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# Meditation and Contemplation: Framework for a Coping Mechanism Among Small Groups at the Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Spartanburg, South Carolina

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MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION:  
FRAMEWORK FOR A COPING MECHANISM AMONG SMALL GROUPS AT THE  
MOUNT MORIAH BAPTIST CHURCH IN SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA

A PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY  
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
GARY W. JORDAN

MAY, 2017

APPROVAL FORM

MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION:  
FRAMEWORK FOR A COPING MECHANISM AMONG SMALL GROUPS AT THE  
MOUNT MORIAH BAPTIST CHURCH IN SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA

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## ABSTRACT

“Don’t say God is silent if your Bible is closed.”  
- Church Sign

This project aimed to encourage and enable a small group class at Mount Moriah Baptist Church to adopt meditative and contemplative prayer as a framework for a coping mechanism. In practicing this type of prayer life, participants anticipated to receive the benefit of being better able to cope with stressors of life. Utilizing a small group study, *Lectio Divina*, biblical examples, breathing techniques and various surveys, participants were enabled to experience a deeper interaction with Scripture, aided by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to hear God speaking to them and transforming their lives to the image of Christ.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am honored to dedicate this work to God, who invited me on a journey to grow in relationship, love and fellowship.

To my wife Kimberly, who has loved me unconditionally through this entire process and along the way offered genuine support and encouragement that only she could give.

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To Rev. Dr. Benjamin D. Snoddy and the Mount Moriah Baptist Church Family, for your prayers, support, participation, love, encouragement, classroom space and so many other blessings I have received by being a part of the church family.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The juxtaposition of living in two realities as in the physical and the spiritual realms requires an individual to make choices in continued growth and development to achieve their goals and dreams. Typically, the realm that receives the most attention, nourishment and nurture will experience the most growth, often to malnourishment of the other. Both the physical and spiritual realms require attention that will promote positive growth and development. Like the contrast of living in two realities, there are two modalities (physical and spiritual) that people use to cope with stress and anxiety. Often, the spiritual coping mechanisms are underutilized, and, when needed, the individual under stress may be ineffective in applying spiritual coping mechanisms. This project proposed that by being more attentive to and obeying God's instructions on living a life in communication with Him, individuals might experience benefits in both the physical and spiritual realms that could provide an effective means of coping. The research was designed to teach a method of prayer through meditation and contemplation, as a means to exercise an individual's own desire for spiritual growth and union with the Spirit of Christ, thereby stimulating them to become more like Christ. Through their participation, the group assisted in developing a curriculum on prayer through meditation and contemplation for future small group studies.

#### **Meditation and Contemplation Defined**

Meditation and contemplation are sometimes viewed as controversial in the Christian community and therefore will need to be clearly defined. Although the term

prayer is not always used when referencing meditation and contemplation, these two categories are indispensable to each other. Doug McIntosh identifies differences between eastern meditation and biblical meditation in terms of *content*, *design* and *assets* as biblical meditation focuses on God and God's truth in God's Word.<sup>1</sup> For example, two primary differences McIntosh identifies are that eastern meditation is premised on emptying the mind with a goal of self-fulfillment in contrast to biblical meditation that fills the mind with God's Word and has an ultimate goal of honoring God. This project views meditation and contemplation as aspects of prayer from a biblical perspective. As J. I. Packer writes,

Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.<sup>2</sup>

In Packer's logic, time spent interacting with and applying Scripture is a means by which meditators come to have knowledge of God that is deeper than knowing about God. This aspect of prayer could be viewed as mindful meditation due to the fact that the practitioner's mind does not go blank, but is totally focused on seeking God's truth as aided by God for personal application.

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<sup>1</sup> Doug McIntosh, *God Up Close: How to Meditate On His Word* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 21-22, Amazon Kindle.

Contemplation is sometimes used synonymously with meditation.<sup>3</sup> A distinction can be made in terms of definition to respect the reverent silence in the presence of God.

Echoing this motif, Luke Dysinger writes,

Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One Who loves us has a name in the Christian tradition - *contemplatio*, contemplation. Once again we practice silence, letting go of our own words; this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God.<sup>4</sup>

The practice of silence in the presence of God has been a part of the discipline of prayer for centuries. This could be described as the ultimate expression of a love relationship and spiritual renewal. In this regard, Thomas Keating presents outlines the history of contemplative prayer.<sup>5</sup> He describes silence as a natural progression of time spent with God. But in later years, as prayer became more compartmentalized, contemplation evolved as an “extra ordinary grace” that only few could experience. Hence, contemplative prayer is not a total mystical experience, but an experience with God that is available to all believers which plays a vital part in spiritual renewal.

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<sup>3</sup> Thelma Hall writes, “The use of the words *meditation* and *contemplation* has been further confused in recent decades with the assimilation of some Eastern methods of meditation into Christian practice. These methods, with their well-developed psychological intuitions and spiritual disciplines, have enriched our own tradition in many ways. But while they have a certain similarity to contemplation, they are basically distinct from it, and are generally referred to by both East and West as “meditation” and never as contemplation. On our side, the similarities have led to the frequent use of the word “meditation” as a synonym for contemplation. In the vocabulary of the *Lectio Divina*, however, the two words remain distinct.” (*Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* [New York: Paulist Press, 1988], 15, Kindle.)

<sup>4</sup> Luke Dysinger, “Accepting the embrace of God: The ancient art of lectio divina,” Saint Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, (February 13, 2009), accessed March 18, 2016, <http://www.valyermo.com>.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Keating, “Contemplative Prayer in Christian Tradition,” in *Finding Grace at the Center*, by Thomas Keating, M. Basil Pennington, and Thomas E. Clarke, 4th ed. (Petersham: Saint Bede's Publications, 1985), 35-47.

### Statement of the Problem

The primary concern that prompted this project was the need for spiritual growth toward a God-centered and God-directed lifestyle as a defense against spiritual immaturity that may allow and reinforce maladaptive coping behaviors. Spiritual growth is the believer's loving response and desire to know God intimately. All believers are directed to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ that they may become more like him (2 Peter 3:18). The overall spiritual growth of a congregation is a concern of many churches as they stand under the banner of the Christian faith. The Baptist Church in particular has made its mission to "make disciples," "baptize," and "teach" to inspire others into relationship with God (Matthew 28:19-20). Attention to growth in churches has traditionally focused on the numerical rather than assisting believers in spiritual growth. In many cases, the barometer for spiritual growth has been indirectly attached to regular attendance and numerical growth. Congregations sometimes lack the tools, resources, and means to measure spiritual growth. However, researchers have sought reliable methods to measure spiritual growth and, more importantly, proven methods for spiritual development. In their book entitled *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson share their discoveries on spiritual growth in congregations. One of their major findings is how spiritual growth, through engaging the Bible and reflecting on meaning in their lives, has the greatest impact for all levels of spiritual maturity.<sup>6</sup> The study indicates the need for a personal interaction between the seeker and Scripture. The call to become more "Christ-like" is the heart of many sermons and lessons taught in Christian venues, but they are

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<sup>6</sup> Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 206, Amazon Kindle.



not adequate to develop spiritual maturity. Increasing personal conversation or prayer experience with God through Christian meditation and contemplation may direct participants to increased spiritual maturity and positive spiritual coping practices.

The primary question that sets the tone of this project was, “To what extent do Christians rely on spiritual resources to cope with stressors in their lives, and how did they learn to utilize those resources?” Do Christians, in general, desire to grow spiritually but are not sure how? If Christians address life in the same fashion as the world or popular culture addresses the same issues, then what is the role of the Christian faith? If “following Christ” is the Christian maxim, then what part of the Christian life truly reflects a dependence and devotion to Christ? Ultimately the choice is up to the individual. Joshua declares to the people, “choose for yourselves this day” whom they will serve (Josh. 24:15). Although the final decision rests with the individual, the Christian community retains a strategic role in edifying participants, to prepare individuals spiritually, and educate them appropriately.

Traditionally, preaching, large group Bible study, and Sunday school have been the primary means to develop young believers into mature ones. Richard Foster observes, “Human beings seem to have a perpetual tendency to have someone else talk to God for them. We are content to have the message second hand.”<sup>7</sup> Foster uses the example of Israel choosing a king as opposed to a theocratic rule (1 Sam. 8:7). Unless otherwise convicted, rather than seeking individual spiritual growth, the tendency may be to continue to get the message second hand. Therefore, Christians may allow preaching and Sunday school attendance to become their primary means toward spiritual growth.

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<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 24.

The lack of personal interaction with Scripture leads to more dependency on others and less utilization of Scripture as a primary spiritual resource for coping. When facing a crisis, an individual is less likely to depend on something they are not comfortable with or do not know how to apply.

In more recent years, Christian Education Ministries have become an intentional means of addressing the spiritual growth needs of a particular congregation through small group studies. Religious small group studies have been around for centuries; but toward the end of the twentieth century, small groups took on a more prominent role within congregations.<sup>8</sup> The Christian Education Ministries have helped address the issue of personal accountability toward spiritual growth through the use of small group studies. Theresa Latini cites the benefits of small groups as she writes, “Small groups create space for people to share their sin and suffering in a community of compassionate accountability.”<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately many churches do not have the benefit of such a vigilant body to organize small group studies. Those who do are often limited by church budget concerns, availability of specific and relevant materials, and participation of the membership.

A familiar option for Mount Moriah Baptist Church would be to go to the local Christian supply store or online to find a course on meditation. A quick search at a Christian supply store would offer numerous titles with “meditations,” but these books are filled with short devotionals, which require little depth of interaction with the

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin D. Dougherty, and Andrew L. Whitehead, "A place to belong: small group involvement in religious congregations," *Sociology Of Religion* 72, no. 1 (2011): 91-111, *ATLASerials, Religion Collection*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org>.

<sup>9</sup> Theresa F Latini, 2010. "Confession and healing in small-group community," *Word & World* 30, no. 1 (2010): 33-40, *ATLASerials, Religion Collection*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://www.luthersem.edu>.

Scripture. *Meditations on the Cross*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and *This is the Day the Lord Has Made*, by Wilfred Stinissen, are examples of titles that are very informative and educational. But the question remains, how transformative are they to the individual? Since meditations read like a devotional, many times more emphasis is placed on the author's words or story than on the Scripture reference. A search for material online will open the faucet on different works on meditation—even “mindful meditation”—but many are not Christian based.<sup>10</sup> However, many of the works will lead Christians to positive thinking (self-promoting) or eastern forms of transcendental meditation that are controversial to many Christians. Finding a course on prayer through Christian meditation and contemplation is not as readily available for seekers.

Another question was, how much personal responsibility do Christians take for their spiritual growth, and how much is determined by God's grace? Are Christians stagnant in their spiritual growth? In a comprehensive study on spiritual growth, one out every four congregants reported being spiritually stalled.<sup>11</sup> True spiritual growth is a grace from God, as only God can give a spiritual increase (1 Cor. 3:6). However, God does promise to reward those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6). This project could prove beneficial not only to those spiritually stagnating Christians but to all believers who want to grow in their spiritual maturity.

Through this project on prayer through meditation and contemplation, I developed a small group course at Mount Moriah Baptist Church. The course was made available to

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<sup>10</sup> Examples of search returns on meditation: UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, “Free Guided Meditations,” (2016), accessed March 19, 2016, <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>. and Noah Shachtman, “In Silicon Valley, Meditation Is No Fad. It Could Make Your Career,” (August 18, 2013), accessed March 19, 2016, <http://www.wired.com/2013/06/meditation-mindfulness-silicon-valley>.

<sup>11</sup> Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 206.

a sample group as a means of developing their conversation with God. It was my hope that through a more interactive prayer dialogue with God, participants could adopt positive coping behaviors to assist in working through the stressors in their lives based on God's wisdom and strength.

In developing this course on prayer through meditation and contemplation, individuals were nurtured in spiritual resources needed to cope with life, and this could free them to keep their focus on the spiritual support of the church. A small group of volunteers from the membership of Mount Moriah Baptist Church of Spartanburg participated in this course on meditation and contemplation. The development of this course has given Mount Moriah Baptist Church another means of assisting individuals in their personal spiritual growth.

### **Project Setting**

Spartanburg, South Carolina, is the twelfth largest city in the state of South Carolina. The population of the area is dispersed throughout the county, contributing to the feel of a big country town. History shows how Spartanburg played an important part in the transportation industry as it acquired one of its popular nicknames of "Hub City." Spartanburg's geographic location made it a vital hub for the railroad system. One of the major commodities in the early twentieth century was textiles, with mill villages scattered throughout Spartanburg County. The Spartanburg community has witnessed a transition from a textile community to a greater diversified industrial base.

The world headquarters and research facility for Milliken & Company is located in Spartanburg County as a representation of adaptation and innovation for the textile industry. The addition of BMW Manufacturing in 1996 opened the doors for many

suppliers to relocate to this area. In more recent years, Amazon and Smith Drugs have distribution centers in Spartanburg County with many others to come. The downtown area is the home of the corporate headquarters for businesses such as Advance America, QS/1 Data Systems and the world headquarters for Denny's.

Spartanburg County has a collection of seven colleges and universities with a combined enrollment of approximately fifteen thousand students. The secondary education opportunities provide a good resource for upstate South Carolina's employers. The numerous industries and businesses provide ample opportunities for residents to find gainful employment and raise healthy families. The addition of walking trails and bicycle routes has promoted an active lifestyle as well as opportunities for social interaction. Along with the new growth in industry and population, Spartanburg has put into motion plans to revitalize its downtown area to be the true center of attention, "Hub City."

Mount Moriah Baptist Church of Spartanburg is a predominantly black church located only a few blocks from the downtown area. Mount Moriah Baptist Church is one of the oldest churches in Spartanburg County and dates its history back to 1863, with early efforts to organize as a church body. Currently, Mount Moriah Baptist Church conducts one Sunday worship services with an average combined attendance of 600. The Sunday school attendance averages 150, including a Monday Church School session. Bible studies offerings abound at Mount Moriah Baptist Church as there are several classes on Wednesday nights offered to all age groups, a Saturday study, and a Tuesday lunch session. The collective attendance of the Bible study classes averages 130 participants. Most attendees to Sunday school also attend another Bible study during the

week. The total number of members on roll is 1700. Mount Moriah Baptist Church has experienced a decline in membership and overall participation over the last ten years. Mount Moriah Baptist Church has a reputation as a traditional Baptist church. As new pastors come into the area, some members have left to join those congregations. Former parishioners have also sought to join other congregations that have a contemporary service and the availability of greater resources.

Mount Moriah Baptist Church offers traditional Bible Study as well as small group classes, with age appropriate studies for teens and adults. The small group classes meet at the church on a weekly basis. The small groups usually have six to twelve participants and last five to ten weeks. After completing a small group class, participants have the option of returning to a traditional Bible study or enrolling in another small group class.

Although membership retention and expansion is a big concern for many churches, the area of focus for this project will be in helping the membership of Mount Moriah Baptist Church to develop effective spiritual coping mechanisms. By approaching life with a God-centered focus, participants could find spiritual means to cope with the struggles of society and improve their spiritual and physical health. The American Psychological Association, American Institute of Stress, and NY 2014 Stress Statistics report that over seventy percent of people surveyed experience physical and/or psychological symptoms caused by stress. The report also shows that related ailments cost the nation three hundred billion dollars in health costs and lost productivity.<sup>12</sup>

Although stress is difficult to define and people react to it differently, the statistics verify

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<sup>12</sup> American Institute of Stress, "2014 Stress Statistics: Fact sheet," (2014), accessed March 18, 2016 <http://www.stress.org/daily-life/2014-stress-statistics>.

the phenomena. The fight against the negative impact of stress is aimed at helping the individual manage the stressors and minimize feelings of helplessness.

Stress is a universal problem and could not be confined to a particular ethnic group. However, for Blacks and other minorities living in America, the economic climate adds another degree of stress that affects all individuals living in a capitalistic society. In other words, there is a cost to achieving the American dream. As C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya observe, “Since economic values are both primary and predominant in American society, and are commonly used to determine social relations and social status, the most severe forms of racial discrimination against black people have been economic in character.”<sup>13</sup> The struggle to be socially and economically relevant in the American culture has placed a strong emphasis on secular means to advance in this culture. Much social and economic advancement have been made, which has reduced the perceived need and relevancy of the church. As the need and relevancy of the church declines, society seems to become more distracted by self-promoting opportunities. The American culture of manufactured wants and needs contributes to unhealthy levels of stress and offers a promotion of inadequate coping mechanisms.

The aim of this project was to utilize prayer through meditation and contemplation as coping mechanisms for healthy living, both spiritually and physically. Through meditation and contemplation, participants had an opportunity to learn how to listen to God and trust God’s direction for their lives. Obedience to God through meditative and contemplative prayer, assisted participants in a transformation that will lead to better choices for themselves and a more positive outlook on living. In 2012,

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<sup>13</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 4216, Amazon Kindle.

American Psychological Association released their report entitled, *Stress In America: Our Health at Risk*. That report confirmed a trend shown in earlier reports that overall Americans are not adapting positive lifestyle changes to cope with stress: “Overall, Americans appear to be caught in a vicious cycle where they manage stress in unhealthy ways, and seemingly insurmountable barriers prevent them from making the lifestyle or behavioral changes necessary for good health.”<sup>14</sup> The church is no exception to the maladaptive behaviors of a post-modern society. A God-centered approach to life could give participants the assurance that they are not helpless. The greater awareness of the presence of God in their life may help individuals maintain their passion for the church and ministry.

### **Project Goals**

The goal of this project included both pragmatic and theological outcomes. On a practical level, I hoped this project would produce a course on prayer through meditation and contemplation which can be used by the congregation of Mount Moriah Baptist Church of Spartanburg as an option for spiritual growth. The project offers an awareness of the holistic approach to spiritual growth. Theologically, I hoped this project would create a spark, ignite, or even fan the flame of spiritual devotion of believers yearning to develop their personal relationship and conversation with God. Additionally, I hoped to develop a person’s spiritual coping mechanisms, which will enable them to live a more peaceful life.

The small group studies offered at Mount Moriah Baptist Church have received great acceptance as well as positive responses concerning their impact on personal

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<sup>14</sup> American Psychological Association, *Stress In America: Our Health at Risk*, (2012), accessed March 18, 2016, <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2011/final-2011.pdf>.



spiritual growth. Most, if not all, of the small group studies require the purchase of workbooks and/or DVD tutorial.<sup>15</sup> Workbooks are usually nominal investments of five to ten dollars per class; however, this cost may prohibit some participants. The DVD tutorials are usually a one-time purchase, but they are also limited to budget concerns of the congregation. In order to alleviate all costs or to keep cost to a minimum, participants in this study needed only items that were already available in their homes. In developing this course, participants were instructed to use their personal Bibles and handouts, which were made in-house. The amount of copies made per group was less than a ream of paper. All course materials assembled and presentations made by this researcher are available for use freely to the congregation. The course was offered at no cost to the participants.

