

**GOD'S
BATTLE PLAN
FOR THE MIND**

GOD'S BATTLE PLAN FOR THE MIND

The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation

David W. Saxton



Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

God's Battle Plan for the Mind
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Reformation Heritage Books
2965 Leonard St. NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
616-977-0889 / Fax 616-285-3246
orders@heritagebooks.org
www.heritagebooks.org

Printed in the United States of America
15 16 17 18 19 20/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Saxton, David W.

God's battle plan for the mind : the Puritan practice of biblical meditation /
David W. Saxton.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-60178-371-4 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Meditation—Christianity. 2.
Meditation—Puritans. 3. Meditation—Reformed Church. I. Title.

BV4813.S23 2015

248.3'4—dc23

2014046678

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Foreword

Imagine being invited to a private dinner hosted by a friend who works as a chef in a five-star restaurant. This person is renowned for cooking meals that are nutritious, healthy, delightful, and satisfying. You can hardly wait for the day to arrive. Finally it comes, and from the moment you step in the front door, you are embraced by tantalizing aromas. As the host seats you, the colors and arrangement of the food on various dishes are a feast for the eyes. Your friend has thoughtfully chosen your favorite foods.

However, just as you sink your fork into the first bite and raise it to your lips, your phone chirps like a cuckoo clock gone mad. The strident voice on the line is your boss's, and before he finishes his first sentence you know that you will never eat the delicacies set before you. With a rumbling stomach and a tight smile, you make your excuses and head out the door. You saw the food and smelled it, but never chewed it, digested it, or benefited from it. That is the Christian life *without meditation*.

All over the world, people go to hear the preaching of the Word on the Lord's Day. Those who are serious about spiritual growth spend time regularly reading the Bible. However, though they hear and read the Word, too often they do not chew or digest it. Before their time in the Word is done, the world is calling, and they rush off after the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. As a result, though they can perhaps say something about what the Word says, they have neither enjoyed the Word in the power of the Spirit nor incorporated it deeply into their lives. They have not meditated on the Scriptures.

On the other hand, there are Christians who bloom where they are planted. If life gives them lemons, they make lemonade. But they are not buoyed up by the power of positive thinking. Though tenderhearted and compassionate, they also have backbones of steel, and their courage is amazing when they must stand for their beliefs. What is their secret? They have learned to draw with joy from the wells of salvation. They live near to the streams of life, for their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law they meditate day and night.

What is meditation? Why is it crucial for spiritual growth? How do you do it? What are practical ways to get started if you have not done it before or if it has been a long time? To answer these questions, read this book.

David Saxton devoted himself to examine this neglected topic at my recommendation as part of his studies at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. It was a pleasure to oversee his work. When I studied this subject in 2002 for a conference address at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, I was amazed to discover that hardly anything had been written on what I called “the Puritan art of meditation.” By the time I finished my study, I had forty-one Puritan books on my desk, all of which dealt with meditation. I incorporated their references into my footnotes, hoping that someone would take what I had done and expand it into a full manuscript. I am grateful to report that David has done his homework, read these old Puritan tomes, and worked hard to share the principles he has learned for today’s readers. However, David does not write as an academic, but as a pastor. In other words, he is not interested in merely generating discussion about the Puritan teachings of meditation. He wants people to meditate on the glory of God for the glory of God. He is convinced that meditation is crucial for the spiritual battle that every Christian fights.

So read this book, but don’t read it just to talk about it or to expand your intellectual knowledge. Read it because you desire God. Therefore, read it with prayer and put it into action.

—Joel R. Beeke

The Importance of Recovering the Joyful Habit of Biblical Meditation

“It has become thoughtless, superficial, and self-absorbed.” That was my answer to the question, What has gone wrong with modern Christianity? When this question has come up in subsequent conversations, no one has ever disagreed with my charge that modern Christianity has devolved to a superficial religion. Believers usually disagree when they discuss the antidote for this shallow spirituality. There are really only two answers to the basic problem of weak, meaningless religion. A believer could adapt and concede to the reality of anemic Christianity; many Christians follow this approach. They construct their churches to be user-friendly in their worship, shallow in their preaching, and casual in their view of Christian commitment. They believe that Christianity’s problem has been organizing churches that are too focused on Christian duties rather than creating a “relaxed” atmosphere. Jeremiah 6:16 outlines the second approach to deal with superficial Christianity: “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.”

