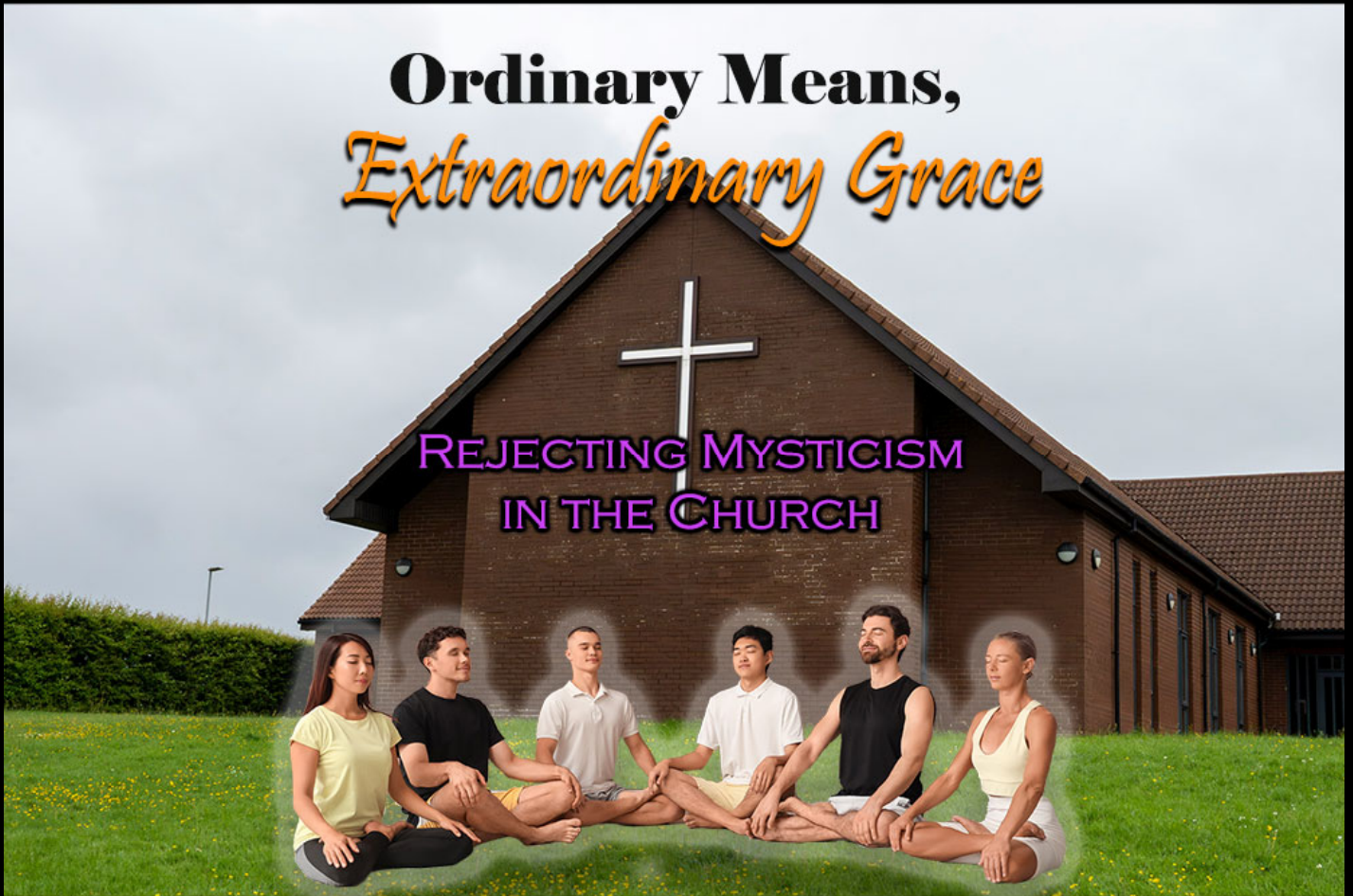


Theology for Life

Volume 12 | Issue 1 | Spring 2025

Ordinary Means, *Extraordinary Grace*

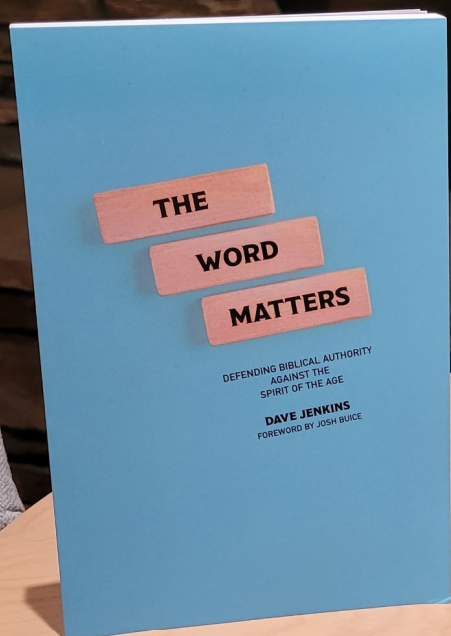
REJECTING MYSTICISM
IN THE CHURCH



Inside this Issue...

- God: The Primary Agent in the Means of Grace
- The Pulsebeat of Every Prayer
- The Dangers of Contemplative Spirituality

In ***The Word Matters***, Dave Jenkins takes readers by the hand and helps them understand how serious the issue of biblical authority is and how the Bible is under attack, so that they can stand with confidence on the Word of God.



The Word Matters

DEFENDING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY
AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE



In a pastoral and yet accessible way Dave Jenkins, in his latest book, ***Contentment: The Journey of A Lifetime***, takes readers on a personal journey of discovering contentment as defined in Scripture. Masterfully incorporating the Church's rich teaching and literature on contentment, he provides very practical help for readers, equipping them in their efforts to gain contentment in their own lives.

Contentment

The Journey of a Lifetime

DAVE JENKINS

Theology for Life

www.theologylife.org

Table of Contents

Editor's Corner By Dave Jenkins	Page 8
God: The Primary Agent in the Means of Grace By Dave Jenkins	Page 10
The Sacraments and the Means of Grace By Dave Jenkins	Page 15
Spiritual Disciplines and the Means of Grace By David de Bruyn	Page 20
10 Signs of Contemplative Influence in Your Church By Dave Jenkins	Page 27
Hearing the Word Together By Joshua Mills	Page 30
The Pulsebeat of Every Prayer By Joshua Mills	Page 34
Mysticism and the Authority of Scripture: Why the Word is Enough By Dave Jenkins	Page 39

Table of Contents (Continued)