A holistic approach to spiritual growth could broaden and deepen the learning of the individual participants. Howard Clinebell identifies seven dimensions of wholeness as an atom with “Spiritual/Ethical” spectrum being the nucleus.<sup>16</sup> Understanding the importance of a strong spiritual center and how it acts as the hub for all aspects of our lives (e.g., physical, mental, society/nature, relational, work and play) could contribute to the wellness of the whole person. Paul reminds his young prodigy Timothy, there is a little benefit to “physical training,” but “godliness is profitable for all things” (1 Tim. 4:8). Viewing spiritual growth with a holistic mindset could encompass that total person and offer methods of learning that are not traditional to Baptist practices but are

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<sup>15</sup> This is a sampling of small group courses offered at Mount Moriah Baptist Church: *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby and Claude King, *MasterLife* by Avery Willis, *Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church* by Rick Warren, and *Dave Ramsey’s Financial Peace* by Dave Ramsey.

<sup>16</sup> Howard Clinebell and Bridget Clare McKeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 30-32.

nonetheless supported in Scripture. Thus, prayer through meditation and contemplation are spiritual disciplines that can strengthen the Christian's spiritual core. These were taught and practiced in a small group setting, exposing participants to something they may want to adopt as their own spiritual practice. The small group approach has already proven its impact on individual participants at Mount Moriah Baptist Church, as classes filled up quickly. Past participants have gone on to be facilitators and accepted leadership positions within the congregation.

All Christians, at some time, face the issue of maintaining their zeal for Christ. For new believers, it is sometimes easier, as things are new and they are excited about learning and growing, but, after a period of time, that eagerness may fade. Christianity is a love relationship with God, and if Christians do not stay engaged with God, then their zeal for God may be lost.

Packer writes, "These who know God have a great energy for God."<sup>17</sup> Prayer through meditation and contemplation could allow the practitioner to be engaged with God on a frequent basis and grow to appreciate the newness of God's love, mercies, and faithfulness (Lam. 3:22-23). Utilizing meditative and contemplative prayer, a Christian may experience a deepening of their relationship and understanding of God and God's word. Meditative and contemplative prayer are opportunities to maintain focus on a Christian's primary love, and that is God.

Prayer is a central spiritual coping mechanism that many turn to, especially during crisis or difficult situations. Prayers are typically crying out and imploring God, with the person at the center. Prayer through meditation and contemplation are aspects of prayer, but the primary focus directs the practitioner to be a listener of God, therefore God

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<sup>17</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 27.

becomes the focus. Through a consistent practice of meditation and contemplation, an individual may be more proficient at praying to God and understanding God's response. As Christians practice prayer through meditation and contemplation, they may become more attuned to hearing God and understanding God's plans for their life. Being more attuned to God could increase the Christian's ability to trust God for wisdom in their own actions and the divine assurance of God's care in times of crisis. Godly wisdom and divine care are not resources anyone can buy, but they are promised to God's children. Both also play a critical role in our perception of crisis and how we relate to those crises in our lives. As the project developed, prayer through meditation and contemplation have proven to be useful coping mechanisms to enhance the experience of peace among participants.

### **Means of Evaluation**

This project employed a number of surveys to be completed by the small group. The small group consisted of eight project participants and two other control groups, one with eight students and the other with forty students. The groups completed an initial survey to assess their familiarity with practicing prayer through meditation and contemplation. Surveys consisted of a combination of Visual Analogue scales and Likert-type scales. Visual Analogue scales were utilized in measuring spiritual growth, as participants looked upon the continuum of their spiritual life over the previous six weeks. The completed post-project surveys reflected changes to the participants' perception of their spiritual growth.

My goal was to track the level of understanding and changes in personal prayer habits of the participants. I also planned to evaluate the participants' perception of the

effectiveness of their own prayer life. The following surveys helped to determine the basis of my analysis, if meditative and contemplative prayer are viable methods of coping among the small group participants.

### *General Survey*

The first assessment was a general survey (see Appendix A) of the individuals in the small group to determine their familiarity with the concepts of prayer, and prayer through meditation, and contemplation. The survey was administered before any course work. I initially planned to hand this survey out to the entire congregation before the project began. Controlling the samples would have been too difficult considering the size of the congregation and the attendance patterns of the congregants at Mount Moriah Baptist Church. I took the Doctoral panel's advice and chose to select two other classes to use as control groups for my study. The first class was another small group study composed of eight students. The second class was a much larger class of forty students. Both classes started a week prior to our first class.

The study participants were given the general survey at the beginning of our gathering. Anonymity for participants was maintained as no surveys were marked for identification. The surveys from three groups were later gathered and analyzed by group for comparison purposes.

### *Perceived Stress Scale / The Stress Test*

The Perceived Stress Scale and The Stress Test (see Appendix B) were distributed and completed during specified meeting times. Only the Meditation and Contemplation small group completed these surveys. The Perceived Stress Scale was used to gather

information on the small group participants' perception of their present level of stress. Participants did receive the same assessment again at the end of the course to determine if there is a change in their perceived level of stress. The third assessment was a Life Change Index Scale or Stress Test. I used this assessment primarily as a teaching tool concerning the compounding impact of stress for individuals. The Life Change Index Scale was only taken as a pre-assessment education tool. The Perceived Stress Scale was identified with a unique code to make comparison in final pre/post analysis. All participant responses were kept anonymous, but the results have been included in final results to reveal any perceived changes in the level of stress for participants.

### *Spiritual Assessment Surveys*

The remaining surveys, one through five, are spiritual assessments (see Appendices C-G) that were designed for this project and were given at the beginning and end of this project. Only the Meditation and Contemplation small group completed these surveys. A coding system was utilized to maintain the anonymity of the participants. These surveys were used to establish a base line in areas such as prayer habits, familiarity with meditation and contemplation, spiritual growth, utilizing Scripture in prayer, and the role of the Holy Spirit. The pre and post surveys were summarized for qualitative analysis using statistical methods. The analyzed data is included in this final report.

### **Literature Review**

Earlier works on prayer through meditation and contemplation were helpful in developing this doctoral project. A comprehensive list of resources which have aided in framing this project are included in the Bibliography section. The Bible is the main

source my grandmother and father used to influence my desire to know God. One of the earlier books that guided me toward meditative prayer is *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster. Foster's subject matter explores an area termed "Spiritual Disciplines." He credits Dallas Willard as being a major inspiration for this theme. Foster asserts that the "inward journey" is the key to spiritual growth and one that is often neglected by Christians. His writing begins with practices he categorizes as "The Inward Disciplines," including the category of meditation. Foster views prayer through meditation from a Christian perspective that portrays a communicative and transforming relationship with God. He stresses the importance of "Hearing and Obeying" God in the life of a Christian as the means to spiritual growth.<sup>18</sup>

A small group study entitled, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, by Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, asserts how God has in the past and continues today to speak to individual lives. The authors share a cumulative presentation to help readers experience God for themselves. In their two-part section entitled, "God Speaks," Blackaby and King highlight the role of the Holy Spirit as the "teacher" and the means by which God speaks today. The authors also elaborate on how, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, individuals can discern God speaking through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to have a better understanding of God's will.<sup>19</sup>

Renita J. Weems, in her thought-provoking book, *Listening for God*, is a personal account to hear and understand God in God's silence. Weems' personal sharing provides a proper balance and perspective in exploring meditation and contemplation. She

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<sup>18</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* unit 10th rev. (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 1993), 72-107.

advocates the “keep doing” and “not giving up” approach and also to be open to experience God’s silence in a new way. In her concluding essay, “When the Bush Stops Burning,” Weems acknowledges silence as a way to communicate and commune with God.<sup>20</sup> Weems provides a great perspective on relating to God in the midst of the chaos and responsibilities of each day.

While simultaneously doing doctoral studies and continuing my ministry as a hospice chaplain, I was drawn to the motif of holistic thinking. A major focus of hospice is to treat the whole person. Howard Clinebell’s research supports ministry aimed at treating the whole person. In chapter two of his book, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Clinebell outlines, “A Model for Spiritually Centered Holistic Pastoral Caregiving,” to support the case for a strong spiritual core. On spiritual and ethical wholeness, he writes, “The strength, integrity, and wholeness of this axle profoundly influence people’s overall well-being and how well they function in other important dimensions of their lives. The spiritual key to whole-person wellness is a trustful, nourishing, growing, relationship with the divine Spirit—the ultimate source of all life.”<sup>21</sup> The chapter highlights the importance of a strong spiritual center in order to keep other dimensions of a person’s life in balance.

Harold G. Koenig’s study shows the relationship between spirituality and mental health in the book, *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health*. Two chapters that stood out for me were chapter 8, *Religion and Coping* and chapter 23, *The Role of Nonparish*

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<sup>20</sup> Renita J. Weems, *Listening for God: A Minister’s Journey Through Silence and Doubt* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 196-200.

<sup>21</sup> Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 30-32.

*Clergy in the Mental Health System*.<sup>22</sup> The validation through research shows the benefits of religion in not only mental health, but also physical and emotional health. These studies are inspiration to help others develop positive spiritual coping mechanisms. Studies also acknowledge the negative effects of religion, as Froma Walsh writes, “It is crucial to explore how religious ideations or experiences may have a destructive or dispiriting effect, fostering guilt, shame, or worthlessness.”<sup>23</sup> The correlation between spirituality and religion is important to this project because it increases awareness and avoids introducing undue stress from a religious standpoint.

Herbert Benson’s work, *The Relaxation Response*, offers scientific proof of the benefit of relaxation breathing and meditation to cope with stress.<sup>24</sup> Benson recognizes a strong link between religious beliefs and a patient’s health. He writes, “Eighty percent of my patients chose prayers as the focus of their elicitation of the Relaxation Response. For this reason, I found myself in a curious position—that of a physician teaching patients to pray.”<sup>25</sup> Benson supports two of my positions for this project: Prayer may reduce stress and provide health benefits and prayer techniques can be taught and learned.

Classic sources supporting the relevance of prayer through meditation, and contemplation are also available, including the works of the practitioners of spiritual practices in church history. One is St. Ignatius of Loyola who outlines the *Spiritual*

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<sup>22</sup> Harold G. Koenig, ed., *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> Froma Walsh, ed., “Opening Family Therapy to Spirituality,” in *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 38.

<sup>24</sup> Herbert Benson and Miriam Z. Klipper, *The Relaxation Response* (New York: HarperTorch, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



*Exercises* that consisted of a thirty-day prayer experience.<sup>26</sup> The experience emphasizes Scripture meditation and contemplative practices to produce transformation. The works of St. Ignatius and other practitioners in the history of the church demonstrate devotion to spending time with God and experiencing transformation into the likeness of Christ. Then there is Clare of Assisi, whose spiritual practice was expounded by Illia Delio in, *Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love*.<sup>27</sup> This work notes the intimate love relationship of humanity in communion with the Divine, specifically, the relationship God longs to have with each of His children. Thus, spiritual growth out of a love relationship with God is the foundation for this project. Another prominent practitioner was Francis of Assisi. Many writers have documented the life of Francis of Assisi, as he was known as one who imitated the life of Christ. Mark Galli writes, “Francis joined obedience to Christ with his love of Jesus; he expressed both by giving himself to a life of pure imitation of Christ.”<sup>28</sup> Galli goes on to refer to the notes of Thomas Celano of Francis’ “regular meditation with the words of Christ” as his means of becoming more like Christ.

Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrissey’s research on personality types apply toward forms of prayer. Their book, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer for Different Personality Types*, offers suggestions of prayers for different personalities along with examples. In chapter three, “Benedictine Prayer — *Lectio Divina*,” the prayer of *lectio divina* is described as “suitable to all four basic temperaments”; it also “employs to full advantage all of the four psychological functions,” and extroverts as well as

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<sup>26</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. S. J. Mullan (Rome: Acheron Press, 1909), Amazon Kindle.

<sup>27</sup> Illia Delio, *Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Mark Galli, *Francis of Assisi and of His World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 142-143.

introverts can find a way to relate it to their world.<sup>29</sup> Being suitable to all personality types, along with its prescribed components of meditation and contemplation, made the *lectio divina* a desired fit for this project.

Michael Casey's book, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, presents the theory and practice of *lectio divina* which expounds the ancient styles of prayer used by monks and early Christians. Casey takes an in-depth look at *lectio divina* as discussed in his writing in chapters on "The Theological Basis of Lectio" and "The Practice of *Lectio Divina*."<sup>30</sup> The first part emphasizes the "intrinsic relationship between the Bible and the Church" as neither would exist without the other, which supports the need for priority to be placed on Bible reading in corporate and in private devotion. The latter chapter offers practical insight into implementing *lectio divina* and suggests potential difficulties that may be encountered.

Hans Urs von Bathasar's works stress the use of Scripture. In his book, *The Christian and Anxiety*, Bathasar develops a Christian theology of anxiety. Bathasar writes, "Christ has borne the anxiety of the world so as to give to the world instead that which is his: his joy, his peace."<sup>31</sup> He asserts that, although Christians may be delivered from "sin-anxiety," there is a "grace filled form of anxiety" that Christians are called to in sharing in Christ's work of atonement.<sup>32</sup> Bathasar's study of anxiety emphasizes the

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<sup>29</sup> Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville: Open Door, 1991), 31-45.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori: Triumph Books, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian And Anxiety*, trans. Dennis D. Martin and Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 934, Amazon Kindle.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1015.

element of fear, although this project pertains to coping with stress, the principles of his theory are applicable to this project.

In his monumental work, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer argues that prayer through meditation and contemplation are crucial to knowing God. Packer stresses the importance of “knowing of God” rather than simply “knowing about God.” He writes, “It is that we turn each truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God.”<sup>33</sup> In chapter two, “The People Who Know Their God,” Packer writes, “Those who know God have great contentment in God.”<sup>34</sup> The contentment that Packer speaks of is the peace of mind based on an assurance of knowing God and being known by God. Packer shares a wealth of teaching that will be drawn from in this project.

As this project aimed to work with small groups, I consulted additional books and materials I have collected through my course work at Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity. One comprehensive book on the group process is, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, by Irvin D. Yalom. In chapter five, “The Therapist: Basic Tasks,” Yalom address the issues of creating and maintaining the group as well as culture building.<sup>35</sup> The stability of the group is important to get proper feedback from the participants. Another resource consulted regarding groups was the book, *Groups Process and Practice*.<sup>36</sup> In chapters eleven and twelve, entitled, “Groups for Adults” and “Groups

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<sup>33</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 24.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Irvin D. Yalom, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 106-118.

<sup>36</sup> Marianne Schneider Corey, Gerald Corey, and Cindy Corey, *Groups Process and Practice*, 8th ed. (Belmont: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning, 2010), 355-423.

for Older Adults” respectively, the authors address characteristics and issues that pertain to these particular groups. Mount Moriah Baptist Church is an aging congregation, but I anticipated the small group would be a combination of adults and older adults of the congregation.

The resources outlined above served as the primary materials for developing the content and substance of this project. Additional relevant sources that have not been reviewed here are listed in the Bibliography section of this report. The reviewed sources above have shaped the direction of this project on prayer through meditation and contemplation that harmonizes with the Bible and Christian history.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project was implemented over a six-week period beginning, October 12, 2016 through November 16, 2016. The project calendar submitted along with my project proposal was used as a guide to formulate the plans for a successful implementation.

The project consisted of a small group study involving a group of volunteers from the congregation of Mount Moriah Baptist Church of Spartanburg, South Carolina. Initially, nine individuals enrolled in the class but only eight participated. There were seven females and one male participant. The ages of the participants ranged from mid-twenties to mid-sixties. This researcher led all small group studies. Material discovered during research provided the framework for materials presented. Additional materials were added to assist in giving a more replete presentation to the group.

#### **Project Introduction**

The Senior Pastor, Benjamin D. Snoddy, introduced the project to the congregation of Mount Moriah Baptist Church on October 2, 2016. After an initial introduction and show of his support, this researcher was allowed to share an overview of the project. I initially anticipated that the announcement and implementation of this project would have been about three weeks earlier. The timing of the project's introduction date had a positive and negative affect on this study. The positive, the fact that the project was announced on a first Sunday meant that many of the congregants would be able to hear the announcement in person. The negative, the first week in October, marked the beginning of Wednesday night Bible studies, which meant that

many in the congregation had already signed up for a fall class, before the announcement was made.

After worship services, I met interested members of the congregation in the Fellowship Hall. I further explained my class and signed up interested participants. I obtained contact information for those who were interested and notified participants that class would begin on October 12. Later in the week I sent out an email to remind participants of date and time for class and to express excitement in anticipation of time that will be spent together learning, exploring, and growing together spiritually.

### **Project Curriculum**

The small group met weekly on Wednesday nights to study and practice Christian Meditation and Contemplation. Each class began with an opener that helped to draw the participants' focus to aspects of meditation and contemplation. This portion of class time allowed other participants to arrive. After a short discussion on the focus topic, an interactive presentation was given on the study for the evening. The design of this small group emphasized a unique approach that was not common to half of participants in the study. Additionally, students were presented with data that revealed the connection between their overall well being and their spiritual well being.

At the forefront of this project was a different approach to reading and interacting with Scripture. Students were encouraged to "listen" to what is revealed to them out of the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit. No longer were participants dependent on rote memorization of facts and data, only now participants were equipped with tools to connect spiritually and emotionally with the pericope. Meditation and contemplation are

proven pathways to fulfill Matthew 22:37 as a means of connecting the heart, soul, and mind to God's Word.

The curriculum was designed to build upon itself as the weeks progressed. The first of six hour and a half session was held on October 12, 2016. During the first session the students entered to music and a welcoming environment, including sweet treats. A formal welcome, class introduction and purpose of the course started the series of six sessions. After the formalities of the forms, including the covenant and surveys, I presented an educational piece concerning the effects of stress. My goal was to get everyone on the same page concerning "good" stress (eustress) and "bad" stress (distress) and then introduce the benefits of meditative prayer as an avenue of not only coping but transformation. The first session wrapped up with enough time to explain the first homework assignment, a meditation on Psalm 119. Psalm 119 elaborates on the psalmist's love and devotion to God's Word. Psalm 119 was chosen as a barometer for each of participant to examine their own love for God and God's Word. Therefore, generating a desire in the participants to deepen their relationship with God. This psalm also provided an innate practice in meditation as the theme remained consistent and participants had more experience in how God spoke to them individually.

The second session was held on October 19, 2016. The second session picked up with an opening discussion of Psalm 119 along with questions from the group. Next, the study group engaged in a closer examination of stress in the lives of biblical characters and how meditation and contemplation would have played a role as a coping mechanism. The presentation on stress and Christian mediation concluded with a simple format for

meditation of Realize [Read], Reflect, and Respond as presented by Doug McIntosh.<sup>37</sup>

The homework at the end of session two was to read and reflect on Psalm 1:1-3. The Psalmist declared “blessings” to those who choose to meditate on God’s Word.

The third session was held on October 26, 2016. The third session opened with a review of Psalm 1:1-3 and an open discussion. One purpose in this project was to guide participants in their spiritual growth as a manifestation and recognition of their deepening love for God and not a legalistic obligation. This researcher used a balance of love and obligation to inspire participants to practice meditation and contemplation. Traits of a healthy relationship were modified and presented the study group. This presentation allowed participants to examine their own relationship with God and develop their own plans for areas of growth. This session concluded with an introduction to *lectio divina*.