This latter approach advocates for the church’s return to true biblical spirituality—a serious focus on putting God’s Word to practice in one’s own experience. We must wholeheartedly integrate doctrine with living. This necessary wedding of doctrine and practice destroys superficial Christianity, but it only comes through a careful and serious consideration of God’s Word. This brings us to the topic of this study—*the practice of biblical*

meditation, or, *the doctrine of Christian thinking*. This is God's battle plan for the believer's mind.

Do you remember the first sermon that truly gripped your heart? I first experienced this joy when I was a sixteen-year-old new believer. An elderly gentleman came as a guest speaker to my church. His text was Psalm 1 on the marks of a godly, blessed person. In that sermon, the Lord drove home this primary point: a healthy, growing relationship to the Word of God is central to a person's blessed condition. A godly person does not just snack occasionally on God's truth; rather, the Word is his heart's delight and hourly consideration. Psalm 1 beautifully demonstrates the practice of biblical meditation. What does it mean to meditate? It means to think personally, practically, seriously, and earnestly on how the truth of God's Word should look in life. Edmund Calamy described it as "dwelling upon the mercies we receive, the chewing upon the promises."¹ When he meditates, the believer fills his mind with truth so that his life becomes governed by the attitude of the Savior.

Unfortunately, over the last century believers have lost a regular focus on Christian meditation. The Reformers and Puritans regularly wrote, taught, and exhorted God's people to a life of meditation. Now, this emphasis has largely diminished. Christians rarely write major works on this subject in modern times. Sadly, in recent years many associate meditation with false religion of the Far East. They view meditation as a process of emptying the mind rather than, as Scripture commands, filling the mind with divinely revealed truth. Noting the ongoing battle for the minds and hearts of the current generation, this is especially alarming. Without a return to the delightful duty of biblical meditation, the believer will continue to handle God's Word merely intellectually. He will fail to digest the Scriptures to make them his daily walk and practice.

The goal of this book is to convince God's people of the absolute necessity of personal meditation. This book will motivate the believer to begin this work; teach practically how to meditate on divine truth; and guide in right patterns of thinking throughout the day. Two sources will aid us: biblical teaching and the rich spiritual experience of Puritans who were

1. Edmund Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation* (London, 1680), 59.

committed to practicing spiritual meditation. Thus, I desire to encourage God's people to see the necessity of this extremely practical subject and to enjoy true meditation on God's Word.

Meditation Heals a Believer's Heart and Settles His Mind

Why have the past few generations of believers not focused on biblical meditation? Although we could answer this question in different ways, the primary reason is a lack of confidence in God's Word to sufficiently deal with the issues, problems, and temptations that believers face. We are bombarded with difficulties, enticements, and anxieties that leave us feeling stressed and inwardly troubled. How has God designed for us to find comfort and relief for our hurting hearts? Is God pleased that His people use the world's escape mechanisms: entertainment, alcohol, hobbies, worldly amusements, mind-numbing pop music, constant shopping, and sports? While we recognize God has freely given His people certain upright enjoyments in this world, God has chosen primarily to help us deal with discouragements and sin by applying divine truth to our minds. Meditation ties people's fluttering minds to their true spiritual anchor of stability. William Bates wrote, "There is great inconsistency in the thoughts of men; but meditation doth chain and fasten them to a spiritual object."² Introducing some Puritan meditations, Edmond Smith commented, "Meditation will lead to a calmness of disposition, a serenity of mind and a certainty about the ways of God."³ Smith reflected that former generations viewed meditation as a godly person's greatest need, especially during times of trials and pain.

Thomas Watson wrote, "A Christian enters into meditation as a man enters into the hospital, that he may be healed. Meditation heals the soul of its deadness and earthliness."⁴ Biblical meditation on Scripture acts as a believer's medicine because God's Spirit always uses the balm of His truth to provide lasting comfort and help. Richard Sibbes attested: "This

2. William Bates, "On Divine Meditation," in *The Whole Works of the Rev. William Bates*, ed. W. Farmer (1815; repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1990), 3:115.