Holding Fast to the Word: A Biblical Response to Mystical Spirituality By Dave Jenkins	Page 44
Inner Healing and Its Dangerous Teachings By Dawn Hill	Page 53
Mindfulness and Christianity By Doreen Virtue	Page 58
Contemplative Spirituality: Is it Biblical? By Marcia Montenegro	Page 65
8 Questions to Ask Before Joining a Spiritual Formation Class By Dave Jenkins	Page 74
Practical Shepherding Note: How to Shepherd People Out of Contemplative Practices By Dave Jenkins	Page 77
The Dangers of Contemplative Spirituality By Gary Gilley	Page 80
Speaking the Truth in Love: How Church Members Can Address Contemplative Spirituality By Dave Jenkins	Page 90

Table of Contents (Continued)

Recommended Reading on the Means of Grace and Contemplative Spirituality By Dave Jenkins	Page 96
Multimedia & Podcast Features: Engaging Hearts and Minds with Sound Doctrine	Page 98
About the Authors	Page 100



Editor's Corner

EXECUTIVE EDITOR*Dave Jenkins***CONTENT EDITOR***Sarah Jenkins***DESIGN DIRECTOR***Sarah Jenkins*

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In every generation, the Church faces the temptation to chase after spiritual shortcuts. Today, that temptation often comes in the form of contemplative practices and mystical techniques that promise peace, presence, or intimacy with God apart from His Word. These trends may sound appealing, but they leave God's people disoriented, often confusing subjective experience with true communion with Christ.

That is why recovering a biblical understanding of the means of grace is so urgent. The Lord has not left us to wonder how He draws near to His people. He has given us His appointed means: the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, prayer, and the fellowship of the Church. Through these ordinary means, God does extraordinary work, giving life, sustaining faith, and conforming His people to Christ.

