

# A COURSE IN PRAYER

TAZEWELL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



# A STORY



# **Part One**

## **Desiring Prayer**

**The Necessity of Prayer**  
**The Greatness of Prayer**

# **Part Two**

## **Understanding Prayer**

**What is Prayer?**  
**Conversing with God**  
**Encountering God**

# **Part Three**

## **Learning Prayer**

**Letters on Prayer**  
**The Prayer of Prayers**  
**The Touchstones of Prayer**

# **Part Four**

## **Deepening Prayer**

**As Conversation: Meditating on God's Word**  
**As Encounter: Seeking God's Face**

# **Part Five**

## **Doing Prayer**

**Practice: Daily Prayer**

# Part Four

## Deepening Prayer

**As Conversation:**  
Meditating on God's Word

**As Encounter:**  
Seeking God's Face



# AS CONVERSATION: MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD



- When we respond in trust to the Word of God, then prayer becomes a conversation with God.
- The hyperactivity of contemporary society and our cultural attention disorder makes slow reflection and meditation a lost art.
- While deep experiences of the presence and power of God can happen in many ways, the ordinary way for going deeper spiritually into prayer is through meditation on Scripture.

*“If we pray without meditation, our communion with God becomes poor and distant.”*  
– Edwin Clowney



# 1. Gateway to Prayer



## Psalm 1

*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither --- whatever they do prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.*



## Psalm 1:

- not a prayer per se but a meditation ---  
in fact, it is a meditation *on* meditation
- its prime place is not an accident  
*the Psalms are an edited book, and Psalm 1 is the entrance to the rest*

*“The text [of the Psalms] that teaches us to pray doesn’t begin with prayer. We are not ready. We are wrapped up in ourselves. We are knocked around by the world.”*

*Psalm 1 is “pre-prayer, getting us ready.”*  
*-Eugene Peterson*

According to Psalm 1,  
meditation promises  
at least three things

- **Stability**

*tree by streams of water*

- **Substance**

*character/ not chaff*

*Meditation doesn't just make us*

*feel "close to God",  
but changes our life*

- **Blessedness**

- *peace, well-being, delight*



# Meditation and the Mind



“meditate” = “chew” = “mutter”

- There is no better way to meditate on a verse than to memorize it.
- To understand a section of Scripture means answering 2 basic questions:
  - (1) What did the original author intend to convey?
  - (2) What role does this text play in the whole Bible?
- Biblical meditation doesn't empty the mind of rational thought (as with “mantra meditation”)

*Psalm 42; Psalm 103:1-2*

# 1. Fixing the Mind



There are many ways to meditate on Scripture

The puritan theologian John Owen believed there are three basic movements or stages in meditation.

The 1<sup>st</sup> stage is to get a clear view  
“fixing the thoughts”  
of a truth from the text.

- What does this teach me about God and his character?
- About human nature, character, and behavior?
- About Christ and his salvation?
- About the church, or life in the people of God?

*Example: John 2:13-32*

Ask application questions:

- any personal examples to emulate or avoid?
- any commands to obey?
- any promises to claim?
- any warnings to heed?

*John 1:29-42*

Or take one crucial verse and think through it by emphasizing each word.

*Mark 1:17*

Or read a verse and then try to restate it in your own words

Or memorize the verse



## 2. Inclining the Heart



After engaging the mind, John Owen says the second part of meditation is inclining the heart.

-- seeing how God's truth should be affecting your, your life, and all your relationships

-- preaching to your heart until it connects to the truth and begins to turn away from false hopes

*Luther's approach:*

- something to praise God for,
  - something to repent of,
  - something needed for which to petition
- 
- Why might God be showing this to me today?

### 3. Enjoying or Crying Out

Once we have fully meditated –

working out the truth  
and then working it into the heart –

we respond to the degree  
the Holy Spirit gives us illumination

*We could say then that meditation before prayer consists of thinking, then inclining, and, finally, either enjoying the presence or admitting the absence and asking for God's mercy and help.*



## *Meditating on the Incarnate Word*

Psalm 1     *“the law of the Lord”*  
              *“rule of faith and practice”*

Since we cannot keep it completely,  
it could drive us to despair, unless ---

*Jesus, the great Meditator*  
*(not simply the exemplar)*

*Jesus, the Meditation of God*  
*(God’s truth made “real”)*



***“We are not saved by the love we exercise,  
but by the love we trust.”***



# AS ENCOUNTER: SEEKING GOD'S FACE



*“Jesus’ gifts for his people  
are not experienced  
by so many of them.  
That enjoyment can happen  
only through communion with Christ  
and the secret energy of the Holy Spirit,  
by which we come to enjoy all his benefits.”*

-John Calvin

Calvin’s idea --- that we have blessings  
in Christ we don’t experience --- is  
expressed by Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3.



*I kneel before the Father. . . . I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge --- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*-Ephesians 3:14, 16-19*

Being Rich  
but Living Poor

Q: Why is Paul asking God to give Christians things they must surely already have?