3. Edmond Smith, *A Tree by a Stream: Unlock the Secrets of Active Meditation* (Ross-shire, U.K.: Christian Focus Publications, 1995), 8–9.

4. Thomas Watson, *The Christian on the Mount: A Treatise on Meditation*, ed. Don Kistler (1657; repr., Orlando, Fla.: Northampton Press, 2009), 26–27.

meditation is...a serious act of the Spirit in the inwards of the soul, whose object is spiritual, whose affection is a provoked appetite to practice holy things; a kindling in us of the love of God, a zeal toward His truth, a healing our benumbed hearts.”⁵ Thus, God’s Spirit relieves the heart by applying divine truth through meditation. The Spirit slows down a worrying mind and restores order to the soul of His creatures. Thomas Hooker defined meditation as a “serious intention of the mind whereby we come to search out the truth, and settle it effectually upon the heart.”⁶ Just as there would be no true healing from a surgery without a serious commitment to physical rest, so there is no spiritual healing without a commitment to meditation. The believer must personally ponder and intimately apply God’s Word to his own depressing case. The great Puritan pastor Richard Baxter experienced many painful agonies during his sojourn here on earth. Yet, he was comforted by “this habit of heavenly meditation.” He was able “to maintain wonderful equanimity of mind, though his trials and sufferings were exceedingly severe.”⁷ Believer, the streams of God’s Word heal just as effectively today as in Baxter’s time. Trust the Spirit of comfort to help you as you begin to dwell on the eternal truths of grace and peace in God’s Word.

Meditation Provides Enormous Spiritual Value

Meditation might not produce earthly blessings like greater wealth, the reduction of trials, or a better job. However, the blessings that flow from a mind fixed on God’s truth are greater, higher, and more valuable than anything that this world could possibly offer. Through meditation, a feeble person is turned into one who is confident in God’s grace. Meditation awakens the lethargic, energizes the weary, and encourages the depressed. Nathanael Ranew wrote that “little meditating makes lean Christians, of

5. Richard Sibbes, “Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations,” in *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander Grosart (1862–1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 7:182–83.

6. Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption: Books 9–10* (Ames, Iowa: International Outreach, 2008), 154.

7. Richard Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest* (1652; repr., Ross-shire, U.K.: Christian Focus, 1998), xxi.

little life, little strength, little growth, and of little usefulness to others.”⁸ More recently, Greg Daniel rightly described meditation’s value as the “nucleus of the Puritan devotional life.”⁹ In his doctoral dissertation on “The Puritan Meditative Tradition,” Simon Chan agreed that the Puritans considered meditation as the “supreme means of grace.”¹⁰ In a recent study of Watson, Jennifer Neimeyer concluded that he “saw meditation upon the Word of God as the most important aspect of private Christian devotion.”¹¹

Divine meditation has a multifaceted value. It provides us spiritual discernment;¹² improves our Bible reading and prayer lives;¹³ applies the general truths of the Bible personally and specifically;¹⁴ strengthens our hearts by focusing on spiritual truths;¹⁵ and provides lasting benefit from dwelling on the truths we know.¹⁶

Because of meditation’s great spiritual value, Satan especially opposes it. Observing this, Watson stated, “The devil is an enemy of meditation.... He knows that meditation is a means to compose the heart, and to bring it into a gracious frame.... Satan is content that you should be hearing and praying Christians, so that ye be not meditating Christians; he can stand your small shot, provided that you do not put in this bullet.”¹⁷ Yet, today, the devil seems to win on this point. He has convinced us that meditation is unnecessary,

8. Nathanael Ranew, *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation* (1839; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 157.

9. Greg K. Daniel, “The Puritan Ladder of Meditation: An Explication of Puritan Meditation and Its Compatibility with Catholic Meditation” (MA thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1993), 4.

10. Simon K. H. Chan, “The Puritan Meditative Tradition, 1599–1691: A Study of Ascetical Pietism” (PhD diss., Madeline College, Cambridge, 1986), 15.