Contemplative mysticism insists there is something "more." But the truth is that Christ is enough. His Word is

sufficient. His Spirit is present and powerful. God's people don't need novelty, we need the faithful, steady nourishment He has promised to give in His Word to His people.

This issue of *Theology for Life Magazine* is devoted to instructing us in these very truths. As you read, you will be invited to trust in the sufficiency of Christ and to rejoice in the simple, profound, and life-giving ways He meets His people.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

God: The Primary Agent in the Means of Grace

By Dave Jenkins

When Christians think about how we grow in holiness, we often default to thinking about our effort: the discipline of daily Bible reading, the commitment to prayer, or the frequency of



attending worship. These are good and necessary things, but the deeper question is often overlooked: who is the One truly at work when we grow in grace?

The biblical answer is clear: God Himself is the primary agent in sanctification. He has not left His people to invent ways of spiritual growth. Instead, He has appointed specific means: the Word, the sacraments, and prayer; through which He communicates His grace, strengthens His Church, and conforms His people to Christ.

Understanding that God is the One at work guards us against two dangers: self-reliance and passivity. The Christian life is neither a self-improvement pro-

ject nor a spectator sport. It is a Spirit-empowered life, lived under God's appointed means, in which He acts, and we respond with faith and obedience.

God's Word: His Living Voice to His People

From the opening chapter of Genesis, we see that God's Word is powerful and creative: "*And God said... and it was so.*" The Word that called the universe into being is the same Word that calls sinners out of darkness into light (2 Corinthians 4:6).

In the Old Testament, God's Word came through His prophets: "*Thus saith the Lord.*" In the New Testament, that Word is revealed supremely in Christ, the incarnate Word (John 1:1–14). Today, God speaks through the inscripturated Word of Scripture, read and preached in the local church.

The Spirit's Work Through the Word

The Word is not a dead letter. Hebrews 4:12 tells us it is "*living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.*" The Spirit wields the Word to convict, comfort, and conform believers to the image of Christ. Paul reminds Timothy that "*all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*" (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Notice that God's Word does not merely inform; it transforms.

Implications for Preachers and Hearers

This truth shapes both preacher and hearer. The preacher does not rely on rhetoric or theatrics, but trusts the Spirit to work through the faithful exposition of Scripture. The congregation does not come to be entertained but to receive God's living Word.

God's Grace in the Sacraments

The Reformation recovered a rich understanding of the sacraments as means of grace. They are not bare memorials, nor are they magical rites. Rather, they are visible words—outward signs and seals of God's covenant promises. The

Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sacraments as “holy ordinances instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.” In other words, the sacraments point us to Christ and assure us of His promises.

Baptism: God’s Covenant Sign

Baptism signifies union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3–4). It marks believers with the name of the Triune God (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is not primarily our testimony about ourselves; it is God’s testimony about His grace.

The Lord’s Supper: Spiritual Nourishment

At the Lord’s Table, Christ feeds His people by His Spirit. We partake of

bread and wine, but by faith we feed on

Christ Himself. Calvin described the

Lord’s Supper as a “mystical union”

where the Spirit lifts believers to com-

mune with the risen Christ. Paul teaches

that the Supper is a proclamation of the

Lord’s death until He comes again (1 Co-

rinthians 11:26). It points us back to the

cross, assures us of His present grace, and

points forward to the marriage supper of

the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

“Across Church history, faithful voices have consistently affirmed that the ordinary means of grace are God’s chosen instruments for building His Church.”

God’s Invitation in Prayer, Rooted in the Trinity

Prayer is not a technique but a relationship. We pray to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26–27 reminds us that the Spirit helps us in our weakness, interceding when we do not know what to pray. Hebrews 7:25 assures us that Christ intercedes for us as our great High Priest. Thus,

prayer is not simply our words reaching heaven; it is the Spirit drawing us into the communion of the Triune God.

God's Action in Answering Prayer

In prayer, God conforms our desires to His will. He gives wisdom generously (James 1:5), peace that surpasses understanding (Philippians 4:6–7), and strength to endure trials. Every answered prayer is testimony that He is the One acting.

Historical Witness: The Church on the Means of Grace

The Reformers and Puritans emphasized the centrality of the means of grace.