Sessions four and five were held on November 2 and November 9, 2016, respectively. The fourth and fifth sessions were dedicated to full immersion into *lectio divina*. I found out that *lectio divina* is a proven approach to prayer and suitable to all personality types and learning styles. Two of the four parts of *lectio divina* emphasized meditation and contemplation, as these are key components in strengthening believer’s ability to hear from God. The class was designed to allow additional practice time and discussion during each step. Focus is an extremely important component of meditation and contemplation. To assist students in achieving better focus and the benefits of deep breathing, breathing techniques were introduced in session five to assist students in their focus. Participants completed their post-surveys during the last portion of session five. The general post survey was also given out to the other study groups, as some were not

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<sup>37</sup> McIntosh, *God Up Close: How to Meditate On His Word*, 23.



scheduled to meet the following week. The homework for session five included more practice of *lectio divina* and interview questions for participants to complete and return during session six.

Session six was held on November 16, 2016. Session six was the closing and final session for the project. In this session additional material were presented on the benefits of deep breathing. The group practiced proper techniques of deep breathing. Furthermore, the group received education and practice in calm breathing techniques similar to relaxation breathing as introduced by Herbert Benson. Finally, the study group reviewed the interview questions and had an open discussion of responses as each participant voluntarily wanted to share.

The curriculum was designed for a progression of building using skills learned and practiced in previous sessions. I have presented an overview of the curriculum and a general expected outcome of the sessions. In a later chapter I will address obstacles encountered while implementing my curriculum. Table 1 is a summary of the curriculum that was used during the six weeks.

**Table 1. Meditation and Contemplation Curriculum**

<b>CHRISTIAN MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION: FRAMEWORK FOR A COPING MECHANISM AMONG SMALL GROUPS AT MOUNT MORIAH BAPTIST CHURCH, SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA – Education Curriculum</b>
<p><b>Session 1</b> – October 12, 2016 - Welcome!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Overview</li> <li>• Consent Forms / Covenants</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Syllabus</li> <li>• Introduction – Effects of Stress / Benefits of Meditation</li> <li>• Homework - Psalm 119</li> </ul> <p><b>Session 2</b> – October 19, 2016 - Welcome!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Psalm 119</li> <li>• Breakout</li> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Christian Meditation and Contemplation</li> <li>• Homework - Psalm 1:1-3</li> </ul> <p><b>Session 3</b> – October 26, 2016 - Welcome!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Review Psalm 1:1-3</li> <li>• Benefits of Meditation and Contemplation</li> <li>• A Healthy Relationship with God</li> <li>• Homework – Lectio Divina</li> </ul> <p><b>Session 4</b> – November 2, 2016 - Welcome!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Review / Questions</li> <li>• Lectio Divina (lexio divina)</li> <li>• Quality Time with God – Practice Session</li> <li>• Homework – Lectio Divina</li> </ul> <p><b>Session 5</b> – November 9, 2016 - Welcome!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Questions</li> <li>• Lectio Divina - Continued</li> <li>• Quality Time with God – Practice Session</li> <li>• Post Surveys</li> <li>• Homework / Interview Questions</li> </ul> <p><b>Session 6</b> – November 16, 2016 - Welcome!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Benefits of Deep Breathing</li> <li>• Practice</li> <li>• Calm Breathing - Handout</li> <li>• Concluding Discussion / Remarks</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The design of this project focused on utilizing prayer through Scripture meditation and contemplation as a viable means of coping with the stressors of life. Just as God spoke in biblical times, God continues to speak into present circumstances through His Word. However, the practice of prayer through meditation and contemplation has been neglected in many denominations across America. It appears that the American culture has created an environment of instant fulfillment and enough distractions to keep many Christians away from spending quality time with Scripture. This neglect can be rectified for everyone, even for older generations who may not have practiced prayer through meditation and contemplation in the past.

Prayer, like other coping mechanisms, could be a process of learned behavior. Through the observation and imitation of others, individuals may adopt a practice of prayer.<sup>38</sup> Matthew includes a group lesson on prayer in the “Sermon on the Mount” that Jesus prefaced with the practice of private prayer (Mat. 6:5-14). I observed members of my family pray, watched people at church pray, and heard the commentary of listeners as well as their opinion on other’s prayer style. Following the commentary of others and the wisdom of Scripture, I have developed my own prayer life. I discovered that prayer has been a practice that focused on my role as a speaker and not as much as a listener to the Holy Spirit. How does a Christian learn other prayer styles? Is there an awareness of different prayer styles among Christians? What community supports teaching prayer

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<sup>38</sup> Patricia D. Brown, *Paths to Prayer: Finding Your Own Way to the Presence of God* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 13-14.

styles? Christians have learned to pray in the same way as in the past; they take a community experience and make it a personal practice in private.

Christians could apply to their lives new information as the Spirit leads.

Meditative and Contemplative prayer are examples of the practice of prayer that many have experienced in a community of others. The “community of others” from the perspective of this researcher is the impact of other religions, cultures or denominations other than Baptist, which may have influenced a believer. Meditation and contemplation as practiced by other religions and denominations requires biblical assessment because they do not always reinforce Christian principles. In the Christian community, prayer through meditation and contemplation tend to be emphasized more in other denominations than in my own Baptist context. This project provided participants another avenue of furthering their spiritual growth and a better understanding of how a Spirit-led life may help them cope better in the world in which they live. In this chapter, the biblical/theological principles were expounded to serve as the basis for this project. Select passages from both the Old and New Testaments will be referenced to illustrate how God’s Word guided people of ancient times. I will also present some patriarchs of the church who testify to the necessity of prayer through meditation and contemplation in their own lives.

### **Old Testament Meaning of Meditation and Contemplation**

The Old Testament provides clues to ascertaining the meaning of the words, “meditate” or “meditation.” Accordingly, “meditate” has been translated twelve times,

while “meditation” six times. The English word “meditate” derives its usage from three Hebrew words, namely, *sûwach* (7742), *hâgâh* (1897), and *sîyach* (7878).<sup>39</sup>

Other related terminologies are also evident. The word *sûwach* means, “to muse pensively.”<sup>40</sup> The word *hâgâh* means, “to murmur” (in pleasure or anger): by implication, to ponder” and in other OT passages, *hâgâh* is translated as *imagine, mourn, mutter, roar, speak, study, talk* and *utter*.<sup>41</sup> The word *sîyach* means “to ponder,” that is, “to converse (with oneself, and hence aloud), or “to utter” and in other OT passages, *sîyach* is translated as *commune, complain, declare, muse, pray, speak*.<sup>42</sup> Looking at the words associated with the Hebrew, it may seem ironic that the same Hebrew word is translated as both “commune” and “complain.” However, when the Hebrew words were translated “meditate” or “meditation,” the word is normally associated to “Sacred Scripture,” or a didactic engagement into some truth of God.<sup>43</sup> Additional explanation will focus on the usage of the word translated as “meditate,” keeping in mind other possible uses of each word. These words in context will be examined below for further discussion.

The word “contemplation” is not literally translated from the Hebrew text, but there is an implication or association regarding its meaning. Strong’s Concordance identifies *sîyach* (7879), which is translated “meditation” in Psalm 104:34, with the

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<sup>39</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2010), 578.

<sup>40</sup> James Strong, “Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary,” *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2010), 273.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>43</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59, A Continental Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 116-117.

primary definition as “a contemplation.”<sup>44</sup> A feminine form of *sîychâh* (7881) means “reflection, devotion” and is also translated as *prayer*.<sup>45</sup> Both “contemplation” and “reflection” denote silence in God’s presence, as words are sometimes not necessary. By usage and interpretation, meditation and contemplation are closely related and intertwined.

### *The Objective of Meditation and Contemplation in the Old Testament*

Prayer through meditation and contemplation in the Old Testament is a didactic experience that led to intimacy with God and spiritual growth. God was sought for wisdom and direction; in other words, divine authority was solicited to direct the human experience. The ancestors were directed to God’s word and in their day that was the *Tôrâh*.

*Torah*, then is the central theologumenon. It is valued beyond all else because in all its forms *torah* is the medium of the LORD. In the psalm’s understanding of God’s way, *torah* is the means by which the LORD deals with human beings and they with the LORD.<sup>46</sup>

As a *medium* of God, the *tôrâh* was a means by which the patriarchs came to know God’s ways and their proper response to God. The *tôrâh* itself did not replace God, but it provided the proper teachings on God’s will for His people. The relationship believers had with God’s *tôrâh*, reflected their relationship with God.<sup>47</sup> Psalm 119, the longest of all the psalms in the OT, is one example of the author’s affection for God’s Word. The

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<sup>44</sup> Strong, “Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary,” 277.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary For Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 383.

<sup>47</sup> Willem S. Prinsloo, “Psalms,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 422.

author uses the entire psalm as a meditation on God's law. The psalmist refers to God's law as *word, ordinances, decrees, precepts, statutes, commandments, and promise*; the psalmist uses these synonyms to illustrate the role of the law in the life of the believer.<sup>48</sup> The author presents the true struggle of meditation, the need for divine assistance for *teaching, understanding*, and obedience (Ps. 119:33-38). The struggle becomes the vehicle by which meditation and contemplation drives the psalmists to develop an intimate relationship with God. The psalmist's life is also transformed through this divine relationship as he is guided by God's teachings.<sup>49</sup>

### *The Elements of Meditation and Contemplation in the Old Testament*

Meditative prayer is filling our minds and thoughts with God's truth. The primary means that God has conveyed His truth to humanity is through His Word. Edmund Clowney describes [Judeo-] Christian meditation in three dimensions: first, it is grounded in the truth of God, second, it responds to the love of God, and third, it is an exercise to the praise of God.<sup>50</sup>

### *Select Examples of the Practice of Meditation and Contemplation*

Psalms is a collection of ancient prayers. Biblical scholars also refer to Psalms as a collection of individual prayers.<sup>51</sup> The origin of most of the psalms is unknown, but they have been maintained through their liturgical use. The English title, "Psalms,"

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 422-423.

<sup>49</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, vol. 3, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 443-444.

<sup>50</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 12-13.

<sup>51</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Partick D. Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 15.

derives from the Greek *psalmos*, a translation of Hebrew *mizmor*, “a song with the accompaniment of a stringed instrument.”<sup>52</sup> The first Psalm sets a foundation and directs participants to meditate on God’s law or teachings as a source of happiness.

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law they meditate day and night.  
They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper. (Ps. 1:1-3 NRSV)

The first division of Psalms recognizes the blessings as the benefit of one who meditates on God’s law or *tôrâh*. Often law is thought of in terms of restricting freedom, but that is not the case for the psalmist. For the Jews, “the *tôrâh* is how God shapes the human soul, like a road map that guides and identifies landmarks toward a destination.”<sup>53</sup> In the Jewish faith community, the *tôrâh* is regarded as the book for spiritual growth. The *tôrâh*, consisting of the five books of Moses, are the “Teachings” of Yhwh; these books are held in high esteem and were used as guides to help followers in becoming a “righteous person.”<sup>54</sup> The psalmist introduces meditating on God’s word as a means of happiness and prospering and achieving the favor of God. The word for “happy” is not simply addressing a human emotion or state of being. It refers to the “lasting blessing” experienced by the individual who purposes to live as divinely directed so their journey

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<sup>52</sup> Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1265.

<sup>53</sup> Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>54</sup> Berlin, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 1269.



through life is meaningful, productive--a life that is pleasing to the Lord.<sup>55</sup> The state of happiness or blessing is found in spending time with God in God's word, along with obedience to God's teaching.

What does the psalmist mean by meditation? Authors vary in their interpretation. James Limburg writes, "The Hebrew word translated meditate is a form of the Hebrew *hāgāh*, may be interpreted, to growl as it is used in Isaiah 31:4 when referring to the actions of a lion with its prey."<sup>56</sup> Limburg further asserts that in this type of meditation, reading aloud was practiced individually as well as in a group setting. In the same frame, John Goldingay interprets Psalm 1:2 by using the term "talks" instead of meditate.<sup>57</sup> Goldingay seems to use talk as in speaking in audible tone through reading or recitation. The Psalmist's words may have sounded like mumbling to a by stander. Samuel Terrien offers more clarification and insight in his commentary:

Meditation on God's tutoring was not originally reading aloud with scansion of a written text, as it became at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.E.), for the verb *hgh*, "to meditate," probably meant an inarticulate groaning, perhaps even the choke of a sob, or the murmur of an assent issued from a profound emotion similar either to the moaning that precedes a lion's roar (Isa 31:4) or the cooing of a dove (Isa 38:14).<sup>58</sup>

Scholars seem to agree that the practice of meditation included a reading of the teachings of God. However, some scholars acknowledge more than the reading or reciting the text from rote memorization. Samuel Terrien asserts that there is a sense of something more

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<sup>55</sup> Schaffer, *Psalms*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> James Limburg, *Psalms*, Westminster Bible Commentary (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 2-3.

<sup>57</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, vol. 1, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2006), 80.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, The Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003), 73.

than simply repeating memorized verses. He communicates a feeling of an internalization of the text, even to an emotional level. Terrien's commentary presents an appropriate transition to explore a deeper understanding of meditation.

Although one may glean from the repeated reading of the text, the scholars mentioned above do not address the deep thought or silence necessary to truly ponder the meaning of what has been read or repeated. As Artur Weiser writes,

Hence we may assume that the meaning of the advice to meditate on the law day and night is not so much that of asking men to become versed in the law by acquiring knowledge of it in a more formal manner, as is still being done today by the orthodox Jew, but rather that of a warning challenging man to yield constantly to the will of God and let that will always pervade his whole being until it becomes his second nature and fills his whole life as the only meaning of that life.<sup>59</sup>

Weiser illustrates God's design to transform humanity's focus on self-will to that of the Will of God. An individual's spiritual growth is determined by what one loves and reflects on continually.<sup>60</sup> As in Psalm 19, the leader refers to the "meditation" of his heart (Ps 19:14). This activity moves beyond repeating of words to pondering the deeper truths that reshape an individual to be more like God. The psalmist calls for a deeper interaction than simple repetitive reading of God's teachings to an intimacy that connects the heart and mind. The psalm itself subscribes a proper application of the teachings that establish a firm foundation and the producing of good fruit.

What the psalmist proclaims in Psalm 1, Joshua also receives as a charge from God. Upon their exile from Egypt and wandering in the desert for forty years, God has

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<sup>59</sup> Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 104.

<sup>60</sup> Schaffer, *Psalms*, 6.

chosen a new leader for his people. Joshua's success in leading God's people would be contingent upon his obedience to the *tôrâh*.

This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:8-9 NRSV)

Joshua's challenge to meditate on the *tôrâh* as his guide for his success is reminiscent of Psalm 1:2. As a result of Joshua's obedience to meditating and obeying God, there was a relationship established between he and God. Joshua's actions led to his success and that of people under his direction. Terrien writes,

Even in postexilic times, when the Law was written, read, and learned verbatim, this inner dynamism preserved a dialogue with God, this anguished observer of human criminality, who seeks to liberate human beings from themselves, as well as from the tortures of foreign tyranny.<sup>61</sup>

It was Joshua's relationship with God that helped him become a successful leader and overcome the pitfalls that distract and ensnare humanity. Being the leader of an emerging nation carries with it many stressors. Joshua dealt with the fate of a fledgling nation as it was entering hostile territory. He may have had to deal with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from some of the vicious battles. Just like Moses before him, he had to manage the murmurings of a nation of people as he sensed God leading him. For Joshua and other biblical leaders, the stressors included getting a nation of people to do things God's way. Joshua was obedient until death and left a legacy as one of Israel's greatest leaders.

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<sup>61</sup> Terrien, *The Psalms*, 73.

### New Testament Meaning of Meditation and Contemplation

Forms of the Greek word for meditate (μελετάω – 3191) can be found in the NT writings.<sup>62</sup> The first occurrence is in Luke 21:14 as the disciples are advised not to “premeditate” their responses. Another instance in Acts 4:25 (ἐμελέτησαν) is translated *imagine* as it is used in quoting David from Psalm 2:1. These first two examples are non-beneficent ways of using meditation. The third usage is found in I Timothy 4:15 (μελέτα) and is translated meditate. As Paul concludes his thoughts in I Timothy 4, he instructs and encourages the young Timothy to “meditate” on things such as *reading*, *exhortation*, and *doctrine*, and application to personal living. In Philippians 4:8, Paul instructs the believers in Philippi about things that should occupy their thought life to assure God’s presence and peace in their lives. Understanding the NT view of meditation and contemplation is more than a word search. One also needs to consider Jesus’ teaching on prayer and obedience and the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of those who choose to follow Him.

In this project, meditative and contemplative prayer have been defined in part as the practice of hearing from God through Scripture and obeying God’s word. This is evident in Jesus’ teaching on prayer and obedience and the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of those who choose to follow Him. Jesus made it a practice of getting away from the crowds, and even his close disciples, to pray. In Matthew, the teaching on prayer includes a practice of finding a solitary place (Mt. 6:6). In Luke, Jesus spends the whole night alone in prayer with God before choosing the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12). In John, Jesus withdraws from the crowd to be by himself (John 6:15). Luke records that Jesus, “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” throughout the course of His

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<sup>62</sup> Strong, *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 901.

ministry (Luke 5:16). Darrell L. Bock highlights how Jesus found time to “commune with God” and the “importance” attributed to those times of prayer because they often preceded troubled times.<sup>63</sup> Jesus’ time of isolation and withdrawing from the crowds gave Him opportunity to spend time in private prayer and receive direction for His ministry on earth.

*The Objective of Meditation and Contemplation in the New Testament*

Prayer through meditation and contemplation in the New Testament promoted intimacy with the living God and spiritual growth. This was seen in the life of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2a states, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son.” As the New Testament unfolds, the revelation of God through Christ is shared through the life and ministry of His Son. Central to this is how Jesus lived out the saying, “[man shall live] by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4). The whole of divinely inspired Scripture is available for us today as a guide.

All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17, *NKJV*)

J. I. Packer sums up this passage as, “a life set to go God’s way – is the promised result.”<sup>64</sup> Meditation and contemplation in Scripture prepared individuals for “good work” as God directed them. Thomas Long concludes, “Scripture trains the faithful, ‘everyone who belongs to God’ (3:17), in the life of salvation so that the church can body

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<sup>63</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moises Silva (Baker: Academics, 1994), 478.

<sup>64</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 264.

forth in the world proficient in the gospel and ‘equipped for every good work’ (3:17).”<sup>65</sup>

The New Testament bears witness to great men and women of faith who were determined to please God through “good work” and their devotion to Jesus’ teachings.

### *The Elements of Meditation and Contemplation in the New Testament*

Meditative and contemplative prayer in the NT are in elemental harmony with the three dimensions presented earlier in the OT. The three dimensions of [Judeo] Christian meditation as presented by Clowney (it is grounded in truth, it responds to the love of God and it is an exercise in the praise of God), were manifested in the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>66</sup> In the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, a genuine love for God was the motivation to be in relationship with God and others.

“Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?”

Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt. 22:36-40 NKJV)

Matthew shares Jesus’ response to a Pharisee concerning the law. Jesus’ response to love God with all one’s “heart,” “soul,” and “mind,” followed by a prescription on how to love others, were quotations of writings in the *tôrâh*.<sup>67</sup>

The essence of the “Law” might have been veiled in the OT, was revealed by Jesus as a foundation of love. The love relationship between Jesus and “God” as well as

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Long, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 234.

<sup>66</sup> Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 28-30.

<sup>67</sup> Anna Case-Winters notes, “[Jesus] quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Jesus is not innovating here; these are fundamentals he would have learned at his mother’s knee” (*Matthew*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015], 259.)

Jesus and “neighbor” were exemplified in His earthly ministry. Ben Witherington, III asserts,

“The entire Law hinges on its central command to love God and neighbor. God is to be loved whole-heartedly, which is the greatest commandment. But this is impossible without the aid of God, hence the word of Augustine: “give what you command, Lord, and then command whatever you will.” Once again Jesus as the incarnate expression of the mind of God knows exactly what is the heart of the matter and how God sees things.”<sup>68</sup>

Believers are not able to love without help from God, but were made possible through prayer of meditation and contemplation. Love also sets the precedence for meditation and contemplation in the NT. The life of Jesus reflected his love for the Father and his dependence on the Father for everything, including wisdom, strength and guidance.

In the NT, Jesus exemplifies the type of love relationship with the Father that human beings could emulate so they too could know God with their “heart,” “soul,” and “mind.” Packer expounds upon knowing God as a matter of personal dealing, personal involvement, and God’s grace.<sup>69</sup> Knowledge of God in mind only is not as rewarding as one who has applied God’s truth to their personal life. In the NT it is revealed how the Holy Spirit participates in God’s revelation to teach and remind of God’s teachings (John 14:26). Meditation and contemplation allow individuals to interact with the Scriptures that provide a foundation for communion with God.

### *Select Examples of the Practice of Meditation and Contemplation*

The Gospel writers record Jesus’ personal practice of prayer life. Jesus models and teaches prayer; he also places a high priority on prayer. The following examples

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<sup>68</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2006), 418.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 41- 44.

from the New Testament depict the meaningful process of the love relationship between God and humanity. The three dimensions (truth, love and praise) of meditation and contemplation remain the foundations of this divine-human bond.<sup>70</sup> The lesson on prayer does not end with Jesus teaching the disciples how to pray, but it was modeled in His life to demonstrate that, apart from God, humanity could not do anything, much less grow spiritually (Jn. 15:5).

### The Father Instructs the Son

Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. (John 5:19-20 NRSV)

Jesus responds to the criticism and curiosity of the crowd. The crowd questions Jesus’ authority to heal someone on the Sabbath. The Jews insinuate that Jesus is making himself equal or rival to God.<sup>71</sup> The text disseminates Jesus’ authority and connection to the Father. The “Son” is acting in subordination to the Father. Jesus also refers to his collaboration with the Father in two other verses (17, 36) in this fifth chapter of John. The verses narrate Jesus’ dependence on instruction from the Father to carry out the will of the Father.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 13.

<sup>71</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 4, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 178.

<sup>72</sup> John Kysar, *John*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 79-81.



### The Son Instructs the Disciples

The following verses are used to emphasize Jesus' teaching to His disciples on their need to remain connected to Him so they would be spiritually nurtured and productive:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:1-5 NRSV)

The teaching ministry of Jesus was prevalent in His works. Many times parables and similes were used to illustrate a spiritual principle. In the above pericope, Jesus used the vine to represent Himself and the branches are His followers. Jesus accentuated the mutual abiding that is necessary for nourishment and growth in order to produce fruit.

The relationship Jesus had with His Father is also the relationship He invites others into in order to share the same type of fellowship.<sup>73</sup> The relationship between the Rabbi or Teacher and the student is vital in transforming the student's mind into a new way of thinking.

### The Holy Spirit Continues To Instruct Disciples

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:26-27 NRSV)

Jesus knew that His ascension was at hand. To prepare the disciples, He revealed to them that they would have "another comforter," sent from God and whose name is the Holy Spirit. Throughout His teachings, Christ assures His disciples that "the Paraclete

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<sup>73</sup> Kysar, *John*, 224-225.

will recall and continue Jesus' revelation of God to the disciples," as they continue in their struggle to live for God.<sup>74</sup> The promise is not for only the remnant of disciples, but for all who follow the teachings of Christ. Hans Urs von Balthasar writes, "In order to find God, no one need reject being human personally or socially, but in order to find God all must see the world and themselves as they are in God's sight."<sup>75</sup> The Holy Spirit will continue the "teaching" and "reminding" of what Jesus taught to those who are willing to receive. That which has been sown through meditation and contemplation is of use to the Holy Spirit to bring back to remembrance. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer sustains spiritual growth that leads to maturity.

#### Paul's Advice to the Philippians

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4:4-9 NRSV)

Paul specifically addresses a spiritual repulse to stress and anxiety. In the first chapter, Paul exhorts the Philippian believers to discern "what is best," so their lives will be pleasing to Christ. The Philippians, although not in a physical prison, were living under stressful times as a minority population in a godless society. Paul concludes this letter in

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<sup>74</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 410.

<sup>75</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Christian Meditation*, trans. Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 10.

chapter four by extending his final exhortations, acknowledgements, and blessings to this group in Philippi.

Some scholars view Philippians 4:4-9 as two sub-sets. The first set of imperatives includes verses 4-7, and the second set consists of verses 8-9. The *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (NICNT) uses the respective labels “A Call to Christian Piety – and Peace” and “A Call to ‘Wisdom’ – and the Imitation of Paul.” The separation of the two sub-sets is based upon language as the first set is considered Christian and common to Paul while the latter is Greco-Roman moralism.<sup>76</sup> Although the latter reflects other writings on morals and wisdom, it remains distinctive to Paul.<sup>77</sup> What the two have in common is the “Spirit” in which they were written as well as the “Spirit” in which they should be followed.

Paul instructs the believers at Philippi to “consider” a set of imperatives, which were commonly known and practiced among non-Christians. Paul exhorted believers to practice meditation. Meditating on higher virtues may give the believers an “alternative” to other thoughts that would be dishonoring or unprofitable for godly living.<sup>78</sup> Paul included the practices of prayer and mindful meditation as means by which believers may experience the “peace” and wisdom of God in the midst of a harsh culture. This peace from God is “far more than the absence of conflict; it even exceeds human imagination.”<sup>79</sup> Meditating on these virtues in the society around them enabled the

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<sup>76</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 402.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.

<sup>78</sup> Bonnie Thurston and Judith Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 10, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 147.

Philippians to see the good and beauty that still remains as God continues to work in the world.<sup>80</sup> Paul presents a spiritual, yet practical, approach for the Christians who wanted to maintain godliness in a culture moving in the opposite direction.

The New Testament therefore stresses that spiritual growth is a dynamic interaction between the believer, the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit. The Church continues to hold a significant role in the nurturing of Christians to spiritual maturity, as demonstrated in the writings of Paul and the practices of the Early Church. Jesus revealed a more comprehensive understanding of the Father and God's Kingdom. Luke also presents a familiar set of teachings found in other gospel writings. In the gospels, Jesus presents the Kingdom of Heaven to all of his followers. The Gospel of John also notes the contrast in operation of the Kingdom of Heaven as opposed to the Kingdom of this World.<sup>81</sup> Although the gospels present a teaching that is radical to a worldly thought pattern, it also presents the heart and mind of God. Understanding the heart and mind of God is a central teaching throughout the New Testament.

The New Testament record evolves into a better understanding of a loving God who desires to be in a close relationship with His creation. Accordingly, intentional time spent with God, and seeking the wisdom of God, could result in a transformed life devoted to God. Meditative prayer is not the only means to spiritual growth, but it points to the fact that God continues to communicate to humanity, whose responsibility is to listen to what God says. The culture of this world has its own set of values that are not

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<sup>79</sup> Charles B. Cousar, *Philippians and Philemon: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2009), 86.

<sup>80</sup> Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 221.

<sup>81</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 528-529.

congruent with biblical teachings or the true “Spirit” of God’s word. Guarding one’s way according to the word of God is the path for keeping oneself pure (Ps. 119:9). Paul supports prayer and meditation as means to a life that redirects the individual away from adopting the maladaptive behaviors of the society around them.

### **Early Church and Patriarchal Perspectives**

Earnest prayer has been a vital part of the early church as noted throughout the book of Acts. As the early church began to grow, the Christians devoted themselves to the “apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). In chapter six of Acts, the Apostles assigned others to certain tasks to allow them more time in “prayer and serving the world” (Acts 6:4). The need for a prayer centered life to obediently follow God is seen from the early church and throughout history. The following patriarchs and practice utilized Scripture centered practices: Origen, St. Augustine, John Cassian, St. Francis of Assisi, Claire of Assisi, Brother Lawrence and *Lectio Divina*.

#### *Origen*

Origen is one of the great Christian intellectuals from the area of Alexandria during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> to the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. From Christianity’s infancy, disciples of Jesus wrestled with ways to synthesize its principles in the midst of an imposing non-Christian philosophy. As Origen notes,

Certainly, even if I shall not have been able to understand everything, if I am nevertheless, busily engaged in the divine Scriptures and “I meditate on the law of God day and night” and at no time at all do I desist inquiring, discussing, investigating, and certainly, what is greatest, praying God and asking for understanding from him who “teaches all humankind knowledge,” I shall appear to dwell “at the well of vision.” ... You too, therefore, if you shall search the prophetic visions, if you always inquire, always desire to learn, if you meditate on

these things, if you remain in them, you too will receive a blessing from the Lord and dwell “at the well of vision.” For the Lord Jesus will appear to you also, “in the way,” and will open the Scriptures to you so that you may say, “Was not our hearts burning within us when he opened to us the Scriptures?” But he appears to those who think about him and meditate on him and live “in his law day and night.” Homilies on Genesis II.3<sup>82</sup>

Origen’s doctrine moves the focus away from achieving a special kind of knowledge to the love of Christ and obedience to Scripture. In the above quote, Origen references a passage from Luke 24:32 when Jesus walked the road to Emmaus with two disciples. Through their conversation, Jesus opens up the Scriptures to his disciples in a way that was meaningful. This story also envisions the life of present-day disciples as we affectionately draw close to the word of God and find ourselves enraptured by its great treasures, as the Spirit of Christ speaks to us. Origen encourages “spiritual Christians” to be motivated by love, not fear.<sup>83</sup>

### *St. Augustine of Hippo*

St Augustine was born in the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century to a Christian mother and a pagan father. Augustine was born into nobility and early on showed a passion for rhetoric and philosophy. Augustine’s early years were marked by his immoral lifestyle filled with sinful pleasures. Augustine’s conversion experience is captured in his work, *Confessions in Thirteen Books*, later retitled as *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. In the midst of a spiritual crisis, Augustine describes his own conversion into Christianity,

So I was speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when lo!  
I heard from a [neighboring] house a voice, as of a boy or girl, I know not,

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Psalms 1-50*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament vol. 7, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Carmen S. Hardin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008) 6,7.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2002): 9, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.gardnerwebb.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzY5OTgxX19BTg2?sid=f9ae69de-eaed-45ba-b289-8d5f9e4852e8@sessionmgr105&vid=1&format=EB&rid=1>.

chanting, and oft repeating, ‘Take up and read; Take up and read.’ Instantly my countenance altered. . . .<sup>84</sup>

Crisis led Augustine to a place of deep, prayerful conversation with God, in which he bared his soul. In his moment of soul searching, Augustine was directed to read the Word of God, and he began with “the Gospel.”<sup>85</sup> Augustine’s own meditative and contemplative practice of prayer in the “Word of Life” found “instructions” to produce “fruitfulness of action.”<sup>86</sup> Augustine’s life was transformed from one of immorality to a life known for his love for Christ, masterful Christian writings and devotion to prayer.

### *John Cassian*

Born in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century and later died in 435 A.D. John Cassian, along with men like Jerome, studied the life of men and women living in the deserts of the Middle East; they were responsible for sharing the “desert spirituality” with others in the West.<sup>87</sup> Based on Cassian’s work and the experience gleaned from the desert fathers, Western monastic communities took the desert traditions and further developed two types of meditative prayers in the West. One is a type of continual meditation on Scripture is *Lectio Divina*, and the other is *Centering Prayer*, also known as the *Jesus Prayer* in Greece and Russia.<sup>88</sup> Cassian’s work kept alive the focus of spiritual growth and being attuned to hearing from God, although still primarily shared among religious orders of the time, the practice of meditation was accepted by early church fathers and mothers.

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<sup>84</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey (Santa Cruz, CA: Evinity Publishing Inc., 2009), 124-125, Amazon Kindle.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>87</sup> Michael and Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament*, 24.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 25.

*St. Francis of Assisi*

St. Francis is a person of note in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Although Francis was born into wealth, it was the stories of his generosity and benevolence that were highlighted throughout his life. After serving in the military and a possible stint of depression, Francis felt the futility in following the military “lord” and chose instead to serve the “God in heaven.”<sup>89</sup> Francis’ contribution to spirituality in the thirteenth century was appealing to all classes of people, especially to the ordinary people.<sup>90</sup> Francis introduced a way of prayer and spirituality that was open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and one did not need to be educated to experience, to practice, and receive the benefits of spiritual growth.<sup>91</sup> The Franciscan spirituality is God-centered and requires the participant to meditatively think about God’s presence and ways one can take action in keeping with God’s nature.

*Clare of Assisi*

Clare was born into nobility around 1194 A.D. and, when she became of age, she rebuffed her lifestyle and chose to live in poverty. Although Clare was twelve years younger than Francis of Assisi, she sought to live a life of poverty and servitude that emulated Francis. Clare did much to persevere the way of Franciscan Spirituality. For Clare and other women of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was difficult for their voices to be heard. Clare was the first woman to have a *Rule* approved by the Pope.<sup>92</sup> A few of

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<sup>89</sup> Augustine Thompson, *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 10-11.

<sup>90</sup> Michael and Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament*, 70.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



Clare's writings have survived the centuries in the form of letters to her sister Agnes.

Clare possessed a deep love for the crucified Christ that drew her into communion with Christ through contemplation. Writing to her sister, Clare exhorts,

Place your mind before the mirror of eternity!  
Place your soul in the brilliance of glory!  
Place your heart in the figure of divine substance!  
And transform your entire being into the image  
of the Godhead Itself through contemplation.<sup>93</sup>

In her third letter to Agnes, Clare shares her exuberance and awe of her personal transformation through contemplation. The literal interpretation of contemplation means "one in mind with."<sup>94</sup> The letter reflects Clare giving of her whole self over to the divine in order to become more like Christ. Through the path of contemplation, Clare was able to experience spiritual growth and the life transforming power of God's Spirit.

### *Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection*

Born, Nicholas Herman, Lawrence was born in France and his life spanned most of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Early on he experienced times of spiritual distress as tried to reconcile his past and his faith. After a particular struggle, Lawrence determined to yield himself completely to God. He sought the support of a religious community to aid his spiritual development and joined a Carmelite Order in Paris, France, as a young man. He spent his years serving as a cook and eventually became a lay brother.<sup>95</sup> On Brother

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<sup>92</sup> Ilia Delio, introduction to *Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007), xvi.

<sup>93</sup> Delio, *Clare of Assisi*, 54.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> "Brother Lawrence Biography" (2017) <http://thepracticeofthepresenceofgod.com/brother-lawrence/>, accessed March 31, 2017.

Lawrence's defining experience of surrendering his life to God, his friend, Joseph de Beaufort, writes,

He didn't realize he had already been forgiven. However, from then on, the firmness of his soul grew. . . . He received a divine revelation of God's majesty that illuminated his spirit, dissipated all his fears, and ended his inner struggles and pain. From that moment, meditating on the character and loving kindness of God molded Brother Lawrence's character. It became so natural to him that he passed the last forty years of his life in continuous practice of the presence of God, which he described as a quiet conversation with Him.<sup>96</sup>

Brother Lawrence developed a life of prayer that impacted his countenance so greatly that others, including his superiors, sought him for wisdom and guidance in godly living and prayer. A series of interviews entitled, *Conversations*, along with a collection of thirteen letters and other writings, *Spiritual Maxims*, are the documented works of Brother Lawrence.<sup>97</sup> These writings have been preserved and passed down through the centuries as *The Practice of The Presence of God*. Brother Lawrence's writings are a stark reminder for Christians today, of the blessing and peace in finding delight in God's presence.

### *Lectio Divina*

As noted earlier the practice of *lectio divina* predates the Benedictine monks who are credited with preserving its practice for centuries to come. Other forms of Christian spirituality and prayer — Augustinian, Franciscan, Thomistic, and Ignatian — are all variations of *lectio divina*.<sup>98</sup> The Ignatian prayer is based on a style of prayer used by the

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<sup>96</sup> Lawrence, Joseph de Beaufort, "The Life of Brother Lawrence," in *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982) 421-429, Amazon Kindle.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

<sup>98</sup> Michael and Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament*, 26.

Israelites over a thousand years before the birth of Christ.<sup>99</sup> Followers of the Ignatian Method may use the steps of *lectio divina* instead of “ten points” for meditation and contemplation. *Lectio divina* is a four-part process primarily utilizing Scripture for the reading. Latin phrases are used to outline the steps, which consist of *Lectio*, *Meditatio*, *Oratio*, and *Contemplatio*.<sup>100</sup> All together it is considered as a form of prayer, but in this practice the dialogue of a conversation is evident between the God and humanity.

Michael Casey notes, “*Lectio divina* is a technique of prayer and a guide to living. It is a means of descending to the level of the heart and of finding God.”<sup>101</sup> The intentional listening and obedience to what the Divine is saying to the heart of an individual leads to transformation. *Lectio divina* has a broad appeal because it makes use of the four psychological functions: Sensing, Intuition, Thinking and Feeling.<sup>102</sup> Although the process is structured, it still allows for flexibility for the individual as well as inward and outward processing. As the learning styles of individuals vary, *lectio divina* offers a meditative process that is adaptable to the individual’s personality. *Lectio divina* has also been proven viable in group settings, especially in places where there is a shortage of Bibles.<sup>103</sup> Dysinger noticed reports in increased trust among group members as they build community with the group. There is therefore ample historical evidence that supports the idea that followers of Jesus Christ practiced meditation for spiritual growth.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>100</sup> Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, 57.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., Preface, vi.

<sup>102</sup> Michael and Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament*, 32.

<sup>103</sup> Luke Dysinger, “Accepting the embrace of God: The ancient art of *lectio divina*,” Saint Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, February 13, 2009, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://www.valyermo.com>.

In retrospect, since biblical times, history is replete with stories of men and women who have encountered and experienced God through meditation. The voices of Christians in the past validate the practice of meditation and being still before God in order to hear Him and to be transformed by His divine presence and power. It is argued that the nature of the Baptist church and its autonomy makes it more difficult to ascertain precise interpretations on its overall views and practices on meditation throughout history.<sup>104</sup> Historically, Baptists have identified with the work and ministry of Jesus and also acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in the individual and collective lives of believers.