11. Jennifer C. Neimeyer, “Thomas Watson: The Necessity of Meditation,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 2010): 181.

12. Smith, *Tree by a Stream*, 9.

13. Ranew, *Solitude Improved*, xi. Many Puritans suggest that meditation is designed to be a transitional, “middle-duty” between Bible reading and prayer.

14. James Ussher, *A Method for Meditation* (London: Printed at Paul’s Church Yard, 1656), 43.

15. Thomas Boston, “Duty and Advantage of Solemn Meditation,” in *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M’Millan (1853; repr., Stoke-on-Trent, U.K.: Tent-maker, 2005), 4:454.

16. Calamy, *Divine Meditation*, 59.

17. Thomas Watson, *Gleanings from Thomas Watson*, ed. Hamilton Smith (1915; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 103.

and we have bought into his ideas. With piercing clarity, Calamy wrote, "Now this want of meditation is a sin, that I persuade myself [that] most Christians are guilty of, I cannot exclude myself; there are few Christians that are convinced of the necessity of this duty of divine meditation."¹⁸ Because of this, pastors such as James Ussher counseled people over 350 years ago to meditate: "One hour spent thus, is worth more than a thousand sermons, and this is no debasing of the word, but an honor unto it."¹⁹

Meditation Is a Necessity for Every Growing, Healthy Believer

While American Christians have access to more Bible study material and biblical preaching than ever before, they struggle to know what to do with all this knowledge. Thankfully, the Lord designed the practice of meditation to unite biblical knowledge to actual living. Unless a believer spends regular time thinking personally and deeply about the things of God, he will not be growing in the grace that the Lord desires in his life. Watson beautifully explained this necessity: "Without meditation the truth of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost; meditation imprints and fastens a truth in the mind.... As a hammer drives a nail to the head, so meditation drives a truth to the heart. Without meditation the word preached may increase notion, not affection."²⁰ Baxter considered a Christian without meditation as a house that had no light because its windows remained shut:

Now you read over whole chapters, and hear sermon after sermon, either they never stir you, or at least, it is but a little for fit, like a man that hath warmed himself at the fire in the winter, and when he goes from it, is colder than before; but if you would but set yourselves to consider of what you hear or read, one line of a chapter, or one sentence of a sermon, would lay you in tears, or make you groan, or at least do more than now is done. Satan hath garrisoned the heart of every carnal man; and consideration is the principal means to cast him out.²¹

18. Calamy, *Divine Meditation*, 59–60.

19. Ussher, *Meditation*, 43.

20. Watson, *Gleanings*, 106–7.

21. Richard Baxter, *Directions to a Sound Conversion*, in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter: Selected Treatises* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 543.

But must Christians really practice meditation? Are there not some who have “arrived” at a point of growth where this isn’t really important for them anymore? When John Ball considered who should apply himself to meditation, he answered that no one can “exempt himself from this duty, unless he purpose to live unprofitably to others, uncomfortably in himself, and disobedient against God.”²² The Puritans set forth Joshua, Moses’ successor, to demonstrate the necessity of meditation. The Lord appeared to Joshua to encourage him for the task of conquering the Promised Land. They did not discuss military strategies or battle plans at this rare meeting. Rather, the Lord told Joshua that his greatest need was to live by meditating upon God’s word (Josh. 1:6–8). Henry Scudder argued that if a person did not meditate on truth in his free time, he would inevitably be tempted and fall into sin. Satan goes after idle minds. Scudder counseled: “When you are alone, be sure that you are well and fully exercised about something that is good...in holy meditation or prayer. For whensoever Satan does find you idle...he will take that as an opportunity to use you for himself, and to employ you in some of his works (Matt. 12:44).”²³

When some implied that meditation was not essential for every believer, Thomas Manton countered that meditation was “a necessary duty, without which all graces would languish and wither. Faith is lean and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation on the promises (Ps. 119:92).”²⁴ Manton continued to show the necessity of biblical meditation by urging: “Those Christians that are backwards to the duty of meditation, find none of those impulses and meltings of love that are in others.... Affections always follow the rate of our thoughts, if they are ponderous and serious.... Thus, you see, it is a necessary duty.”²⁵ Without meditation, our faith and understanding will remain simple and underdeveloped—like unripened fruit. But meditating deeply on God can inspire rich, loving

22. John Ball, *A Treatise of Divine Meditation* (London: Printed at St. Paul’s Church Yard, 1660), 12. Ball spends pages 11–17 discussing various categories of individuals and roles to show that every person in every vocation must pursue biblical meditation.