- Martin Luther insisted that God works through “external Word and sacrament” to give faith.
- John Calvin wrote, “God has joined together the preaching of the Word and the sacraments, and it is wicked to tear them apart.”
- The Westminster Confession of Faith (14.1) declares that faith is “ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.”

Across Church history, faithful voices have consistently affirmed that the ordinary means of grace are God's chosen instruments for building His Church.

Counterfeits and Misuses of the Means of Grace

These substitutes may seem appealing, but they rob God of His glory and His people of true nourishment. The Church must resist counterfeits and cling to the sufficiency of God's appointed means.

- Mysticism seeks direct experience apart from the Word.
- Moralism treats the sacraments as human works rather than God's promises.

Entertainment-driven worship replaces reverence with spectacle.

Application for Believers

Prioritize sitting under the faithful preaching of God's Word. Receive baptism and the Lord's Supper with gratitude and faith. And pray with confidence, knowing God works through your prayers. Remember to keep the means of grace central in corporate worship. If you're in leadership, resist the temptation to rely on gimmicks or innovations. And those in preaching and teaching positions must teach believers to see God's hand at work in the ordinary.

Conclusion: Confidence in God's Work

The means of grace remind us that the Christian life is not about self-sanctification. It is about trusting the God who works through His appointed ways to sanctify His people. When we gather around His Word, partake of His sacraments, and lift our hearts in prayer, we are not engaging in empty rituals, we are meeting with the living God, who acts to strengthen and sustain His people. As Paul assures us, *"He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it"* (1 Thessalonians 5:24). That is our confidence: not in ourselves, but in the God who sanctifies His people through His means of grace.

The Sacraments and the Means of Grace

By Dave Jenkins



Every Christian longs to grow in grace, but the question of which method should engaged often creates confusion.

Some chase spiritual highs, new techniques, or emotional experiences. Others rely on sheer

willpower, hoping they can make themselves holy. But the Lord has not left His people to guess how they might grow.

From the earliest days of the Church, God has given His people ordinary means of grace: the Word, prayer, and the sacraments. These are not human inventions or optional extras. They are the divinely appointed channels through which the Lord strengthens faith, nourishes weary souls, and assures His chil-

dren of His promises.

Among these means, baptism and the Lord's Supper stand at the heart of the local church's worship, as both visible and tangible signs of God's covenant faithfulness. They remind us of Christ's finished work and point us forward to the day when faith becomes sight.

The Means God Has Ordained

When we talk about "means of grace", we are describing the ways God communicates His grace to His people. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, "The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, His ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer" (Q. 88).

Notice the word *ordinary*. God often works through simple, regular means rather than flashy or dramatic ones: hearing the Word preached week by week; gathering at the Lord's Table; witnessing a baptism. These might seem plain to the world, but they are powerful because God has tied His promises to them. He stoops to our weakness, giving us visible signs to confirm His invisible grace.

Baptism: Marked by Grace

Baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the Christian life. It is not a magical ritual, nor does it save apart from saving faith. Instead, baptism is a sign and seal of our union with Christ.

The Apostle Paul writes, "*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life*" (Romans 6:3–4). In baptism, God visibly proclaims the truth that Believers have died with Christ, been cleansed by His blood, and been raised with Him to new life. Baptism therefore:

- **Declares our union with Christ:** We are identified with His death and resurrection.
- **Marks our identity as God's people:** We belong to Him, not to ourselves.
- **Incorporates us into the Church:** Baptism publicly recognizes that we are part of Christ's visible body.

Church history underscores this. The Early Church Fathers spoke of baptism as the sign of entrance into Christ's covenant community. The Reformers clarified that baptism does not save, but it is a true means of grace, confirming to Believers the promises of the gospel. Every baptism we witness should remind us of God's gracious initiative in salvation. We were dead in our trespasses, but God made us alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:5). Baptism points us back to His sufficient work, not our own.

The Lord's Supper: Nourished by Grace

If baptism marks the beginning of the Christian life, the Lord's Supper nourishes us along the way. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and wine and gave them to His disciples, saying, *"This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me"* (1 Corinthians 11:24). The Supper is not an empty symbol. Paul calls the cup and bread *"a participation in the blood of Christ"* and *"a participation in the body of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 10:16). By faith, Believers commune with Christ Himself, receiving spiritual nourishment and grace. The Supper reminds us of three key realities:

- **Remembrance** — We proclaim Christ's death until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26).
- **Participation** — We fellowship with Christ and with one another as His body.
- **Anticipation** — We look forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb

(Revelation 19:9).