Prayer continues to be an integral part of Baptist spirituality. It is central to Baptist theology as well as the work of the Trinity, of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Baptist Articles of Faith (National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.) and the Baptist Faith and Message (Southern Baptist Convention) each supports a history of faith in Scripture and practice of prayer.<sup>105</sup> Although prayer is considered essential, different methods of prayer have not always been adapted by changing cultures. History has proven that some facets of the Christian have not been maintained or practiced as in ages past.

Prayer through meditation and contemplation is a focused approach to communication intimacy with God. Participants are also open to hearing from and being obedient to God. The obedient life is one of transformation into the image of Christ.

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<sup>104</sup> Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America*, Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series (New York, Columbia University Press, 2005), 11-12.

<sup>105</sup> National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. "Articles of Faith," (2016), accessed March 18, 2016, <http://www.nationalbaptist.com/about-us/what-we-believe.html>. and Southern Baptist Convention, "Basic Beliefs," (2016), accessed March 18, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp>.

This project's focus is on teaching prayer through Scripture meditation and contemplation as a means of coping. Although an ancient practice, *lectio divina* shows promise for meeting the needs of the Mount Moriah Baptist Church and the project goals for spiritual growth. Many other prayer models are based on *lectio divina*, therefore it will serve as a good foundation to teach individuals how to prayerfully meditate and contemplate on Scripture and allow the divine process of allowing God to speak to our hearts.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CRITICAL EVALUATION

This Doctor of Ministry project employed a number of surveys that were completed by a small group. The group completed pre and post surveys to assess their level of understanding of meditation and contemplation. The spiritual assessment surveys consisted of a combination of Visual Analogue scales and Likert-type scales. In this project, the continuum measured a period of six weeks. The post-project surveys reflected changes in the participant's perception of stress, as well as spiritual growth among participants.

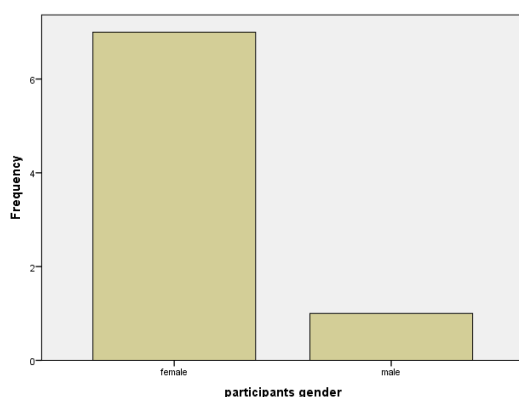
A goal of this project was to track the perceived effectiveness of the participants' prayer life. Additionally, I have monitored changes in the level of understanding and changes in the personal prayer habits of the participants were tracked through pre and post surveys. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS and determined the viability of meditation and contemplation as coping mechanisms among the small group participants. Qualitative data provided through verbal and written comments, student interviews and weekly evaluations are included in this report to reflect the participants' level of interest.

#### **Report and Analysis of Quantitative Data**

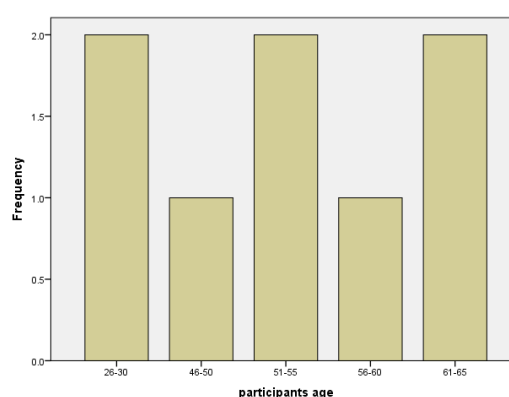
The quantitative data collected for this project includes responses from the eight participants that voluntarily signed-up for this study. The term participant(s) will be used to refer to the eight members of the study and the term student(s) will denote those who participated in the control groups. The gender of the participants included seven females and one male, as graphically represented in Figure 1A below. Furthermore, Figure 1 B

below, reflects the distribution of age groups. There were two participants in each of the following age groups: “26-30,” “51-55,” and “61-65.” Completing the group were two participants who respectively fell into the age groupings of “46-50,” and “56-60.” The group is weighted toward those who are past middle age. No participants fell into grouping of ages between “31-35,” “36-40,” and “41-45” in the study. This age gap of fifteen years is a reflection of the aging congregation at Mount Moriah Baptist Church and somewhat representative of the participation level of the adult age groups for Wednesday night Bible studies.

**Figure 1 A. Participant’s Gender**



**Figure 1 B. Participant’s Age**

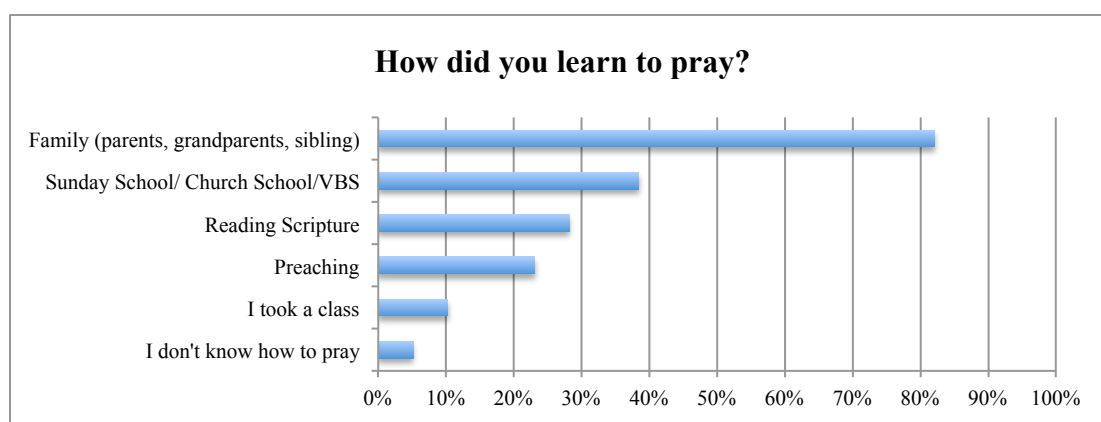


A General Pre-Survey (Appendix A-1) was designed to gather data to determine the familiarity with the categories of prayer, meditation, and contemplation. This survey was completed by the study group and a control group before any lectures or detailed instructions were given on meditation and contemplation. The Meditation and Contemplation (Med&Cont) group met on Wednesday evenings along with other adult Wednesday evening Bible study groups, whose studies started a week prior to the study. The General Pre-Survey was administered to two other adult classes: Experiencing God (ExpGod) and Autopsy of a Deceased Church (AuDecCH) to serve as a control group. In

the ExpGod class, six students were surveyed and in AuDecCH class, twenty-five students were surveyed. In comparison, regarding the General Post-Survey (Appendix A-2), the number of students surveyed are as follows: Med&Cont (8), ExpGod (5), and AuDecCH (28). All of the General Surveys were completed anonymously.

The first question on the General Pre-Survey, “How did you learn to pray?” is based on a premise that prayer is taught and learned. The remaining questions are as follows: How are we being taught to pray; who is teaching us to pray; and are we learning how to listen to God in prayer? Participants had the option of selecting as many choices as they wanted, to reflect how they have learned to pray. The analysis shown in Figure 2 below, reveals the responses from all surveys.

**Figure 2. General Pre-Survey: Question One – Survey Total**



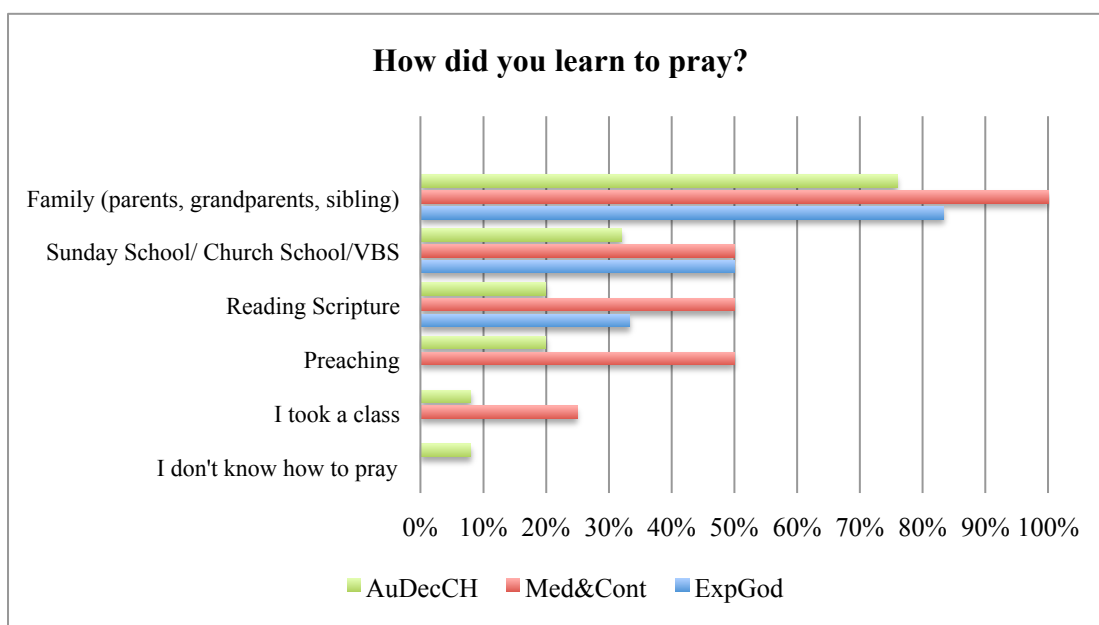
In Figure 2 above, 82% of those surveyed identified “Family” as a major influence in learning how to pray. Sunday School/Church/VBS was selected by 38% of those surveyed, followed by Reading Scripture at 28%, Preaching at 23% and “I took a Class” at 10%. The previous categories are church related, which is not surprising that the church does have some influence on an individual learning to pray. The bars that reflect the church’s influence also indicate an opportunity that the church can address



when teaching individuals more about prayer. The remaining 5% of those surveyed indicated they do not know how to pray and only marked that response. General Pre-Survey Question One, “How did you learn to pray?” was only asked on the pre-survey and not on the post-survey. Of those surveyed, 95% indicated like they have an understanding of prayer and have been exposed to prayer in a learning environment.

A further breakdown of this data shows how participants in the project compared to students in the control group. Figure 3 below, shows how students in each class responded to the first question on the General Pre-Survey.

**Figure 3. General Pre-Survey: Question One – Summary By Class**



The “Family” selection on the survey was the primary modality selected by each class. AuDecCH had 76% of it’s students select “Family,” with the next choice being “Sunday School/Church School/VBS” at 32%. Rounding out the selections for AuDecCH are “Reading Scripture” and “Preaching,” both at 20% and “I took a class” and “I don’t know how to pray,” both at 8%. Med&Cont had 100% of it’s students

select “Family,” to make it the top choice for this group. There was a three way tie at 50% as Med&Cont participants selected “Sunday School/Church School/VBS,” “Reading Scripture,” and “Preaching” as being an influence in their learning how to pray. Rounding out the selections for Med&Cont was “I took a class” at 25%, and no participant selected “I don’t know how to pray.” ExpGod saw 83% of it’s students select “Family.” The next two selections were “Sunday School/Church School/VBS” at 50% and “Reading Scripture” at 33%. ExpGod students did not select any other categories.

The need for the church to offer teachings on prayer is evident in the AuDecCH class with only 44% of it’s students selecting a learning modality other than “Family” and 8% selecting “I don’t know how to pray.”<sup>106</sup> None of those surveyed from the small groups, ExpGod and Med&Cont, selected “I don’t know how to pray.” The small groups are considered advance studies which reflects in the confidence of both small groups in their ability to pray. Participants in the Med&Cont have high percentages in a broader spectrum of the learning modalities represented in the survey. The exposure to different ways of learning to pray may speak to their pursuit of a more satisfactory prayer life or an awareness of prayer in various settings.

The next two questions were on both the pre and post surveys. The questions “What do you think when you hear meditation?” and “What do you think when you hear contemplation?” were designed to solicit initial reaction to these terms. This research showed different definitions as well as practices for both meditation and contemplation.

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<sup>106</sup> Note: The 44% is based on the total number of students from Autopsy of A Deceased Church who selected at least one of the following selections: “Sunday School/Church School/VBS,” “Reading Scriptures,” “Preaching,” or “I took a class.” Therefore 56% of those students did not choose any of the learning modalities, which may be associated with learning to pray through the church.

In Table 2 below, there is an overall favorable response to the term meditation by all the classes. The first two responses, “Something I practice” and “Something I want to learn,” are considered favorable responses.

**Table 2. General Survey, Pre/Post – Question Two**

What do you think when you hear meditation?	ExpGod		Med&Cont		AuDecCH	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Something I practice	83%	60%	38%	50%	36%	46%
Something I want to learn			62%	50%	40%	54%
I don't think about meditation	17%	20%				
Only for other religions					4%	
None of the above		20%			20%	

The ExpGod class had the highest percentage of students who practiced meditation, although that score dropped on the post survey from 83% down to 60%. Considering the sample size for ExpGod, it represents one person moving from “Something I practice” (60%) to “None of the above” (20%). There is consistently one survey response of “I don’t think about meditation,” rating 17% on the pre survey and 20% on the post survey.

The AuDecCH class had “Something I practice” (36%) and “Something I want to learn” (40%) for a total of 76%, yielding a favorable responses on the pre survey. The unfavorable responses for AuDecCH included “None of the above” (20%) and “Only for other religions” (4%) for a total of 24% indicating an unfavorable response to “Something I want to learn.” There was a shift in the AuDecCH class on the post survey as 100% responded favorably to meditation.

The Med&Cont class remained consistent in their favorable response to meditation maintaining a 100% on both the pre and post surveys. Ratings on “Something

I practice” increased from 38% to 50% points. The selection “Something I want to learn” decreased from 62% on the pre survey to 50% on the post survey. The data reflects one person moving into the category of practicing meditation.

The data indicates that overall there has been an increase of 22% points in favor of meditation. There was one student who opted for “None of the Above” on the post survey. The total percent favorable responses for all three classes were 82% on the pre survey and 95% on the post survey. The 16% point increase in a favorable response toward meditation means that it was practiced or something the student was interested in learning.

In Table 3 below, there is an overall favorable response to the term contemplation by all the classes. As in the previous table, the first two responses “Something I practice” and “Something I want to learn,” are considered favorable responses.

**Table 3. General Survey, Pre/Post – Question Three**

What do you think when you hear contemplation?	ExpGod		Med&Cont		AuDecCH	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Something I practice	83%	100%	24%	24%	20%	25%
Something I want to learn			38%	63%	36%	39%
I don't think about contemplation	17%		38%	13%	20%	11%
Only for other religions						4%
None of the above					24%	21%

The ExpGod class had the highest percentage of students who practiced contemplation, the score increased on the post survey from 83% to 100%. The increase on the post survey came from the selection, “I don’t think about contemplation,” at 17% on the pre survey. I do not know what changed in this class other than to assume that a small group discussion on the subject might have occurred with their facilitators during the six weeks of the study.

The AuDecCH class had “Something I practice” (20%) and “Something I want to learn” (36%), for a total of 56% favorable responses on the pre survey. The unfavorable responses for AuDecCH included “None of the above” (24%) and “I don’t think about contemplation” (20%), for a total of 44% indicating an unfavorable response. The post survey saw a slight improvement, but there remains an uneasiness with the AuDecCH class with contemplation. The unfavorable responses to contemplation dropped in two selections--“I don’t think about contemplation” (11%) and “None of the above” (21%). The selection, “Only for other religions,” is 4% on the post survey after not registering on the pre survey. The post survey favorable responses from AuDecCH are “Something I practice” (25%) and “Something I want to learn” (39%), which is a 15% increase over the pre survey.

The Med&Cont class was initially unfamiliar with the practice of meditation. Their response was similar to AuDecCH class, although not as unfavorable. On the pre survey the Med&Cont class rated “Something I practice” (24%), “Something I want to learn” (38%), and “I don’t think about contemplation” (38%). The ratings did have some movement on the post survey as the participants selected “Something I practice” (24%), “Something I want to learn” (63%), and “I don’t think about contemplation” (13%). The top favorable response for contemplation remained the same, but there was 66% in those interested learning more about contemplation. There was a decrease of 13% points (one person) in the response, “I don’t think about contemplation.” The unfavorable response may be a result of insufficient instruction on the part of the instructor or an absence on the part of the participant. More practice in class may have helped to increase a favorable response.

The overall favorable response of 25% toward contemplation on the post survey is a good indicator of the students being receptive to this type of prayer. The unfavorable response toward contemplation decreased from 41% to 25% points.<sup>107</sup> The response reflects how well this study has been received by the adult students of Wednesday night Bible study, and the interest it has fostered in meditation and contemplation. Of the unfavorable response toward contemplation, 91% came from the AuDecCH class. This may be an indication of the level of exposure this class experienced concerning meditation and contemplation. I assume the small increase in the AuDecCH class's favorable responses would be from a few individuals talking to others on their own.

The fourth question on the General Pre-Survey had to be omitted due to an error in choices listed. The question, "What is your confidence in your prayer life to help you cope?" was corrected on the General Post-Survey. Due to the error, there was no comparison between the pre and post responses. Table 4 below, shows the results of the post survey for comparison of the three classes.

**Table 4. General Survey, Post – Question Four**

<b>What is your confidence in your prayer life to help you cope?</b>	ExpGod		Med&Cont		AuDecCH	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Very Confident		80%		25%		47%
Confident		20%		62%		39%
Somewhat confident						14%
No confidence				13%		
None of the Above						

The top three responses in Table 4 above, of "Very Confident," "Confident," and "Somewhat confident," are considered favorable responses. The ExpGod class was confident in their prayer life to help them cope, rating "Very Confident" (80%) and

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<sup>107</sup> The percentages are based on all classes representing 39 pre-surveys and 41 post-surveys.

“Confident” (20%). The AuDecCH class had all favorable responses as well. The AuDecCH class ratings are as follows: “Very Confident” (47%), “Confident” (39%), and “Somewhat confident” (14%). The AuDecCH class had all favorable ratings regardless of the fact that the pre survey results showed that some students responded, “I don’t know how to pray.”

The participants in Med&Cont have been awakened to a new depth of prayer that may have influenced them to remain favorable in their overall response, even though the Med&Cont class was not as confident in their prayer life to help them cope at the end of six weeks. The Med&Cont class had an unfavorable response of “No confidence,” which represented 13% of the participants or one person. The majority or 87% of the class responded favorably, rating “Very Confident” (25%) and “Confident” (62%). The participant who responded with “No confidence” in their prayer life to help them cope is revealing. This response is not only a reflection of this class but also the first question in the pre survey, as participants responded to how they learned to pray. I assume this may be an error, as later surveys did not support this response.