At one level, Christians have these things Paul speaks of. At another level, they haven't experienced them. It is one thing to know the love of Christ and to say, "I know he did all that." It is another thing to **GRASP** how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.





*“In the year 1654, Monday, twenty-third November, from about half past ten in the evening until half an hour after midnight . . . FIRE . . . God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, and not of the philosophers and of the learned. Certainty. Certainty. Feeling. Joy. Peace.”*

*--Blaise Pascal*

***Dwight Moody in Chicago***

***Thomas Merton in Louisville***

- **Exceptional?**
- Would Paul pray for his Ephesian readers to have a nearly unattainably high occurrence?
- Such experiences can come in many degrees, from a mild and gentle warming to an explosive epiphany
- Common to them all is a sense of the magnitude of what we have been given in Christ ---
- attitudes, feelings, behavior change



## *“The Truth Begins to Shine”*

Spirit’s “chemical treatment,”  
(spiritual sensitizing)

2 ways to know honey is sweet  
- with the rational mind  
- with the sensing tongue

“Similarly, there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and graciousness in your heart.”

-Jonathan Edwards



*When once Thou visitest the heart,  
Then truth begins to shine,  
Then earthly vanities depart,  
Then kindles love divine.*

*“O Jesus, King Most Wonderful”  
12<sup>th</sup> century hymn*

## *“Grasping the Love”*

*“I kneel before the Father. . . I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through the Spirit . . . to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge --- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*

*(Eph. 3:16-19)*

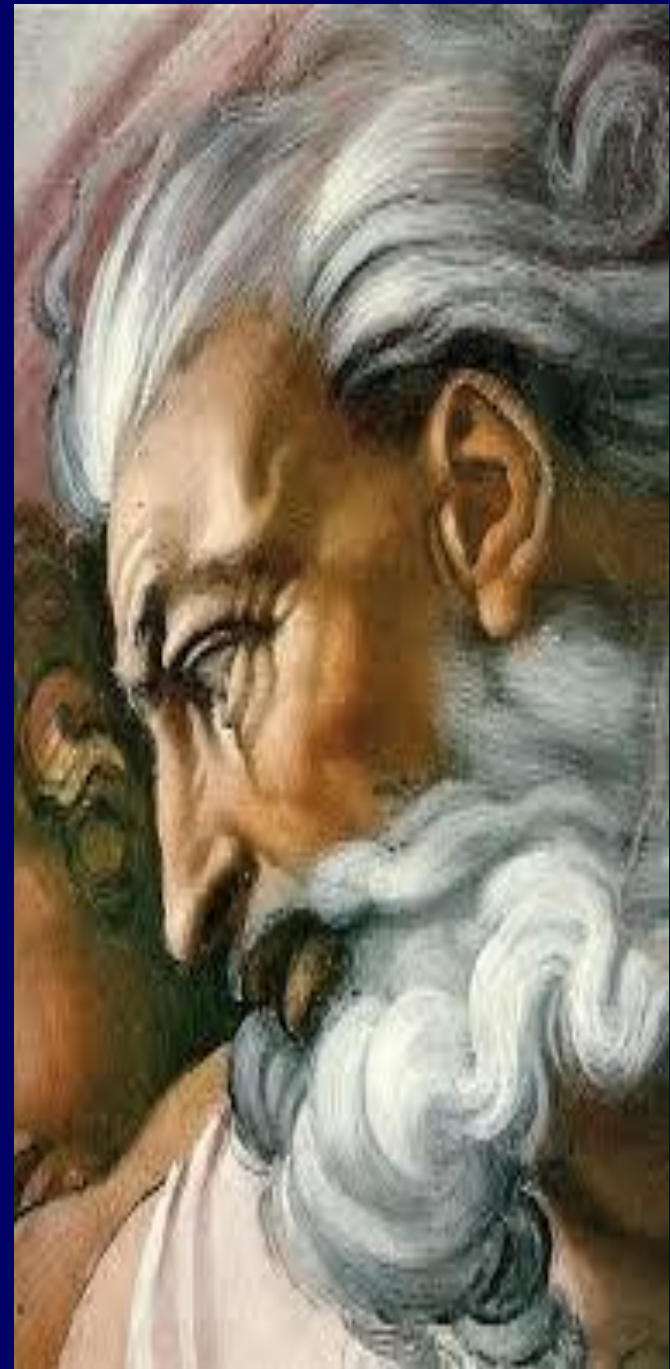
- *kneeling before the Father*
- *the power to “grasp”*
- *through the Spirit*
- *the love of Christ*
- *Width?*
- *Length?*
- *Height?*
- *Depth?*



## *“The Light of the Glory of God in the Face of Christ”*

*“Your face will I seek” (Ps. 27:8)  
What does it mean to seek God’s face?*

- *“addressing people to the face”*
- *having our hearts enabled  
to sense God’s reality/ presence*
- *to lose a sense of God’s presence  
is to lose God’s face  
(Ps. 13:1)*
- *“The Lord make his face  
to shine upon you”.... (Num. 11)*