23. Henry Scudder, *The Christian’s Daily Walk in Holy Security and Peace* (repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1984), 97.

24. Thomas Manton, “Sermons Upon Genesis 24:63,” in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (Worthington, Pa.: Maranatha Publications, 1979), 17:270.

25. Manton, “Sermons Upon Genesis 24:63,” 17:271.

fellowship with Him. Watson agreed: “Grace breeds delight in God, and delight breeds meditation. Meditation is a duty wherein consists the essentials of religion, and that nourishes the very life-blood of it.... A godly Christian is a meditating Christian.”²⁶ Later, Watson specified the necessity of meditation in four principles:

1. The end why God has given us His Word written and preached is not only to know it, but that we should meditate on it. The Scripture is a love letter.... We must not run over it in haste, but meditate upon [it]....
2. The necessity of meditation appears because without it we can never be godly Christians. A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without weapons or a workman without tools....
3. Without meditation the truths we know will never affect our hearts....
4. Without meditation we make ourselves guilty of slighting God and His Word.²⁷

Meditation Stresses What Is Practical, Not the Contemplative or Speculative

When many people picture meditating, they see an oddly dressed monk who contemplates useless and unsolvable mysteries. This, however, is not true biblical meditation, which always results in changed actions, resolves, and practices. Far from using meditation as an excuse for laziness, William Bridge warned his people to “not so spend your whole time in the work of meditation, that this work of meditation should eat up other duties.”²⁸ Sadly, many believers may not connect their everyday life with spending time thinking deeply about divine truth. Yet, Paul connects right thinking and right practice in one of the key New Testament passages on meditation, Philippians 4:8–9:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those

26. Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 23–24.

27. Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 65–67.

28. William Bridge, “The Work and Way of Meditation,” in *The Works of Rev. William Bridge* (1845; repr., Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 3:157.

things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

This passage pronounces a blessing not on those who merely know God's will, but rather on those who have put His will into everyday practice by dwelling on God's truth.

The Puritans often stressed this practical goal of biblical meditation. Richard Greenham shaped meditation around Christian practice: "Meditation is that exercise of the mind, whereby we call to our remembrance that which we know, do further debate of it, and apply it to ourselves, that we might have some use of it in our practice."²⁹ Watson had these rules about his meditation:

Let meditation be reduced to practice. Live out your meditation.... Meditation and practice, like two sisters, must go hand in hand.... The end of meditation is action.... Without this, we are like those Gnostics who had much knowledge, but were licentious in their lives. When you have been meditating on sin...put your meditation to practice; give sin a bill of divorce.... Let your meditation be practical. When you have been meditating upon a promise, live out that promise.... If when you have meditated on God's law, you do not obey His law, you will come short of those who have come short of heaven.... Meditation without practice will increase a man's condemnation.³⁰

Calamy used the image of doors to explain the close connection between meditation and practical obedience. He wrote that for meditation to be biblical, it must pass through three doors to be any good—the doors of understanding, the doors of the heart, and the doors of conversation (lifestyle). He wrote that the end goal of meditation was to "make thy conversation more holy; thou must meditate of God as to walk as God walks; and so to meditate of Christ as to prize him, and live in obedience to him."³¹ If meditation did not end in the practice of godly obedience, then it would be similar to chewing and swallowing food and never growing or getting healthier. Manton said it well: "Whatever you meditate upon must

29. Richard Greenham, "Grave Counsels and Godly Concerns," in *The Works of Richard Greenham* (1599; repr., Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1973), 37.

30. Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 100–102.