Question five on the General Surveys addressed the individual’s sense of alleviation of stress after praying. In Table 5 below, those surveyed responded to the question, “When stressed, how do you feel after praying?”

**Table 5. General Survey, Pre/Post – Question Five**

<b>When stressed, how do you feel after praying</b>	<b>ExpGod</b>		<b>Med&amp;Cont</b>		<b>AuDecCH</b>	
	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>
Uplifted	33%	40%	38%	75%	64%	64%
Relieved	67%	60%	62%	25%	32%	36%
About the same					4%	
Worse						
None of the Above						

The first two responses in Table 5 are considered favorable responses. The ExpGod class had favorable responses on both the pre and post surveys. On the pre survey, 33% claimed to be “Uplifted” and 67% reported to be “Relieved.” The post surveys revealed an increase in both favorable responses, as 40% noted to be “Uplifted” with 60% being “Relieved.” The AuDecCH class also experienced an increase of 4% points favorable responses. The pre survey ratings are as follows: “Uplifted” (64%), “Relieved” (32%), and “About the same” (4%). The post surveys revealed no change for those who indicated to be “Uplifted” after prayer, while those “Relieved” moved up to 36%. Of those surveyed in the AuDecCH class, all felt either “Relieved” or “Uplifted” after prayer. This translated to a positive shift in favorable from 96% to 100%.

The Med&Cont class was similar to the ExpGod class ratings on the pre survey. The Med&Cont class had all favorable responses, rating “Uplifted” (38%) and “Relieved” (62%). The post survey saw a larger movement out of all the classes as the participants rated “Uplifted” (75%) and “Relieved” (25%). When undergoing stress, participants in the study moved from feeling “Relieved” to “Uplifted” after prayer.

The responses in Question Five did not support the “No confidence” response to Question Four regarding the participant’s prayer life. The participants responded “No confidence” in their prayer life in Question Four and later in Question Five, submitted a favorable response to their sense of relief after prayer. Moreover, Question Five did not show an unfavorable response from any of the participants (Med&Cont) of this study.

The General Survey was designed to provide a context for analyzing this study. The comparative analysis of the Meditation and Contemplation class to the control groups’ data provided some valuable insight for the study. First, it revealed an



opportunity for Mount Moriah Baptist Church to teach the members how to pray and introduce a variety of prayer styles. Secondly, the conversation generated by this study has increased an interest in meditation and contemplation as evidenced by more favorable responses on the post-survey. The last insight to address is the change in attitude of how the participants felt after praying. There was a 50% increase in participants' feeling "Uplifted" after praying when stressed. The increase in the participants' euphoria after prayer is a positive indicator for this study.

### **Statistical Analysis of Small Group Surveys**

A series of surveys were designed to gather data for this project. Each survey had a general theme to capture for analysis. Participants in the study group were given a Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) survey (Appendix B). The Perceived Stress Scale was used to gather information on the small group participants' perception of their present level of stress. Survey1 (Appendix C) invited the participants to reflect on their awareness of God and the utilization of meditative and contemplative practices toward their spiritual well being. Although Survey2 (Appendix D) is similar to Survey1, Survey2 allowed participants to assess their spiritual coping toward stress. This survey also provided a way to determine the consistency of the responses from Survey1. Survey3 (Appendix E) used a linear scale to measure the participant's confidence level in successfully performing certain spiritual activities. Survey4 (Appendix F) asked students to rate their proficiency in practicing five spiritual disciplines (Personal Prayer, Meditation, Contemplation, Fasting and Bible Study). Survey5a and Survey5g (Appendix G) included two surveys, the first part asked students to report their "actual" practice of the five spiritual disciplines. In the second part, participants reported their "goal" of

practicing each discipline. Each of the surveys were administered as a pre-survey and post-survey

The analysis, at this juncture, has addressed percentages and changes in percentage points as an indication of the progress of the study group in comparison to other members of the congregation and within the group itself. In the following pages, other statistical methods will be used to analyze the data from the remaining surveys to determine the significance and correlation of data.<sup>108</sup> In designing the surveys, there was a tendency for “favorable” responses to carry a higher value; therefore, the responses to some questions were purposely inverted, giving the “unfavorable” response the higher value. This adjustment was necessary to discourage “top box” responses and allow participants to give due consideration to their responses. Additionally, there were certain questions which the favorable response carried a lower value or inverted.<sup>109</sup> The inverted questions were accounted for by the analyst and adjusted accordingly for proper analysis.

Descriptive statistics was used to produce an initial summary of the survey values. This analysis allowed for an initial comparison of the data. Table 6 below, compares the Mean and Standard Deviation of the pre and post totals of the Perceived Stress Scale and the Spiritual Assessment Surveys.

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<sup>108</sup> Dr. David Carscaddon has aided me in my data analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

<sup>109</sup> SPSS allows the analyst to “reverse” the values of responses to accurately reflect the favorable response and standardize the data.

**Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Select Pre and Post Surveys**

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PSSPreTot	16.14	7.690	7
PSSPostTot	14.88	8.543	8
Survey1PreTot	89.86	14.462	7
Survey1PostTot	102.57	5.798	7
Survey2PreTot	40.43	4.826	7
Survey2PostTot	45.71	5.090	7
Survey3PreTot	433.75	115.256	8
Survey3PostTot	466.25	123.974	8
Survey4PreTot	11.63	2.875	8
Survey4PostTot	13.50	2.330	8
Survey5apreTot	18.63	6.163	8
Survey5apostTot	24.43	2.225	7
Survey5gpreTot	28.50	4.209	8
Survey5gpostTot	28.88	3.944	8

Comparisons in Table 6 should only be made for like pre and post surveys. For example, Survey1 measured the participants' awareness of God and utilization of meditative and contemplative practices toward their spiritual well being. Survey1PreTot had a sample size of 7 participants with a mean of 89.86 and a standard deviation (std. dev.) of 14.462. At the end of the project, Survey1PostTot had a sample size of 7 participants with a mean of 102.57 and a std. dev. of 5.798. Since favorable responses carry a higher value, the increase in the post-survey values is a good sign of desired results. The std. dev. decreased from 14.462 down to 5.798. The smaller std. dev. reflects a decrease in the variance of the responses. Further analysis is needed to determine if this particular change is of statistical significance. In Table 6 above, the PSSPreTot has a sample size of 7 with a mean of 16.14 and a std. dev. of 7.690. The PSSPostTot has a sample size of 8 with a mean of 14.88 and a std. dev. of 8.543. The change in mean score

indicated that the participants perceived themselves as being less stressed at the end of the project. The statistical significance of these ratings and others will be discussed later in this report.

Survey2 assessed the participants' spiritual coping toward stress. Survey2PreTot had a sample size of 7 participants with a mean of 40.43 and a std. dev. of 4.826. Survey2PostTot had a sample size of 7 with a mean of 45.71 and a std. dev. of 5.090. The increase in the mean is a favorable response for the study as participants reflected a stronger spiritual attitude toward coping with stressors in their lives.

Survey3 used a linear scale to measure the participant's confidence level to successfully perform certain spiritual activities. Survey3PreTot had a sample size of 8 participants with a mean of 433.75 and a std. dev. of 115.256. Survey3PostTot had a sample size of 8 with a mean of 466.25 and a std. dev. of 123.974. The increase in the mean is a favorable response as participants are reflecting an increase in their confidence level to perform selected spiritual activities.

Survey4 measured how participants rated their proficiency in practicing five spiritual disciplines. Survey4PreTot had a sample size of 8 participants with a mean of 11.63 and a std. dev. of 2.875. Survey4PostTot had a sample size of 8 with a mean of 13.50 and a std. dev. of 2.330. The increase in the mean is a favorable response for the study as participants are reflecting feel more proficient in performing selected spiritual disciplines.

Survey5 included two surveys, Survey5a measured the participants' "actual" practice of five spiritual disciplines and Survey5g participants reported their "goal" of practicing each discipline. Survey5apreTot had a sample size of 8 participants with a

mean of 18.63 and a std. dev. of 6.163. Survey5apostTot had a sample size of 7 with a mean of 24.43 and a std. dev. of 2.225. One participant did not respond to two of the five questions so SPSS did not include that survey in the calculation. The increase in the mean is a favorable response for the study as participants showed an increase in their “actual” practice of carrying out their spiritual disciplines. The std. dev. also reflected a tighter variance as participants reflect similar practices. Survey5gpreTot produced a mean of 28.50 and a std. dev. of 4.209 for 8 participants. Survey5gpostTot revealed a mean of 28.88 and a std. dev. of 3.944 for 8 participants. Survey5g showed very little change, if any, in the goals of practicing spiritual disciplines, which was expected because of the ambitious expectations of a goal.

This project sought to make a case for meditation and contemplation as coping mechanisms to help practitioners to manage coping with their stress. To establish the relationship between variables related to prayer and an individual’s perception of their level of stress, the Pearson Correlation method was used “to describe variables and their potential relationships” primarily “in the early stages of research.”<sup>110</sup> In this study, the small group surveys were compared against one another to determine if a relationship existed and the strength of the relationship. Strong correlations have a value of (+/-) 0.7, moderate correlations have a value of (+/-) 0.4 to 0.6, and correlation values below (+/-) 0.4 were considered to be weak.<sup>111</sup> A positive (+) correlation indicates that the variables move in the same direction and a negative (-) correlation indicates that the variables move in opposite directions. SPSS flagged certain values with an asterisk (\*) to signify a

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<sup>110</sup> D. M. Carscaddon, (2016). Introduction to statistics and research methods. Unpublished manuscript, 172.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 167

significance of 0.05 (Pearson Correlation values of +/-0.755 up to +/-0.865) and a double asterisk (\*\*) to signify a significance of 0.01 (Pearson Correlation values of +/-0.870 and higher). A significance of 0.05 means that there is only a 5% chance that the variables were not related and a significance of 0.01 means that chances of being incorrect is 1%.

Table 7 below, compares the correlation of the small group surveys.

**Table 7. Survey Correlations Table**

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
		PSSPreTot	PSSPostTot	Survey1PreTot	Survey1PostTot	Survey2PreTot	Survey2PostTot	Survey3PreTot	Survey3PostTot	Survey4PreTot	Survey4PostTot	Survey5aPreTot	Survey5aPostTot	Survey5gPreTot	Survey5gPostTot
PSSPreTot	Pearson Correlation	1	.790*	-.406	-.552	-.747	-.642	-.842*	-.436	-.594	-.773*	-.311	-.007	.678	.621
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.034	.366	.199	.053	.120	.017	.329	.160	.042	.498	.990	.094	.136
	N	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	7
PSSPostTot	Pearson Correlation	.790*	1	.043	-.701	-.383	-.608	-.546	-.651	-.287	-.635	.002	-.065	.395	.262
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.034		.927	.079	.396	.147	.161	.081	.490	.091	.997	.889	.332	.530
	N	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8
Survey1PreTot	Pearson Correlation	-.406	.043	1	-.289	.794*	.235	.636	-.239	.605	.071	.809*	.051	-.507	-.551
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.366	.927		.530	.033	.612	.125	.605	.150	.880	.027	.924	.246	.200
	N	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	7
Survey1PostTot	Pearson Correlation	-.552	-.701	-.289	1	.341	.775*	.418	.759*	.386	.920**	.016	-.572	.114	.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.199	.079	.530		.454	.041	.350	.048	.393	.003	.974	.236	.807	.879
	N	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	7
Survey2PreTot	Pearson Correlation	-.747	-.383	.794*	.341	1	.745	.852*	.182	.827*	.657	.811*	-.354	-.427	-.508
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.053	.396	.033	.454		.054	.015	.696	.022	.109	.027	.492	.339	.245
	N	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	7
Survey2PostTot	Pearson Correlation	-.642	-.608	.235	.775*	.745	1	.530	.356	.798*	.899**	.597	-.722	.042	-.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.120	.147	.612	.041	.054		.221	.433	.031	.006	.157	.105	.928	.951
	N	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	7
Survey3PreTot	Pearson Correlation	-.842*	-.546	.636	.418	.852*	.530	1	.566	.509	.657	.419	.008	-.664	-.697
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.161	.125	.350	.015	.221		.144	.197	.077	.302	.987	.072	.055
	N	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8
Survey3PostTot	Pearson Correlation	-.436	-.651	-.239	.759*	.182	.356	.566	1	.032	.616	-.240	-.065	-.188	-.211
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.329	.081	.605	.048	.696	.433	.144		.941	.104	.568	.890	.657	.615
	N	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8
Survey4PreTot	Pearson Correlation	-.594	-.287	.605	.386	.827*	.798*	.509	.032	1	.565	.870**	-.463	.006	.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.160	.490	.150	.393	.022	.031	.197	.941		.144	.005	.295	.989	.962
	N	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8
Survey4PostTot	Pearson Correlation	-.773*	-.635	.071	.920**	.657	.899**	.657	.616	.565	1	.284	-.546	-.146	-.194
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042	.091	.880	.003	.109	.006	.077	.104	.144		.496	.205	.731	.645
	N	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8
Survey5aPreTot	Pearson Correlation	-.311	.002	.809*	.016	.811*	.597	.419	-.240	.870**	.284	1	-.458	.014	-.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.498	.997	.027	.974	.027	.157	.302	.568	.005	.496		.301	.974	.908
	N	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8
Survey5aPostTot	Pearson Correlation	-.007	-.065	.051	-.572	-.354	-.722	.008	-.065	-.463	-.546	-.458	1	-.665	-.504
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.990	.889	.924	.236	.492	.105	.987	.890	.295	.205	.301		.103	.249
	N	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Survey5gPreTot	Pearson Correlation	.678	.395	-.507	.114	-.427	.042	-.664	-.188	.006	-.146	.014	-.665	1	.951**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.094	.332	.246	.807	.339	.928	.072	.657	.989	.731	.974	.103		.000
	N	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8
Survey5gPostTot	Pearson Correlation	.621	.262	-.551	.072	-.508	-.029	-.697	-.211	.020	-.194	-.049	-.504	.951**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.136	.530	.200	.879	.245	.951	.055	.615	.962	.645	.908	.249	.000	
	N	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data in Table 7 above revealed the primary interest for this study, showing how Spiritual Assessment Surveys correlated with the Perceived Stress Scale. The correlation coefficient and significance values in columns A and B depict the relationship of each survey to the Perceived Stress Scale. It was anticipated that as spiritual confidence and proficiency increased, the perceived stress would decrease.

Table 7 shows only three associations that are of significance in columns A and B: PSSPreTot and PSSPostTot, PSSPreTot and Survey3PreTot, and PSSPreTot and Survey4PostTot. The relationship between PSSPreTot and PSSPostTot has a Pearson Correlation coefficient of 0.790 and a significance value of 0.034. The correlation analysis supports the validity and consistency of the Perceived Stress Scale assessment. The remaining two associations of significance are PSSPreTot and Survey3PreTot (-0.842), and PSSPreTot and Survey4PostTot (-0.773). Both surveys reflect an inversed relationship to the Perceived Stress Scale. As confidence and proficiency in spiritual practices and disciplines increased, stress decreased. Most of the Spiritual Assessment surveys in columns A and B have an inversed relationship to the Perceived Stress Scale. While this was anticipated, the strength of the correlations was not consistent and the significance values indicate random chance.

Overall, the Correlation table did not produce the anticipated results for this study. The statistician determined that the small size of sample contributed to the inconsistency of the results. The statistician recommended a larger sample size of at least thirty, to determine the statistical significance of the data. An increase in the sample size translates to narrowing confidence intervals, as uncertainty decreases it with produces greater precision.

The small sample size also impacted the results for the t-test, which was used to determine if the two sets of data were statistically different. One may ask, will the change in scores from pre survey to post survey show a significant difference in scores to validate the impact of this study on meditation and contemplation? Table 8 below presents the paired samples t-tests comparing the small group pre and post surveys. This table provides statistical evidence if there is a change in the participants' responses during the course of the study.

**Table 8. Paired Samples Test**

		Paired Samples Test							
		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	PSSPreTot - PSSPostTot	-0.429	4.962	1.875	-5.017	4.160	-0.229	6	0.827
Pair 2	Survey1PreTot - Survey1PostTot	-12.714	17.066	6.450	-28.497	3.069	-1.971	6	0.096
Pair 3	Survey2PreTot - Survey2PostTot	-5.286	3.546	1.340	-8.565	-2.007	-3.944	6	0.008
Pair 4	Survey3PreTot - Survey3PostTot	-32.500	111.708	39.495	-125.890	60.890	-0.823	7	0.438
Pair 5	Survey4PreTot - Survey4PostTot	-1.875	2.475	0.875	-3.944	0.194	-2.143	7	0.069
Pair 6	Survey5aPreTot - Survey5aPostTot	-5.857	7.925	2.995	-13.187	1.472	-1.955	6	0.098
Pair 7	Survey5gPreTot - Survey5gPostTot	-0.375	1.302	0.460	-1.464	0.714	-0.814	7	0.442

The Paired Samples Test looks for a Sig. (2-tailed) value of .050 or lower to indicate a statistical difference. The only pairing to meet this criterion from the study is Pair 3 (.008), which is Survey2PreTot and Survey2PostTot. The data revealed that the participants had a statistical improvement in their spiritual coping toward stress. Pair 2 (.096), Pair 5 (.069) and Pair 6 (.098) are all close but not considered significant because



the Sig. (2-tailed) values are not lower than .050. Again, the small sample size of data is not large enough to reveal a statistical significance.

The next phase of statistical analysis was the Paired Samples *t* Test. This test compared the means of the pre and post surveys to determine statistical significance.<sup>112</sup> When calculating the Paired Sample Statistics, SPSS produced a new table. Table 9 below, is the new table for the Paired Sample Statistics.

**Table 9. Paired Sample T-Test for Pre and Post Small Group Surveys**

		Paired Samples Statistics			
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PSSPreTot	16.14	7	7.690	2.907
	PSSPostTot	16.57	7	7.635	2.886
Pair 2	Survey1PreTot	89.86	7	14.462	5.466
	Survey1PostTot	102.57	7	5.798	2.192
Pair 3	Survey2PreTot	40.43	7	4.826	1.824
	Survey2PostTot	45.71	7	5.090	1.924
Pair 4	Survey3PreTot	433.75	8	115.256	40.749
	Survey3PostTot	466.25	8	123.974	43.832
Pair 5	Survey4PreTot	11.63	8	2.875	1.017
	Survey4PostTot	13.50	8	2.330	.824
Pair 6	Survey5apreTot	18.57	7	6.655	2.515
	Survey5apostTot	24.43	7	2.225	.841
Pair 7	Survey5gpreTot	28.50	8	4.209	1.488
	Survey5gpostTot	28.88	8	3.944	1.394

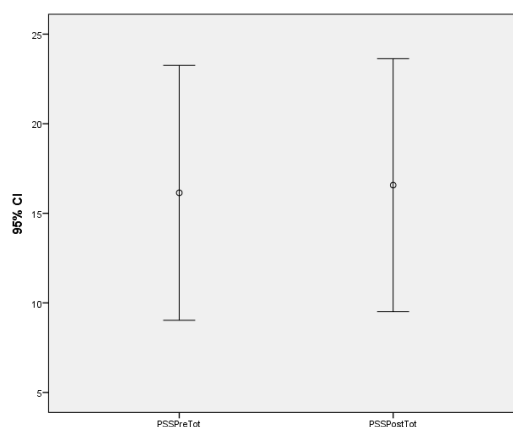
The data in Table 9 is similar to the data reviewed earlier in Table 6. In order to pair the data, SPSS omitted information that was not paired. Therefore in the new table, the mean for PSSPostTot is now 16.57, not 14.88 and the sample size is 7, not 8. In cases where the sample size is similar, data appear to be exactly the same as Table 6. For

<sup>112</sup> Kent State University, “The Paired Samples *t* Test compares two means that are from the same individual, object, or related units. The two means typically represent two different times (e.g., pre-test and post-test with an intervention between the two time points)....” (“SPSS Tutorials: Paired Samples *t* Test,” [Mar 14, 2017], accessed March 14, 2017, <http://libguides.library.kent.edu/SPSS/PairedSamplestTest>.)

example, on Pair 3 (Survey2PreTot and Survey2PostTot), the means (40.43 and 45.71) and the standard deviation (4.826 and 5.090) are the same in both Tables 9 and 6.