Throughout Church history, this has been a point of much debate. Yet the Reformers agreed on this: Christ is spiritually present in the Supper. We do not re-sacrifice Him, nor does the bread and wine change in substance. But Christ is truly present by His Spirit to strengthen faith, comfort weary hearts, and assure His people of His love.

This is why Paul warns us not to partake in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27–29). The Supper calls us to examine ourselves, repent of sin, and renew our trust in Christ. Far from being a casual snack or ritual, it is a holy feast for the people of God.

Guarding Against Misuse

Because the sacraments are God's appointed means of grace, they must

“What makes the sacraments powerful is not the water, bread, or wine themselves. It is the promise of God, applied by the Holy Spirit...”

not be distorted or misused. Baptism without faith is an empty washing. The Supper taken without repentance invites judgment. Both are gifts, but they require faith to be received rightly. Paul's words to the church at Corinth remind us that the sacraments are not neutral. To take them lightly is to dishonor the Lord. Yet to receive them in faith is to

enjoy the rich assurance that Christ is for us, with us, and in us.

Christ's Presence Through His Appointed Means

What makes the sacraments powerful is not the water, bread, or wine themselves. It is the promise of God, applied by the Holy Spirit, that makes them means of grace. They are outward signs that point us inward and upward to Christ. Baptism assures us that we are washed and united to Christ. The Supper

assures us that Christ died for us and continues to nourish us. In both, God stoops down to our level, giving us tangible reminders of His faithfulness.

Committed to the Means of Grace

The Christian life is not sustained by novelty or spiritual shortcuts, but by faithful commitment to God's appointed means. The Word, prayer, baptism, and the Lord's Supper are how God feeds and sustains His people until Christ returns. To neglect these is to neglect Christ Himself. But to embrace them in faith is to find Christ feeding, strengthening, and assuring us of His love. So let us be committed to hearing the Word preached, committed to prayer, committed to remembering our baptism, and committed to coming often and joyfully to the Lord's Table. For in these ordinary means, God does extraordinary things.

**“So let us be committed to
hearing the Word preached,
committed to prayer,
committed to our baptism...”**

Spiritual Disciplines and the Means of Grace

By David de Bruyn



When God told Israel to love Him wholeheartedly,

He followed up that command with the command to create routines and rituals that would remind, reinforce, and reflect that commandment at every corner of an Israelite's life.

"You shall love the Lord

your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:5–9).

While Israel over-literalized His words and created physical boxes containing Scripture to wear on the forehead or stick on the doorpost, God's command was simpler and simultaneously more demanding: create structures in your life that will teach and enable love for God, make these structures prominent, conspicuous, repetitive, and natural, and develop routines, habits, rituals, and ways of life that direct the wandering heart back to loving God. In other words, nurture love for God through discipline.

This is the purpose of the spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are the structures that nurture communion with God. The disciplines are not communion with God in themselves, but they are means to that communion. Many disciplines have been suggested: private prayer, meditation on the Word, memorization of the Word, wider reading of devotional or theological writers, journaling, corporate worship, giving, service of others, evangelism, and others. Most of these come from either Scriptural example or direct command. So, in many ways, spiritual disciplines are a matter of plain obedience, or a better part of wisdom. But they are much more than that. The disciplines provide the greenhouse in which desire for God thrives.

Five Ways Spiritual Disciplines Helps Desire for God Grow

First, spiritual disciplines provide the opportunity for communion with God to occur. Spiritual disciplines, rightly used, are the moments when we can give clearest attention to communing with God. It is no wonder that some have mistaken these means as the end itself, for they provide the stage upon which communion often takes place.

Exercising is not always the experience of enjoying good health, though it may be, and it certainly contributes towards that experience. Likewise, spiritual disciplines are not always communion itself, but few other times and places provide us with as concentrated an experience of communion.