31. Calamy, *Divine Meditation*, 28.

be drawn down to application.... While we stay in generals, we do not but bend the bow; when we come to application, we let fly the arrow, and we hit the mark."³² As Ball aptly wrote, "Application is the life of meditation."³³

Meditation Digests God's Word into One's Own Life and Experience

Ball stated, "Without meditation, truths are devoured, not digested."³⁴ Can you imagine eating a nutritious meal by swallowing each bite whole instead of carefully chewing? This is what it is like to constantly hear sermons and read Bible passages without careful meditation. Calamy agreed: "As it is impossible for a man to be nourished by meat if he [lacks] digestion and concoction, so it is impossible for a man to be nourished in grace, if he neglect the duty of divine meditation; for divine meditation is the spiritual concoction [mixing] and digestion of all holy things, and all holy duties."³⁵ Baxter also employed this image of digestion. He counseled, "I think that as a man is but half an hour in chewing and taking into his stomach that meat which he must have seven or eight hours at least to digest; so a man may take into his understanding and memory more truth in one hour than he is able well to digest in many. A man may eat too much, but he cannot digest too well."³⁶ Ranew taught that meditation "is like the assimilating or digestion power, by helping to concoct spiritual food and turn it into spiritual nourishment.... Meditation highly conduces to this spiritual digestion by its pondering... reasons and incentives as work the heart into compliance and obedience."³⁷

In a more recent work that briefly touches upon meditation, Donald Whitney compares meditation to hot water and a tea bag. "Hearing God's Word is like one dip of the tea bag into the cup. Some of the tea's flavor is absorbed by the water, but not as much as would occur with a more thorough soaking of the bag.... [Meditation] is like immersing the bag completely

32. Manton, "Sermons Upon Genesis 24:63," 17:277.

33. Ball, *Divine Meditation*, 132.

34. Ball, *Divine Meditation*, A3.

35. Calamy, *Divine Meditation*, 144.

36. Baxter, *Everlasting Rest*, 549.

37. Ranew, *Solitude Improved*, xii.

and letting it steep until all the rich tea flavor has been extracted.”³⁸ Jerry Bridges agreed. He described how to meditate to promote godly fear: “It is vain to pray for an increase of the fear of God in our hearts without meditating on passages of Scripture that are particularly suited to stimulate that fear.”³⁹ Watson was correct when he wrote, “It is better to meditate on one sermon than to hear five sermons. Many complain that they do not profit from sermons; this may be the chief reason, because they do not chew the cud; they do not meditate on what they have heard.”⁴⁰

Meditating on Scripture versus merely hearing it is the difference between true and false grace in a person’s heart. Thomas White explained, “No man is converted without meditation, for everyone that is converted... hears the truth,...is convinced,...considers and meditates upon them,... [and] is affected with them.”⁴¹ Bates suggested that David was called a man after God’s own heart because he meditated. It was “because of the heavenly frame and temper of his spirit.”⁴² Commenting on Psalms 1:2 and 119:97, 148, Ranew instructed:

Not a watch set in the night, but he had his meditation. Oh, most admirable frame of spirit! A king and a daily meditator, and a night meditator also. It was not family business, nor state affairs, nor war’s urgencies and difficulties that so could crowd in and impose upon his thoughts, but he would have his spiritual retreats, his soul-repasts, in meditation, and mount up to heaven by it.⁴³

Meditation, Though Delightful and Joyful, Remains a Rare and Difficult Work

I used to drive past a house that was in such a state of disrepair it eventually collapsed with all the furniture still inside. This house reminded me of the inner heart of many of God’s people. The heart is destroyed due to neglect

38. Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 48.

39. Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), 50.

40. Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 85.

41. Thomas White, *A Method and Instruction for the Art of Divine Meditation* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, 1672), 22.