The data from Table 9 was used to plot the following series of error bars. Error bars are the graphical representation of the t-test as they plot the overall distribution of the data. The eyelet of the bar's plots is the mean score of each group of data. The legs represent the range in which the data points are expected to fall if this study were repeated one hundred times with a 95% Confidence Interval. If the two groups overlap, then there is no significant difference. Figure 4 below, is the error bar for the Perceived Stress Test.

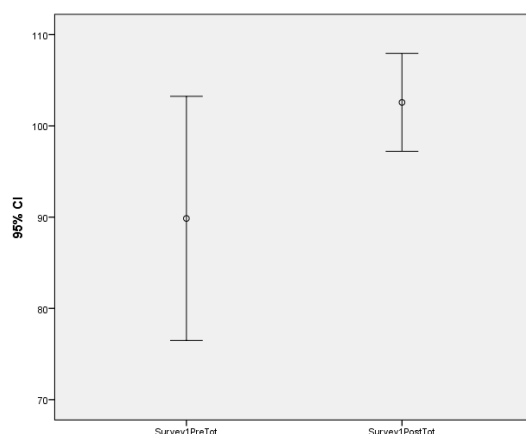
**Figure 4. Error Bar: Perceived Stress Test**



The Error Bar for the Perceived Stress Test, Figure 4, indicates that there is not a significant difference from the pre to post survey results. In fact, they are covering the same range of scores. Gleaning from the present data, no statistical difference in the level of perceived stress among participants was found.

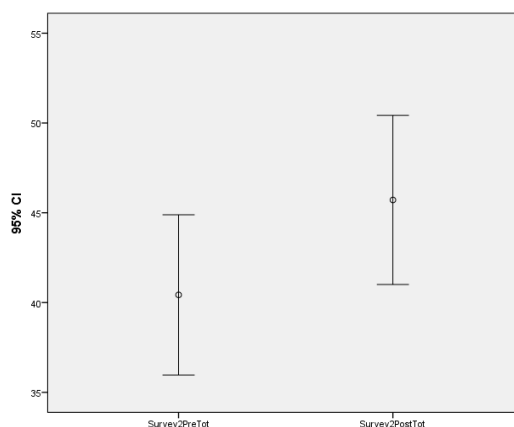
The analysis for Survey1, in Figure 5 below, does not have a statistical difference between the pre and post surveys. There was a shift in the mean, but at the same time, the standard deviation was smaller in the post survey (14.462 vs. 5.798). The range of scores remained in the same area. This survey may show significance with more data.

**Figure 5. Error Bar: Survey One (Awareness of God)**



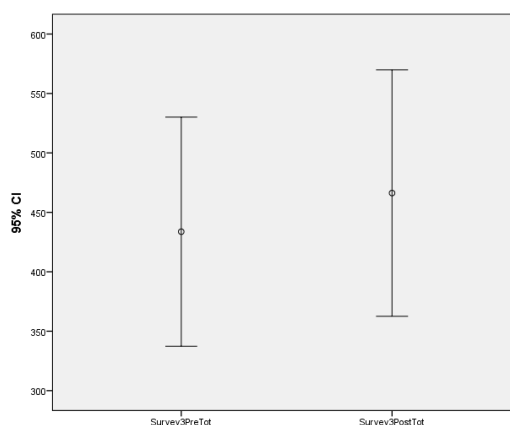
The analysis for Survey2, in Figure 6 below, does have a statistical difference between the pre and post surveys. There is a shift in the mean as well as a shift in the range. Survey2 and Survey1 are similar but have differences in the format. The response to the survey reflected more favorable answers on the post survey.

**Figure 6. Error Bar: Survey Two (Spiritual Coping)**



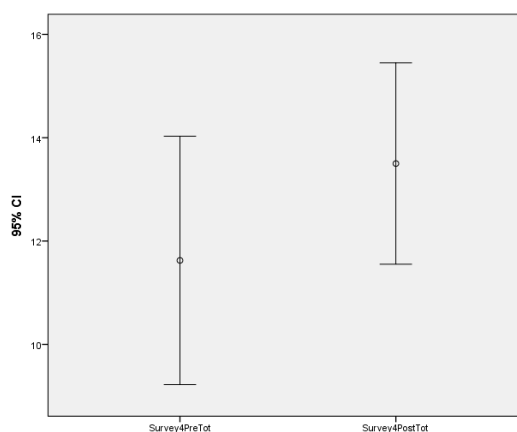
The analysis for Survey3, in Figure 7 below, measured the participant's confidence level in various spiritual exercises. Survey3 does not have a statistical difference between the pre and post surveys. There is a slight upward shift in the mean, but at the same time the range of scores remains in the same general area.

**Figure 7. Error Bar: Survey Three (Confidence)**



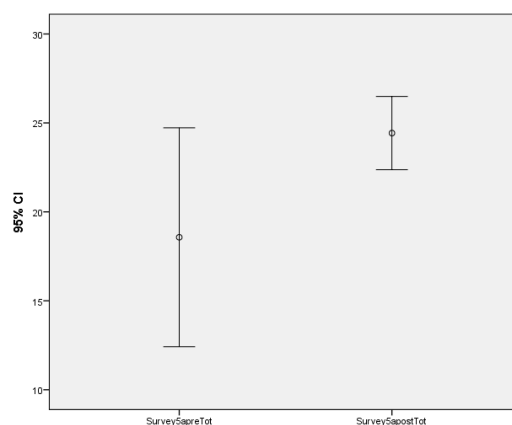
The analysis for Survey4, in Figure 8 below, does not have a statistical difference between the pre and post surveys. There is a slight shift in the mean and is close to being significant. The range of scores remains in the same general area. This survey may show significance with more data.

**Figure 8. Error Bar: Survey Four (Proficiency)**



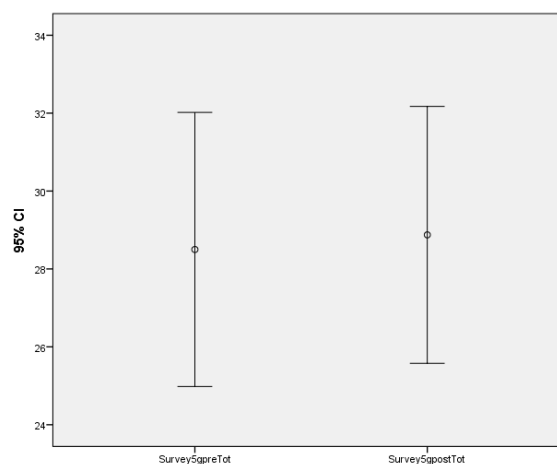
The analysis for Survey5a, in Figure 9 below, measures the participant's actual practice in following certain spiritual disciplines. Survey 5a does not have a statistical difference between the pre and post surveys. There is a shift in the mean but at the same time the standard deviation is smaller in the post survey (6.655 vs. 2.225).

**Figure 9. Error Bar: Survey Five A (Actual Practice)**



The analysis for Survey5g, in Figure 10 below, is a measure of the participant's desired goal in practicing certain spiritual disciplines. As expected for this measure there is not a statistical difference between the pre and post surveys.

**Figure 10. Error Bar: Survey Five G (Goals)**



### *Concluding Analysis of Quantitative Data*

The quantitative data initially showed some interesting trends in changes in the mean values. The raw data looked as if it was trending in a favorable manner and supporting my theory that prayer through meditation and contemplation can reduce stress. By utilizing other statistical analysis tools, the quantitative data revealed a different story than as expected by looking initially at percentages and changes in mean values. Overall, the quantitative data revealed no significant statistical difference in the data from the pre surveys to the post surveys results. One exception was Survey2.

Survey2 did show a statistical difference between the pre and post surveys. The results of the analysis of Survey2 supports the idea that participants were growing spiritually with reliance on God when stressed. This survey is similar to Survey1, only in a simpler format and different scaling. These variables may have contributed a more distinct change in values.

The primary concern with the quantitative data is the small sample size. The recommended sample size is at least thirty. Another variable that may have contributed to no statistical difference may be the time frame of the project. Ideally, there would be more time lapse between the surveys to allow participants to become more comfortable with the practices of meditative and contemplative prayer. More time would also give them an opportunity to find their own rhythm.

### **Report and Analysis of Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data was collected from several sources. Qualitative data was gathered from documented Student Interviews, a group debriefing, comments from weekly class evaluations and discussions (see Appendix H and Appendix I). The

following qualitative data has been evaluated to determine the outcome of this project and its impact on the participants.

Comments from the Participant's Interviews and group debriefing provided good feedback. I used open questions to stimulate discussion and to contribute ideas to improve the study. The response to the study was significantly positive. Participants were asked, "What are the strengths of this study?" One participant liked the power point presentations as they established background for the lesson. During our debriefing, all participants agreed with the format of the class, being direct instruction and practice. Four of the five interviews returned identified practicing meditation and contemplation in class as a strength. One participant stated in the interview how much she felt this class was needed. This was the consensus of the group as well. The participants that signed up for the class expressed their excitement that this class was being offered. This energy was maintained, as other comments would support later.

The class also discussed areas of weakness. Three written interviews commented that they wanted more time, by increasing the number of the class sessions and have more guided practice time in class. These comments received a lot of head nods in agreement. One participant identified the need for more instruction and practice of contemplation on the written interview. This comment is also supported by other participants as 63% indicated that they wanted to learn more about contemplation on their post survey. Another participant commented that more time on breathing exercises needs to be considered. The breathing exercise component was given a small amount of time during the study. This could be corrected with an extended study time.

When asked how has this study changed their prayer time, a significant response highlights the participants' focus. Comments included, "It taught me the importance of focusing;" "I meditate on God more;" and "I spend more time listening." Other remarks noted the use of *lectio divina*, which helped deepen one's personal prayer time.

All participants responded positively to feeling "better" about practicing meditation and contemplation. One participant noted, "I feel better and happier." Another claimed that she was not sure about contemplation before the class but looked forward to practicing it alongside prayer. Meditation is a term that drew most participants to the class, as noted earlier by the favorable responses in Table 2. When participants began to understand the concept of contemplation, most embraced the practice as illustrated earlier in Table 3. As pointed out, there is an opportunity to strengthen the attitude toward contemplative prayer with more group practice.

Participants were unanimous in stating that studying meditation and contemplation has contributed to their spiritual growth. A participant stated, "I have a deeper understanding of the Word and feel more of a closeness with God." Another participant said, "I now slow down to feel God's presence." A particular written response stated, "It taught me how to listen to God and Bible principles." Another benefit that the class expressed was the increase of the time they spent with God.

When asked if they consider prayer through meditation and contemplation as tools to cope with their stress, the response was a resounding "yes" among verbal and written responses. One participant commented, "Meditation and contemplation helps to deescalate stress and helps [me] to manage it." Another wrote, "[I use] guidance in the Scriptures, along with the Holy Spirit to give direction." Another participant simply



stated, “It calms me down.” From the responses I have received, I discovered how participants utilized prayer through meditation and contemplation to help them cope with stressors in life (see Appendix L for an example).

Another opportunity that some participants took time to share was in their written thoughts on the Participants’ Interview under “Additional Comments.” One participant noted the teaching style and “would like to take another class from this teacher.” An “excellent course” comment led the class to suggest holding a meditation and contemplation retreat. In the same vein as in the prior comments, one participant would like to see the course “expanded” to “Christian Meditation and Contemplation II.” Another stated, “I really enjoyed the course,” and also thanked everyone for their prayers. Of the five written interviews returned, only one did not share additional comments. These comments did sum up the many of verbal and written comments throughout the course. I did not receive three written interviews. I am able to determine which participants did not return their written interview, based on the attendance of participants. Two of the three participants who did not return a written interview did participate in the group debriefing.

### *Concluding Analysis of Qualitative Data*

The qualitative data supported my hypothesis; participants were adopting a method of prayer that would help them build a relationship with God and also cope with the stressors of life. The comments that I received throughout the project were positive and encouraging. I offered anonymity on weekly evaluations and the written Student Interview. I asked participants to be honest in their comments. Overall, participants shared honest and positive feedback, but the evaluation could have been more beneficial

if more constructive criticisms were shared. The comments and recommendations though could enhance future learning experience.

Participants were consistent in their comments from the Student Interview and the weekly Student Evaluation. Initially, class members expressed their excitement and looked forward to what the course had to offer. As we progressed through the course, feedback on more practice time in class had already started appearing on the weekly evaluations. One participant wrote, “[We] need more time in class even though this is self development with God.” The feedback was well taken because class was designed to introduce a technique, practice it, and let members master it at home. In the end, participants wanted more practice time in class.

Both old and new ideas packed into this course on meditation and contemplation. The verbal and written expressions were designed to increase study time to allow the participants process the lessons and practice techniques. Extended time would have given participants more opportunities to practice as a group. The beginning of the course focused on setting the foundation for the meaning of meditation and contemplation and their practical observance. The class spent two solid weeks practicing *lectio divina*, which received positive assessment. A closer look at the entire process may reveal that adequate time was necessary to produce quantitative change, but the experience showed how it increased positive qualitative responses on the part of the participants.

Another portion of the course that did not receive its fair share was relaxation breathing. I did touch on breathing techniques and provided information for participants to read, but I found myself trying to rush through this significant part of the course. Increasing the number of weeks would have allowed participants to spend more practice

time in both class and group discussions. But even with limited time, some verbal and written comments turned out positive, including how the breathing techniques helped a participant maintain focus.

Furthermore, the anecdotal responses to meditation and contemplation were very positive as participants expressed how they felt the class helped them to cope with stress and grow spiritually. The perceived spiritual growth became evident (concrete) as participants shared how they incorporated the skills learned into their lives and experienced positive results. The general consensus was that the group discussions were very helpful in the learning process as well. The group discussions fostered interaction with the instructor as well as their peers. Evidence of this growth is further supported by participants requesting an additional (Med&Con) class and by giving the following comment: “I used *lectio divina* with my Sunday School lesson before reading the commentary and I was so excited about how the lesson spoke to me!”

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project**

There are six identifiable strengths and weaknesses in this project. The first weakness lies in the sampling size. This study was based on the experience of a small group study. Being a small group, class size was limited to twelve or less participants. The group size was appropriate for the space assigned to the class. If the group were larger, then the setting would have been uncomfortable due to space constraints and room temperature. The weakness of this group size was highlighted in the statistical analysis as pointed out by the statistician. To get a sample size of at least thirty would require conducting multiple small group studies. Because the sample size was small, the success or failure of the project could not be represented statistically.

The second weakness was the time element, which was noted earlier in the “Concluding Analysis of Qualitative Data.” The participants, the data, and this researcher found this as a significant factor. Responses requesting more time for practice and lengthening the course were duly noted. The time factor also could have impacted the data. More time during group practice would allow participants to become more comfortable with personal practice. As a result, “favorable” ratings among participants would increase. Part of the time constraint was dictated by Mount Moriah Baptist Church as this course had to fit in with other courses being offered through the church’s Board of Christian Education.

The third weakness dealt with the surveys and data analysis. I made an error in the General Survey section when I lost valuable information that resulted in the failure to analyze pre and post responses for this project. In the end, each survey was calculated to determine an overall response of “favorable” and unfavorable responses” only. It was necessary to do this in this project, but more information could have been gleaned from a statistical analysis based on additional details. This researcher would also heed the statistician’s advice on “less variables and a larger sample size.” Another change would be to restructure some of the surveys by grouping questions that identify certain characteristics together. This change would simplify evaluation and allow for more comparisons of the data.

This project also had its identifiable strengths. A major strength of this project is the subject matter itself. The project addressed a need at Mount Moriah Baptist Church for small group members to experience a deeper relationship with God through prayer. The turnaround from announcing this project to the actual start date happened very fast.

The excitement and curiosity regarding prayer through meditation and contemplation quickly added up to the eight participants who formed the small group study. Some participants were familiar with this researcher in attending other studies. A familiarity with the researcher helped in the trust factor, although participants expressed a genuine interest in the subject matter. This showed up particularly in the qualitative responses received throughout the project. Members of Mount Moriah Baptist Church who did not participate in the small group expressed their desire to sign-up if the class was offered again.

Another strength of this project was the actual structure of the study. The structure had many variables, beginning with it being a small group. Research revealed evidence that a small group environment would enhance individual learning. Although, sample size was a weakness for statistical analysis, there were qualitative intangibles that produced positive results. The other part of the project structure was the way the class was structured to include lecture, practice, and group discussion. These aspects were mentioned in the study evaluation and surveys in a positive way; they were also noted as being beneficial to the participants in helping them to grasp the concepts of meditation and contemplation more readily.

The last area of strength lies in the mystical. The timing of this project coincided with things happening inside of Mount Moriah Baptist Church and outside of the congregation; these were also other variables beyond my control. As this project was being developed, a movie about the power of prayer entitled, “War Room,” premiered across the nation in theaters. Many members watched the movie and were encouraged to do something about their own prayer life. The Mount Moriah Baptist Church Board of

Christian Education included the class study of “War Room” in its curriculum for 2016. It can be surmised that what church members learn in public influences their private life, although the new information may fail to open up opportunities to its teachings. As rumblings of the movie and class subsided, I was able to offer this project on meditation and contemplation. The excitement generated by a small group of students from the project has opened up other possibilities at Mount Moriah Baptist Church, not only for this class but also for other classes on prayer. Two months after the class portion of the project concluded, the senior pastor and Mount Moriah Baptist Church Board of Christian Education chose to offer a month long study on prayer for all Bible study groups during the month of February. In a final analysis, the series on Christian Meditation and Contemplation made such a positive impact on the congregation that it will be offered again in the spring of 2017 at Mount Moriah Baptist Church.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The pressures and demands of society are inescapable, yet the Scriptures are clear that as humanity we are not to be apprehended by stress. The Scriptures admonish us not to “be anxious” (stress), but what does it offer in place of stress? God has provided us with a proper alternative to stressors in our lives. This Doctor of Ministry project, “Meditation and Contemplation: Framework For A Coping Mechanism Among Small Groups At The Mount Moriah Baptist Church In Spartanburg, South Carolina,” is an account and analysis of teaching prayer through meditation and contemplation as practiced in biblical times, the Early Church, and throughout the centuries. Although communication with God is both expressive and receptive, the focus of meditation and contemplation is largely receptive. It is this receptive aspect of prayer that is often overlooked in our communication with God. The following summary presents the findings of this study and the impact on the participants, Mount Moriah Baptist Church, and this researcher.

