**Journey Into Wholeness “*Seek peace and pursue it” Ps 34:14***

**Session 5: “BIBLICAL MEDITATION”**

***Overview: This session will discuss biblical meditation, its benefits, and how to get started.***

1. **WHAT IS BIBLICAL MEDITATION**

***“Blessed is the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and on His Law he meditates day and night.” Psalm 1:1-2***

***“One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple.” Psalm 27:4***

***“When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.” Psalm 63:6***

***“I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your doings/accomplishments; I reflect/muse on the works of Your hands.” Psalm 143:5***

The word ***“meditation”*** in the Bible means to focus one’s thoughts, to ponder, muse, mutter, contemplate, and reflect.

The focus of biblical meditation is God. In biblical meditation we focus on God, His Word, His attributes, His works, His ways, and His majesty.

***“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.” J.I. Packer, Knowing God, page 23.***

***“Biblical Meditation”*** is a form of prayer and a devotional practice we engage in under the guidance of the Lord’s Spirit to focus and reflect on the Lord and His Word, so we can know God better, love Him more, and experience greater transformation in our whole person.

1. **DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BIBLICAL MEDITATION AND EASTERN MEDITATION**

**Eastern Meditation** (Transcendental Meditation) or other forms of New Age meditation are to be avoided and can be very harmful spiritually. **Biblical Meditation** is very beneficial and should not be feared.

**Eastern Meditation** tends to focus on emptying the mind completely… **Biblical Meditation** focuses on emptying the mind of negative/wrong things while focusing the attention on God and filling the mind with truth according to God’s Word.

**Eastern Meditation** focuses on becoming detached from the world, losing personhood/individuality, and merging with the Cosmic Mind/Consciousness…**Biblical Meditation** focuses on becoming detached from the ways and thoughts of the world and to become joined and attached in deeper fellowship to the Living God.

***Peter Toon*** (Christian Writer) explains the difference between Eastern Meditation and Biblical Meditation:

***“The simplest way to highlight the difference is to say that for the one (Eastern Meditation) meditation is an inner journey to find the center of one’s being, while for the other (Biblical Meditation) it is the concentration of the mind/heart upon an external Revelation (God and truth).” Meditating as a Christian, 18-19.***

**Biblical Meditation** has God as the focus and is God-oriented. Whether it is reflective reading of the Holy Scriptures or quiet contemplation of the Lord, His character, or His works…the goal is to be more filled with God, His Spirit, and His truth.The Lord wants us to come close, quiet our hearts and minds, internalize and personalize the Scripture, with the goal that our spirit, soul, and body will be illuminated, elevated, and brought into greater unity with the Lord’s Spirit.

1. **BENEFITS OF BIBLICAL MEDITATION**

Biblical meditation is about drinking deeply of the things of God and not just merely staying on the surface. Thomas Brooks, a seventeenth-century Christian leader, said this:

***“Remember that it is not hasty reading but serious meditation on holy and heavenly truths, that makes them prove sweet and profitable to the soul. It is not the mere touching of the flower by the bee that gathers honey, but her abiding for a time on the flower that draws out the sweet. It is not he that reads most but he that meditates most that will prove to be the choicest, sweetest, wisest and strongest Christian.”***

As we seek to enjoy fellowship with God by pondering Him and the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to experience greater depths of his love. The Spirit also strengthens us by helping us more fully grasp “how wide and long and high and deep” Christ’s love is, deepening our roots in truth and in His love (***Ephesians 3:18–19***). Biblical meditation is a precious vehicle at our disposal to more fully experience “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (***2 Corinthians 13:14***).

The benefits of biblical meditation to the spirit, soul, and body of the Christian are vast as biblical meditation is a powerful catalyst for growth and wholeness in all areas of our life. **Some of the spiritual benefits we can expect to experience when we meditate:**

1. **Receptivity** - Our spirits and soul become more open to the Holy Spirit and God’s movement in our life. The river of God’s Spirit is flowing more in us and through us.
2. **Listening** – We are learning to quiet ourselves and our mind so we can tune in to the Lord and hear His voice more clearly. We are positioned to receive.
3. **We feel more of God** - We gain a greater capacity to experience godly emotions (love, joy, peace) more powerfully and consistently. Intimacy with the Lord is easier as we draw close and focus.
4. **Renewal of our mind** - Our mind/soul/heart are renewed and transformed in truth. We think more in line with the Word and God.
5. **More at rest and peaceful** - We learn the ability to still ourselves and be less cluttered in our thinking. Our thoughts are more under control, and we are at peace and content in Him.
6. **Connected** - We are in greater tune with ourselves, others, the Lord, and our surroundings. We are more sensitized and able to see the connectivity and interconnectedness of everything around us.
7. **Scriptures come alive** – We gain the capacity to receive revelation in a much deeper way. The Word is illuminated to us and has greater impact in our heart.

**Some of the researched psychological and physiological benefits of meditation:**

1. **Stress Reduction** – Reduction in inflammation from stress and the stress hormone called cortisol. Meditation has also been shown to reduce blood pressure, tension, and other stress-related conditions, while improving sleep and boosting our immune system.
2. **Controls Anxiety** – Meditation has been shown to reduce depression/anxiety symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health issues.
3. **Promotes Emotional Health** – Studies show that meditation improves well-being, positive feelings about oneself, improves self-image, and a positive outlook on life.
4. **Improved Brain Functioning** – Better attention, problem-solving, innovation, and creativity. Meditation slows brain aging (particularly the thinning of the prefrontal cortex).
5. **Reduces Pain** – Studies show that following 60 to 80 minute meditation sessions, participants reported (and confirmed through fMRI scanner) 45% less pain. Meditation effects both subjective and objective pain scores.
6. **GETTING STARTED**

My goal is to give you some basic tools and techniques to get started with biblical meditation. There are many ways to meditate. In some ways, biblical meditation is a journey in and of itself. The main thing is to get started and to begin to incorporate meditation into your devotional life and lifestyle. Over time, you will find out what you like, and you will essentially design your own way of seeking the Lord in meditation that is beneficial to you and fits your personality and preferences.

