically rich passage over several days, take note of any new insights you gain about Jesus Christ, as well as practical ways these truths can transform your life.

Whether you choose to meditate upon an individual verse or a larger passage of Scripture, remember that meditation requires time and focused attention. As much as possible, get away from distractions. Turn off your computer and put aside your phone to give God and his words your undivided attention. As Christians in this technologically driven world, we have much to gain from recovery of the ancient practice of biblical meditation. The greatest benefit will be growing love for the One who has revealed himself in Scripture.

*I will meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.*

PSALM 119:15–16
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