#### **The Statistical Evidence**

Initially, I was encouraged by trends in the data showing the mean scores shifting in a favorable direction. However, the statistical evidence ultimately showed no significant change in the participants’ perception of their stress or their confidence and proficiency in practicing prayer through meditation and contemplation. There were two variables that greatly influenced the outcome of the statistical analysis, namely, the small sample size and a short time to learn and adopt a new prayer method. As noted by the

statistician, David Carscaddon, a sample size of about thirty should have been adequate to reach more reliable results. The time allotted for the study by Mount Moriah Baptist Church, and the amount of time spent practicing prayer through meditation and contemplation, were not sufficient for the participants to experience a significant increase in proficiency and confidence in practicing these new skills.

### **Other Indications of the Impact of the Research**

Although the results of the statistical analysis did not support the project hypothesis, there were other indicators that the project was well received by the participants and other members of Mount Moriah Baptist Church. Participants shared verbal and written comments that expressed their excitement over this new way to encounter God's Word. Participants also expressed their desire for more practice and requested that this class be offered again.

Participants appreciated the format of *lectio divina* because it gave the small group a well-defined process to practice prayer through meditation and contemplation, either individually or collectively. Group practice also stood out during the project as it gave members an opportunity to go through a series of drills that eventually strengthened cohesion within the class. Those who were polled in the General Survey showed an increased favorable response to meditative and contemplative prayer as shown in the post-survey. It became common for members who were not a part of the study to ask this researcher when could they have an opportunity to take the class and learn techniques of meditative and contemplative prayer.

The General Survey results showed how Mount Moriah Baptist Church responded to a deficiency in teaching on prayer. A renewed focus on prayer has grown at Mount



Moriah Baptist Church, through sermons from the pulpit and a special study on prayer for all Bible study classes. The Bible study on prayer ran through the entire month of February 2017 and could be extended to the first week or two in March as different classes move along with the subject matter. A new class on Christian Meditation and Contemplation is slated in April 2017.

### **The Impact of the Project on My Ministry Setting**

This project has been instrumental in creating awareness, interest, and excitement regarding meditation and contemplation in all aspects of my personal ministry experience. As a hospice chaplain, the project provided avenues for more meaningful healing experiences for my patients. As an associate minister at Mount Moriah Baptist Church, this experience has afforded richer and deeper conversations among the participants, especially about prayer. I shall begin first with the church.

The response from the participants of Christian Meditation and Contemplation has been very positive and encouraging. Participants have asked about extending the class with a desire to have more time to practice together. They shared how the experience helped them to approach the Scripture differently than they did prior to taking this class. They noted how they became more open and engaged with the Scripture as they sought to hear the text speaking to them. Participants sensed their spiritual growth while interacting with and being obedient to God's Word.

The project was designed for small groups, which limited the number of participants. Several church members approached this researcher to express their desire to be included in the initial class on Christian Meditation and Contemplation. They have inquired if the course could be offered in a foreseeable future so they can sign up for it.

The needs of the Church are expanding and consideration for the modality used to address those needs is of utmost importance. As members move away from this area, they want to remain connected through social media platforms and other available technology. For example, a member of Mount Moriah Baptist Church who recently moved out of state has requested to be a member of the class via technology. This request raises the possibilities of using technology to keep the membership connected and expanding the reach of this class.

My senior pastor has been supportive of this project from the beginning. He has had individuals to inquire about personal Bible study approaches and has led those studies himself. The interest in God's Word and the desire for individuals to interact directly with Scripture is at the heart of this project. Studies show that churches with the most engaged members and membership who are growing spiritually, have placed a significant emphasis on Scripture and personal study. This project has allowed more members to be exposed to an approach to Scripture that can result in transformation.

As a hospice chaplain, my conversation on meditation and coping has stimulated interest among my peers and co-workers. Guided meditation and other techniques have been utilized to help patients and families cope with difficult situations. In the past, I have been reluctant to utilize some techniques due to lack of formal training. But through this project, I have gained confidence in utilizing meditative techniques and relaxation breathing with my patients and families to help them cope with many end-of-life scenarios. The project helped me become a better chaplain as I now have more to offer to those whom I assist.

This project also helped me become more spiritually disciplined, becoming more present to those whom I assist as well as my co-workers. However, due to the dynamic nature of the culture and decisions (that are not in the scope of the researcher's control) at work, this researcher experiences stress. I have observed an increase in turnover in some disciplines that impacts the entire organization. The wisdom and insight I gained from my personal practice of prayer through meditation and contemplation has also given me godly wisdom to offer those whom I counsel. Through this project, I have become more spiritually anchored, which allows me to keep most things in perspective.

### **Personal Significance of This Project**

This project was personally significant to me on many levels. First, it was significant in addressing a passion of mine in enhancing the spiritual growth of Christians. This is a two-sided passion—my own personal spiritual growth and my desire to help other Christians grow spiritually.

Second, as a Christian person, I realized how progress and setbacks could characterize and impact my spiritual journey. This doctoral project has helped me understand the complexities of dealing with people who are going through stressful moments and events in life. It also exposed me to appropriate coping mechanisms and resources that people need to have as they strive to overcome adverse circumstances. The doctoral project has enhanced my identity and commitment as a Christian, hospice chaplain, local church minister, and teacher of God's Word.

Third, incorporating active listening skills, utilizing *lectio divina*, and learning deep breathing techniques during meditative and contemplative prayer, have enhanced

two skills sets that are necessary for me as a hospice chaplain: *focus* and *intention*. This project enabled me to contribute more to the spiritual growth of others.

Fourth, as noted earlier, my ministry objective is to help to help others grow spiritually. This doctoral project has clarified and intensified my ministry call. Through the practice of mediation and contemplation, I have developed further “ears to hear, a receptive heart, and obedience to God.” Consequently, this advanced theological training epitomizes my commitment to intentional education and life-long learning. I have always maintained that education, both Christian and secular, could be regarded as tools to create opportunities. This insight has been instilled in my life even at an early age.

Furthermore, it is this researcher’s hope that this project serves as a pathway for others to identify, further clarify, and strengthen their personal ministry through meditative and contemplative prayer. The opportunity to learn, teach, apply, and develop Christian meditation and contemplation skills, has been empowering. This research process has afforded me the opportunity—both from spiritual and scientific perspectives—to expose others to the necessity and validity of developing a strong spiritual framework for holistic spiritual health, wellbeing, and coping ability.

## APPENDIX A

## Appendix A-1

General Survey: Rev. Gary Jordan  
Pre

**Do not write your name.**

**\*\*Check each box that applies to you.\*\***

**How did you learn to pray?**

- ☐ I don't know how to pray
- ☐ Family (parents, grandparents, sibling)
- ☐ Preaching
- ☐ Sunday School / Church School / VBS
- ☐ Reading Scripture
- ☐ I took a class

---

**\*\*\*Check 1 box that best applies to you.\*\*\***

**What do you think when you hear meditation?**

- ☐ Something I practice
- ☐ Something I want to learn
- ☐ Only for other religions
- ☐ I don't think about meditation
- ☐ None of the above

**What do you think when you hear contemplation?**

- ☐ Something I practice
- ☐ Something I want to learn
- ☐ Only for other religions
- ☐ I don't think about contemplation
- ☐ None of the above

**What is your confidence in your prayer life to help you cope?**

- ☐ I sometimes
- ☐ Something I want to learn
- ☐ Only for other religions
- ☐ I don't think about contemplation
- ☐ None of the above

**When stressed, how do you feel after praying?**

- ☐ Worse
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ Relieved
- ☐ Uplifted
- ☐ None of the above

**When stressed, how often do you use Scripture in your prayers?**

- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Almost always
- ☐ None of the above

## Appendix A-2

General Survey: Rev. Gary Jordan  
Post

**Do not write your name.**

**\*\*Check 1 box that applies to you.\*\***

**Confidence with your spiritual growth:**

- ☐ No confidence
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Confident
- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ None of the above

---

**\*\*\*Check 1 box that best applies to you.\*\*\***

**What do you think when you hear meditation?**

- ☐ Something I practice
- ☐ Something I want to learn
- ☐ Only for other religions
- ☐ I don't think about meditation
- ☐ None of the above

**What do you think when you hear contemplation?**

- ☐ Something I practice
- ☐ Something I want to learn
- ☐ Only for other religions
- ☐ I don't think about contemplation
- ☐ None of the above

**What is your confidence in your prayer life to help you cope?**

- ☐ No confidence
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Confident
- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ None of the above

**When stressed, how do you feel after praying?**

- ☐ Worse
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ Relieved
- ☐ Uplifted
- ☐ None of the above

**When stressed, how often do you use Scripture in your prayers?**

- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Almost always
- ☐ None of the above

## APPENDIX B

### PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by circling how often you felt or thought a certain way.

Code \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**0 = Never    1 = Almost Never    2 = Sometimes    3 = Fairly Often    4 = Very Often**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? .....                 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? .....     | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”? .....  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? .....         | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?.....  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? .....       | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? .....                              | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?..  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?.....            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? ..... | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

**Mind Garden, Inc.**  
 info@mindgarden.com  
 www.mindgarden.com

**Reference:**

The PSS Scale is reprinted with permission of the American Sociological Association, from Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., and Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24, 386-396.  
 Cohen, S. and Williamson, G. Perceived Stress in a Probability Sample of the United States. Spacapan, S. and Oskamp, S. (Eds.) *The Social Psychology of Health*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988. (accessed March 13, 2016).

## APPENDIX C

## SURVEY 01

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the statements below as you may or may not have experienced, avoid answering how you think you should respond.

		Never or Almost Never	Once in a While	Some Days	Most Days	Every -day	Many Times a Day
1.	I feel God's presence when I pray.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	During/after prayer I feel uplifted.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	My prayer life is a source of strength.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.	I talk with God throughout the day.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	I specifically tell God what bothers me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	I feel I know what God wants of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	I understand God's general guidance in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8.	I understand God instructing me on a daily basis.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9.	I spend time quietly with God.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10.	I have heard God's audible voice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11.	I hear God speaking in Scripture.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12.	I hear God speaking through others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13.	I hear God speaking through my circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14.	I hear God speaking in my prayer time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15.	I personally feel God's love for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16.	I feel God's love through others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17.	I think about things I am grateful for.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18.	When stressed I pray.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19.	When stressed I meditate.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20.	I spend time in meditation with God.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21.	I spend time in contemplation with God.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22.	I am a contented person.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23.	Overall, I have a deep sense of peace/harmony.	1	2	3	4	5	6

## APPENDIX D

## SURVEY 02

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the statements below as you may or may not have experienced, avoid answering how you think you should respond.

		Not at All	Somewhat	Very Much	As Much as Possible
1.	Creation reminds me of God.	1	2	3	4
2.	I want a closer relationship with God.	1	2	3	4
3.	I have a grateful attitude.	1	2	3	4
4.	I see God in other people.	1	2	3	4
5.	I think about the things of God.	1	2	3	4
6.	When stressed it is difficult for me to talk to God.	1	2	3	4
7.	When stressed it is difficult for me to think about God.	1	2	3	4
8.	When stressed I pray more.	1	2	3	4
9.	When stressed I meditate more.	1	2	3	4
10.	When stressed I contemplate more.	1	2	3	4
11.	When stressed I find comfort in prayer.	1	2	3	4
12.	When stressed I can understand God's plan.	1	2	3	4
13.	The Holy Spirit is a part of my prayer life.	1	2	3	4
14.	I depend on the Holy Spirit to understand God.	1	2	3	4



## APPENDIX E

## SURVEY 03

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Think about your level of confidence in your ability to perform each item listed. Indicate the degree of confidence you have in your ability to successfully perform the item using the following scale:

1. The effectiveness of my personal prayer life.

0%	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100%
No Confidence				Moderate Confidence				Complete Confidence		

2. The effectiveness of my personal meditation time.

0%	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100%
No Confidence				Moderate Confidence				Complete Confidence		

3. The effectiveness of my personal contemplation time.

0%	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100%
No Confidence				Moderate Confidence				Complete Confidence		

4. My satisfaction with my current rate of spiritual growth.

0%	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100%
No Confidence				Moderate Confidence				Complete Confidence		

5. My ability to cope with stressors in my life.

0%	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100%
No Confidence				Moderate Confidence				Complete Confidence		

6. My ability to understand Scripture and apply it to my life.

0%	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100%
No Confidence				Moderate Confidence				Complete Confidence		

7. My ability to understand God's specific direction for my life.

0%	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100%
No Confidence				Moderate Confidence				Complete Confidence		

## APPENDIX F

## SURVEY 04

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Listed below are spiritual disciplines that may assist us in spiritual growth. Please tell us your proficiency level in practicing the following disciplines:

	<b>1=Poor</b>	<b>2=Fair</b>	<b>3=Good</b>	<b>4=Excellent</b>	<b>5=Not sure/not applicable</b>
<b>1. Personal prayer</b>					
<b>2. Meditation</b>					
<b>3. Contemplation</b>					
<b>4. Fasting</b>					
<b>5. Bible Study</b>					

## APPENDIX G

## SURVEY 05a

Participants Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Choose the frequency that best fits how often you practice the following:

	<b>Rarely/ Never</b>	<b>Annually</b>	<b>Quarterly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Daily</b>	<b>Many times a day</b>
<b>1. Personal prayer</b>							
<b>2. Meditation</b>							
<b>3. Contemplation</b>							
<b>4. Fasting</b>							
<b>5. Bible Study</b>							

## SURVEY 05g

Choose the frequency that best fits how often you **would like** to practice the following:

	<b>Rarely/ Never</b>	<b>Annually</b>	<b>Quarterly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Daily</b>	<b>Many times a day</b>
<b>1. Personal prayer</b>							
<b>2. Meditation</b>							
<b>3. Contemplation</b>							
<b>4. Fasting</b>							
<b>5. Bible Study</b>							

## APPENDIX H

Student Evaluation of Meditation and Contemplation  
Rev. Gary W. Jordan, Instructor

Please circle session evaluating:      1      2      3      4      5      6

Please rank according to your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction using the following scale:

1 = Poor      2 = Fair      3 = Average      4 = Good      5 = Excellent

- |     |   |           |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 1.  | Instructor is well prepared for class session.        | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2.  | Instructor has a mastery of material.                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3.  | Instructor stimulated interest in topic.              | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4.  | Instructor spoke clearly and audibly.                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5.  | Instructor used class time effectively.               | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6.  | Instructor answered questions completely and clearly. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7.  | Instructor maintained integrity to Biblical teaching. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8.  | Instructor maintained integrity to Baptist doctrine.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9.  | Instructor treated students respectfully.             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. | Class design was conducive to my learning.            | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Additional Comments:

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## APPENDIX I

**Student Interview**

Your answers to these questions will greatly assist in determining how to improve this course offering:

1. What were the strengths of this study?
2. What were the weaknesses?
3. Could this study have been more helpful to you?  
Yes                      No  
If yes, in what way?
4. Did this study change the way you use your personal prayer time?  
Yes                      No  
Please explain?
5. How do you feel about practicing meditation and contemplation?
6. Did this course contribute to your spiritual growth?  
Yes                      No  
If yes, in what way? If no, what would have helped?
7. Can meditation and contemplation help you cope with stress?  
Yes                      No  
If yes, how? If no, why not?
8. What other class subject matter would interest you?

Additional Comments:

## APPENDIX J

## Adult Consent Form

*Please read the following consent form. If you would be willing to participate in Rev. Gary Jordan's doctoral project and agree to the terms below, please sign your name at the bottom of the page. Thank you!*

I have freely chosen to participate in Rev. Gary Jordan's doctoral project. As such I understand the following:

- All the information I share is confidential. My general age-range and gender may be associated with results in publication, but my name, as an identifier will never be used.
- Once all the data is compiled and analyzed, and once Rev. Jordan completes this project, any survey associated with this project will be destroyed.
- While the administrator (Rev. Jordan) promises confidentiality, and while confidentiality will be heavily stressed in this group session, I understand I share my responses with other group members. Group confidentiality can be stressed and clearly requested, but the administrator cannot ultimately promise absolute confidentiality when a number of other people are involved.
- My participation in this group is completely voluntary, and declining to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Choosing not to participate will not affect my church membership or my relationship to Mount Moriah Baptist Church in any way.
- If I choose, I may withdraw from this research at any time. I also understand if I choose to participate that I may decline to answer any question that I am not comfortable answering.
- If I have any questions or concerns about my participation in this project, I can contact Rev. Gary Jordan, at any time.

**\*\*By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read the above statements and understand them.**

**If I am unclear, I have asked for more information for clarification. I consent to voluntarily participate in this research study, and for Rev. Gary Jordan to use my confidential answers in his research.\*\***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

## APPENDIX K

**Participant Covenant**

This covenant is drawn to emphasize the importance of your commitment and participation to the success of this research project. This document outlines expectations for all participants and expected contribution to this study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, commit to participate fully in this study group. I have been informed of the nature of this Doctor of Ministry project and am aware its design and its stated goal. I have been informed regarding publication of this research and give my consent as a participant to anonymous use of any of my contributions (verbal, written or otherwise).

I understand that there is a time commitment and expectation to attend the weekly sessions and personal study time.

Additionally, I understand there is an expectation that I will engage the experiment fully by completing required assignments to the best of my ability, such as participating in group discussions, conducting a regular personal prayer time, journaling and completing home assignments.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX L

The following series of events took place on November 9, 2016 of this project:

During the study, the 2016 Presidential Election occurred. Many Americans witnessed a very contentious and vicious election for the office of President of the United States. Polls showed most Americans were not very thrilled with either candidate. Although, not all African Americans voted for the Democratic candidate, that candidate was the favored choice among many minorities. It was felt among many African Americans that the Democratic candidate would be more connected and offered support to the African American community. It was past the mid-point of the study when the November 2016 election took place. The candidate from the opposing party won the election. Many people around the country were shocked. Many Americans, especially minority groups, felt uneasy because of the unknowns behind the election results and the President Elect, himself.

The next day was our scheduled meeting for our Meditation and Contemplation class. I prepared a meditation on Psalm 46 for us to practice in class. We used the *lectio divina* format to read slowly through the Scripture and allow God to speak to us collectively and individually. After the readings, the participants shared how they felt how God spoke to them. One could feel the tension lifted from the room as participant after participant explained how various parts of the text spoke to them. Many participants expressed how they felt better, knowing that “God is still in control.” The verse that received the most comments was, “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10).

Participants shared how this session was uplifting for them through their verbal comments and the evaluation for the week. This was one of the more practical examples as participants were given an opportunity to experience meditative and contemplative prayer as a mechanism to cope with stressors in their lives.



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