Second, spiritual disciplines give our souls practice at bringing together inward beliefs with external actions. Like many tasks in life that require us to combine and coordinate several actions at once, we need practice. We are clumsy when we first ride a bicycle, or try to ice-skate, or drive a car. We are too conscious of the separate actions, and we fumble, fall, or stall. As we keep practicing, something marvelous happens in our brains, as we combine these actions more and more seamlessly, until we can do them by muscle memory. Since our souls are united to bodies, spiritual disciplines enable us to unite our thoughts with our actions.

Third, spiritual disciplines teach and develop the abilities, attitudes, and actions fundamental to communing with God. Discipline is an act of ordering what is chaotic. Communion with God often requires habits such as sustained attention, reflective thought, and a perceptive eye; and these spiritual disciplines strengthen and shape such abilities through use. Communion requires using the religious imagination, saying or writing words of praise, gratitude, admiration, or adoration to God. These abilities lie dormant or even defective until regular use begins to carve, shape, and polish them into abilities fit for communion.

“God is at the center of life. God is the ultimate reality.”

Fourth, the spiritual disciplines help structure and shape the Christian’s life so that its rhythms, routines, and rituals shape the overall imagination and sensibilities. For the Israelite, his daily routine involved reciting the *Shema* in the morning and in the evening. When he ate his meals, his restricted diet reminded him to put a difference between the holy and the common as he remembered God. His very clothing had a blue border as commanded by God.

When he worked the land, there were laws regarding the animals, and laws regarding sowing, tilling, and reaping, which caused him to think about God. If he went to transact business, there were laws about money and equity. When he went home, there were laws about ritual cleanness, skin diseases, bodily emissions, and even the presence of mold on the walls.

Once a week, he was to cease work, per God's Sabbath command. If he was anywhere near the Tabernacle (or later, the Temple), he would have seen a routine: a burnt offering, twice daily; and a meal offering, twice daily—one in the morning, and one in the evening—when the day's activity began and when it ceased. There were the regular burnt offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings, peace offerings, and fellowship offerings. There would have been a sacrifice every Sabbath, and a sacrifice at the beginning of each month. There were sacrifices at the special feasts of Passover, Pentecost, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Booths. He was to go to the Tabernacle or Temple three times a year.

What did this routine communicate to him? God is at the center of life. God is the ultimate reality. God is the One we love ultimately, because He is ultimate reality. The repetition of actions, the structured patterns of obedience, the limits and restraints on our actions, the prohibitions and prescriptions shape attitudes and feelings about reality, while these keep reinforcing the value of the disciplines. So, it is with New Testament disciplines.

Fifth, the disciplines shape and sharpen our sense of discernment and judgment. Ordinate affection is loving what God loves and hating what He hates. We can only do this if we judge correctly: if we evaluate all things and see them as God does—lovable or hateful. We must judge rightly, weigh rightly, discern correctly. We are told that this discernment only comes through use: *"But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Hebrews 5:14). The disciplines of the Christian life afford the believer the opportunity to develop discernment.

The Gospel and Discipline

Christian discipline is death and resurrection. To cultivate communion with God, the chaotic nature of our spirits must be subordinated so that the orderliness of God's beauty can be known. No one makes spiritual progress unless the body is brought into submission (1 Corinthians 9:27), temperance is exercised, our time carefully measured and used, and the soul trained in godliness. Unless we are careful stewards of our time, sleep, and physical and emotional states, communion with God will usually be crowded out.

The gospel teaches us that all healthy spiritual life is preceded by some kind of death. Discipline involves death. Inclinations towards laziness, waste, procrastination, self-indulgence, perpetual ease, unearned rest, sloppiness, and questionable shortcuts have to be mortified. Every time a disciplined person denies his inclinations that would ruin his desired goal, he is practicing a kind of death so as to find another kind of life. Every denial, abstention, embraced hardship, accepted limitation, or chosen deprivation is a chosen death to some desires, to make way for something else that is desired.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24). Christians who embrace spiritual disciplines have the opportunity to re-enact the gospel: dying to our own life to save it, enduring the cross for the joy set before us, always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

However, discipline is not Christian merely because it involves self-control, or we would have to call all human discipline a re-enactment of the gospel. What makes discipline explicitly Christian is when it makes its hard choices motivated and empowered by the death and resurrection of Christ. In fact, discipline lapses immediately into what Colossians 2:23 calls self-imposed religion

when the gospel is removed as the motive and means.