# *“The Beatific Vision”*

= **direct sight  
of the glory of God**

- in heaven fully, by sight
- on earth partially, by faith
- Thomas Aquinas
- Protestant theologians
- **John Owen** saw it as a vital practice





*“No one will ever behold the glory of Christ by **sight** hereafter who doth not in some measure behold it by **faith** here in this world.”*

John Owen

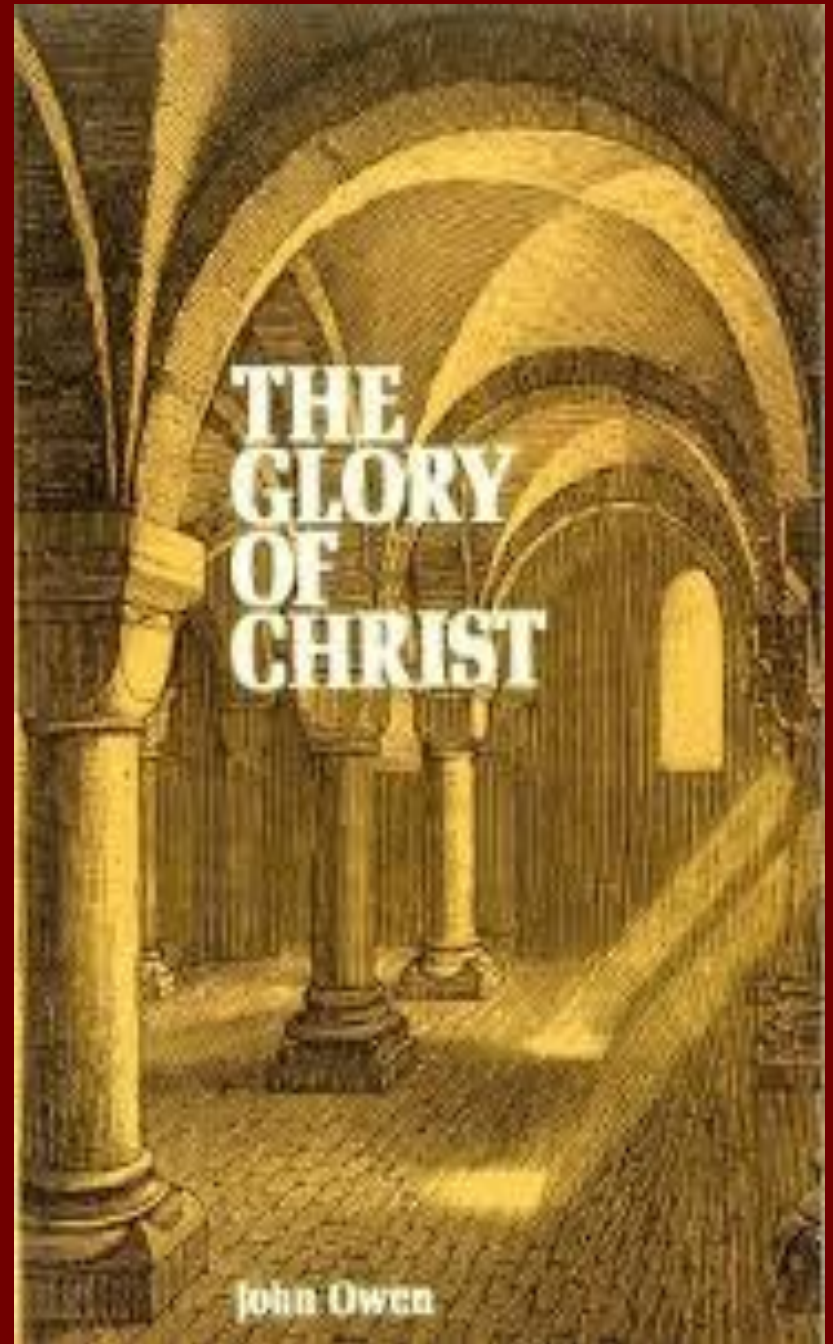
-raises the stakes on prayer and meditation

-Owen held that, unless you learn how to behold the glory of Christ, you are not actually living a truly Christian life in the world

## ***“To behold the glory of Jesus”***

- To find Christ beautiful for who He is in Himself
- not simply to get forgiveness,
- or help (favor/ blessing)
- Jesus’ character, words, and work becomes inherently satisfying, and strengthening

Owen thought it crucial that Christians be enabled to meditate thusly. He reasoned that if the beauty and glory of Christ do not capture our imaginations, and fill our hearts with longing --- then something else will --- and it will rule our lives. We will be slaves.





KEEPING TRUTH  
AND EXPERIENCE  
TOGETHER

“All the things I love are in God,  
the headwater of all streams of desire.”

-Augustine of Hippo (4<sup>th</sup> cent.)



**NEXT SUNDAY**

**Part Five**  
**Doing Prayer**

**Practice: Daily Prayer**