42. Bates, “On Divine Meditation,” 3:113.

43. Ranew, *Solitude Improved*, 4–5.

and lack of right thinking. Though God's people should delight in meditation, the modern high-tech church has almost totally forgotten about this hidden jewel of spiritual strengthening. William Spurstowe mourned the same reality for believers in his day in *The Spiritual Chemist*. He wrote, "This duty of divine and spiritual meditation, is a thing that in this degenerate age the generality of Christians are utter strangers to, and very hardly brought to the practice of."⁴⁴ Bates began his sermon "On Divine Meditation" this way: "Meditation is a duty so rare and unpracticed, that I think the knowledge of it is not among all Christians, the exercise of it is among very few."⁴⁵ In the opening words of *A Treatise of Divine Meditation*, Ball wrote: "There is no duty more neglected amongst Christians, than this of meditation."⁴⁶ Baxter added, "Men that are very tender-conscienced toward most other duties, yet do as easily overslip this, as if they knew it not to be a duty at all.... Though it be a duty by which all other duties are improved."⁴⁷ James Davison commented in his excellent article on Puritan meditation: "Like the art of Christian contentment, the art of Christian meditation is something of a lost art. It does not sit easy in our quick-fix world.... Meditation takes time."⁴⁸ If these men all lamented that there wasn't enough meditating happening in their own day, how much worse is it today?

Why is meditation so neglected when it is so important and delightful? Simply put, meditation is difficult work—work that is opposed by the distracting spirit of our age, our adversary the devil, and the carnal raging of our hearts. Since modern Christianity stresses an instant, easy kind of spirituality, it is not difficult to see why the practice of meditation is so often neglected. Watson in *Heaven Taken by Storm* honestly shared why meditation is so difficult:

By nature we shun holy meditation. To meditate on worldly secular things, even if it were all day, we can do without any diversion, but to

44. William Spurstowe, *The Spiritual Chemist or Six Decades of Divine Meditations* (London: Philip Chetwind, 1666), A3.

45. Bates, "On Divine Meditation," 3:114.

46. Ball, *Divine Meditation*, A3.

47. Baxter, *Everlasting Rest*, 549.

48. James Davison, "What We Can Learn from the Puritan Emphasis on Meditation," *Gospel Magazine* (January 2012): 19.

have our thoughts fixed on God, how hard do we find it! How do our hearts quarrel with this duty!... Satan does what he can to hinder this duty. He is an enemy of meditation. The devil cares not how much we hear, nor how little we meditate.⁴⁹

Based on the difficulty of the work, one would be wise to accept the counsel of Ranew: "In all soul work, and particularly in this of meditation, the throng of difficulties is great, the oppositions are many; therefore the purposes and resolutions of heart must be strong and high. None ever carry on their work well who are not first well resolved...to hold on their course to the last."⁵⁰ But Bridge explained that the work of meditation is worth the great spiritual reward:

As it is a soul-satisfying work, so this work of meditation to a gracious soul is a most delightful work. What greater delight than to think on that God in whom he doth most delight?... Though it be hard in regard of its practice, yet it may be sweet and delightful in regard to its profit.... Is it not a hard work for a man to be digging in the mines, digging up of silver; and yet delightful in regard of the profit?⁵¹

He also wrote that if a believer were to profit and benefit spiritually, then there must be a "fixation of the souls upon some truth; a dwelling and fixing of the soul upon some thing."⁵² We struggle with fixing our attention, just as these Puritan pastors in their day. However, though the task is troublesome, we must still attempt it. It is a mark of growth that will take time to develop the habit of learning to sit still with God and listen to Him, thinking about His words. The specialness of that quiet, private time with Him has to outweigh the difficulty of it. Robert Bolton exhorted, "Let not pass such a golden opportunity for thy spiritual good, without some sweet comfortable conference with thy God in secret."⁵³ Sibbes added, "So then a true Christian must endeavor himself to deliver...the millions of God's

49. Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, ed. Joel Beeke (1810; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 23.

50. Ranew, *Solitude Improved*, 14.

51. Bridge, "The Sweetness and Profitableness of Divine Meditation," 3:135.

52. Bridge, "The Sweetness and Profitableness of Divine Meditation," 3:126.

53. Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* (1626, repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1991), 79–80.

mercy to his soul; in secret thoughts, chewing the cud of every circumstance with continual contemplation.”⁵⁴ In closing this chapter, note what Ussher prayed about meditation: “God grant we may be as willing to use the means, as we are ready to enjoy the end.”⁵⁵

54. Sibbes, “Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations,” 7:181.

55. Ussher, *Meditation*, A3.