We can fall into opposite ditches on this matter of discipline. The one ditch is where we're told that all discipline that does not come from a throbbing heart of spontaneous desire is dead formalism, and heartless duty-bound legalism. Adherents of this view are frequently non-starters, waiting for desires to ignite in the green wood of their immature souls. This approach denies that both death and resurrection are part of discipline, imagining that pure resurrection-like zeal and desire must be spontaneously present.

The other ditch is where we're told that bodily discipline is a sweetness of its own, and if we would only ignore our wayward desires, embrace our obligations, and commit to rigid discipline, we would enter into a new state of disciplined bliss. Some devotional writers through the centuries have not only emphasized the disciplines variously considered, but discipline as an end in itself. This is the error found in much of the contemporary "contemplative" movement. This promotes a quasi-mysticism, where union with God is achieved purely through the severity of the discipline. The discipline functions almost sacramentally.

Devotees of this way end up either veering over into the other ditch in sheer rebellious frustration, or developing a thick layer of pride, as their will-worship forbids worship of the true kind (Colossians 2:23). This approach denies that we have already died and risen in Christ, and are to become what we already are, not seek to become something we are not through self-effort.

Instead of these approaches, we must recognize Christian discipline is dependent obedience motivated by love for the Lord. Some spiritual sweat will be needed, but sweat is not its own reward. Rather, our desire for communion, combined with our awareness that much in us is still disorderly and warring against that desire will lead us to combine self-denial and seeking. Ask any dis-

ciplined man his secret, and he will tell you that necessity and desire married to produce the child of discipline.

The Holy Spirit works in us *to will and to do* (Philippians 2:13), but it seems His work of both motivating and enabling is deeply related to our struggle to desire and do His will (Colossians 1:29). Instead of trying to find the starting point of the circle, let us simply remember that whatever Spirit-prompted flames of desire are present need to be fanned into flame by disciplined, dependent obedience.

The organic life of abiding in the Vine also needs a trellis to grow on, and discipline provides such a trellis. We must believe we have died and risen in Christ, and dependently deny what destroys communion with God, while also dependently seeking and submitting to practices that nurture communion. This is how the gospel provides the pattern and power for discipline.

10 Signs of Contemplative Influence in Your Church

By Dave Jenkins

Contemplative spirituality often sneaks into churches quietly.

It may be packaged as “deeper spirituality”, “soul care”, or “ancient practices”, but at its root, it shifts authority from God’s suffi-

cient Word to subjective experience. If left unchecked, it will reshape how God’s people approach Scripture, prayer, and worship. Here are ten signs your church may be influenced by contemplative trends.



One: Scripture Takes a Back Seat to Experience

Preaching and teaching begin to emphasize “what you feel” over “what God says.” Sermons drift toward storytelling, journaling, or silence instead of careful exposition of God’s Word.

Two: Practices Rooted in Mysticism are Introduced

Words like *centering prayer*, *breath prayers*, *Lectio Divina* (used as a mystical tool), or labyrinth walks are recommended as ways to “experience God” beyond Scripture.

Three: Silence and Solitude are Treated as Sacraments

Instead of seeing prayer as speaking to God according to His Word, silence itself becomes the “means of grace.” The emphasis shifts from truth-filled communion to emptying the mind.

Four: Emotional Impressions are Equated with Revelation

Phrases like “God told me” or “I felt God say” begin replacing “the Bible says.” The line between Scripture and personal impression grows blurry.

Five: Popular Contemplative Authors are Quoted Favorably

Books and teachers such as Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, John Mark Comer, Henri Nouwen, Brennan Manning, or Sarah Young (*Jesus Calling*) are held up as models of discipleship.

Six: Biblical Meditation is Replaced by Mystical Techniques

Instead of filling the mind with Scripture (Psalm 1:2), people are taught to empty the mind through mantras, repetitive phrases, or breathing exercises borrowed from Catholic mystics or Eastern practices.

Seven: The Gospel Becomes Therapeutic

Sin, repentance, and justification by faith alone fade into the background, replaced by messages of inner peace, healing, and wholeness through “spiritual practices.”