Be encouraged and do not focus on the specifics of how long and how you are performing. Focus on giving yourself to the Lord and simply making it an integral part of your faith practice and walk with Jesus. Meditation, like prayer in general, will get easier the more you do it – like exercising a muscle. Once you have the skill, it will never leave you. Enjoy the journey into deeper intimacy with the Lord and see meditation as a key to quickly advance in that journey.

1. **Deep Breath** – We discussed last session the value of breathing to calm us and bring us into a relaxed and clear state of mind. Meditation is about putting other things aside and concentrating on the Lord and His Word. Starting with a deep breath technique, as we discussed in **Session 4**, is really useful (refer to Session 4 notes).

Use the “Box Breathing” or the “Relaxing Breath” method for a few minutes as a starting point to relax, still your mind, and settle your body.

***“Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10***

1. **Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”)** – This practice of biblical meditation is about the devotional and prayerful reading of Scripture. Instead of studying the Bible didactically and cultivating head knowledge, “divine reading” is about cultivating communion with the Lord and relationship/dialogue with Him through the Word. It normally includes these 4 steps:

***“The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7***

1. **Lectio** **(Reading)**- Reading a specific passage slowly several times. As you read you are trying to take in and savor the words of the reading and listening for the “still small voice” of the Spirit to highlight a word or phrase.

***Example*** – “The peace of God.”

1. **Meditatio** **(Meditation)** – Reflect on the passage/word/phrase and think about what it speaks to you and your life. Let your feelings and emotions engage with what God is saying through the Word to you personally. Reflect and feel the impact of what the Lord is speaking. The feeling is as important, or even more important, than the thought. Enter in fully by focusing on both the thought/truth/promise and the godly emotion that coincides with it.

***Example*** – “God, You love me and want me to receive Your peace in my heart.”

1. **Oratio** **(Praying)**– Respond back to the Lord in prayer and conversation, opening your heart. The prayer can be vocal or silent. This step can involve focusing on releasing negative thoughts/feelings/emotions, and then receiving the positive and good.

***Example*** – “I release stress and the feelings of anxiety to you Lord…And I receive your peace…peace…peace. I am at peace in You.” Repeat positive biblical affirmations.

1. **Contemplatio** **(Contemplation)** – This last step involves restful contemplation. In this step you are simply resting in the Lord’s presence and experiencing His grace, love, peace, and union.
2. **Visual Meditation** – This practice of biblical meditation involves taking a biblical image from Scripture and focusing on it to bring edification and spiritual impact. We discussed visualization in some detail in **Session 3**. Instead of a Word from Scripture, a biblical image is the focal point. You can be creative. Remember the example I gave from **Session 3** about how I visualize myself as a tree of life planted by the river of life (***Ezk 47:1-12; John 7:38***). I visualize myself as a tree with roots going down deep soaking in life, grace, and all the good things of God’s Spirit.

We want to meditate visually on what we want to be in God and in wholeness. Paint the picture in your mind and heart and engage your emotions and how it feels – what transformation looks and feels like. God gives us permission to use our imagination in this biblical way. Remember – your brain doesn’t know the difference between what is real and what is vividly visualized.

1. **Auditory Meditation** – This practice of biblical meditation involves opening the heart through focusing on listening to godly music or being in nature. The ear is connected to every part of the body via the nerve pathways. A great amount of spiritual blessing and healing can take place in us as we simply get in a quiet place and relax, while listening to worship music, classical music, instrumental music, or the sounds of God’s creation. Different frequencies of sound have different effects on our brainwave rhythms.

As was shared in **Session 4**, God has created nature to be medicine for our mental, physical, and spiritual health. When you go outside in nature, experience the awe and wonder of God’s beautiful creation and listen to the birds, the wind, the aspen trees rustling, the sounds of a bubbling brook or a rushing river. Listen, and let God speak to you, teach you, restore you.

1. **FINAL THOUGHTS AND ENCOURAGMENT**
2. Biblical meditation can combine two or more of these techniques. They can overlap and flow together. Allow yourself to explore all of these techniques and methods in combination.
3. Give yourself a lot of grace for the drift and resistance you will experience, especially in the beginning. It is very normal to have times of restlessness, frustration, doubt, and criticism of yourself or meditation. Questions will arise in your mind: “Is this working? Am I doing this right? Can this be over now? Why won’t my mind stop wandering?

This is all normal. This is also why we need to give ourselves to the Lord in biblical meditation – so we can get more rooted in the Spirit and overcome these areas of resistance and tension in our soul and body. Just remember that resistance and restlessness is normal and takes time to overcome. Be committed to the process of making biblical meditation a regular part of your lifestyle, and you will reap great rewards.

1. Early morning is the best time to pray and practice biblical meditation (though of course you can and want to fit it in anytime and throughout the day). Mornings are preferred because you are starting the day off with a fresh start and with the Lord. You are setting the spiritual and emotional tone for your whole day – connecting with God, being quiet and at peace, reducing stress, visualizing success, and getting energized.
2. Set manageable goals. Start with 10, 15, or 20 minutes and go from there. Again, biblical meditation is a journey in itself. Just get started and get yourself on the road. You will find that as you grow in biblical meditation, you will enjoy it so much and get so much benefit from it (spiritually, emotionally, and physically) that you will naturally do it more and more. It will become a natural part of your life that you will treasure and find great enjoyment in.