Eight: Corporate Worship is Minimized

Private spirituality, inner experience, and personal journaling are elevated above the gathered worship of God’s people, where His Word is preached and His sacraments observed.

Nine: Discernment is Labeled as Judgmental

When warnings are raised against mysticism or unbiblical practices, discernment is dismissed as “unloving” or “legalistic”. Criticism of mystical authors is frowned upon.

Ten: The Sufficiency of Scripture is Subtly Denied

Though leaders may affirm biblical authority in theory, but in practice Scripture is treated as incomplete, needing to be supplemented with feelings, experiences, or ancient practices to achieve true intimacy with God.

Conclusion: Guard the Flock

The Apostle Paul warned the Colossians against those who promoted visions, asceticism, and man-made regulations (Colossians 2:18–23). The danger is the same today. Contemplative spirituality does not bring us closer to Christ; it moves us away from the sufficiency of His Word.

Churches must recover confidence in the ordinary means of grace: the preaching of the Word, prayer rooted in Scripture, the sacraments rightly administered, and fellowship with the saints. These may not seem novel or exciting, but they are God’s appointed path for His people. So, dear Christian, test everything by the Word of God. Cling to what is good. And remember: Christ is enough, and His Word is sufficient.

Hearing the Word Together

By Joshua Mills

Today, we live in an individualistic culture where Christianity has become a religion of me, myself, and I.

Yes, we must each have personal dealings with God. It is only through a

personal embrace of Jesus Christ by grace, through faith, that we enter into the Kingdom of God. Yet, we forget that Jesus Christ has a Bride. He has joined us to His body, the Church. As redeemed sinners in His Church, part of our sanctifica-



tion is hearing the Word of God corporately. I believe in our individualistic culture, we have rightfully emphasized the importance of private devotions in the Word, but have we properly emphasized the necessity of corporately hearing the Word?

In Paul's final letter to Timothy, he gives a charge to Timothy and the flock in Ephesus: *"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word"* (2 Timothy 4:2). Timothy is called to preach the Word to his flock, and the flock is called to receive the preached Word together. In this article, I will argue that the corporate hearing of the Word of God is a vital aspect in our sanctification, and thus, it must be recovered. It cannot be substituted. To see this, let us consider two things. First, we will consider the ministry you must sit under. Second, we will consider the ministry you must receive.

The Ministry You Must Sit Under

Paul charges Timothy to *"preach the Word"* (2 Timothy 4:2). As he proclaims the whole counsel of God, Timothy is to *"reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching"* (2 Timothy 4:2). God does His work among His people as the Word is opened up and preached. Therefore, for your spiritual edification, you must sit under the sound preaching of the Word. Do not be one who sits under ear-tickling messages, but one that wields the Sword of the Spirit to your very soul. Paul warns us of ear-tickled people:

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

In his article *The Urgency of Preaching*, Dr. Albert Mohler speaks of this shift. Mohler writes:

There has been a subtle shift visible at the onset of the twentieth century ...

The shift from expository preaching to a more topical and human-centered approach ... Should the preacher seek to preach a biblical text through an expository sermon? Or, should the preacher direct the sermon to the felt needs and perceived concerns of the hearers?

Human-centered preaching may tickle your ears, but it will not do your soul any good. Instead, look for men of the Word, who preach the whole Word to the whole flock to see them wholly equipped for every good work. Look for the kind of men that J. C. Ryle describes in his book titled, *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century*. Ryle said the following:

God stirred up and brought out [men] to do his work. They did his work in the old apostolic way... They taught one set of truths. They taught them in the same way, with fire, reality, earnestness, as men fully convinced of what they taught. They taught them in the same spirit, always loving, compassionate, and, like Paul, even weeping, but always bold, unflinching, and not fearing the face of man.

The Ministry You Must Receive

Next, having considered the ministry you must sit under, namely, a Word-centered, Christ-exalting ministry, we must now consider the ministry you must receive. Throughout the Scriptures we see that there is a responsibility on the preacher, but also on the hearer. Our Lord Jesus often said in His ministry, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear"* (Matthew 11:15). The wise man hears the Word of God and acts upon it. The foolish man hears the Word of God and refuses to build his life upon it. Jesus described it this way in His Sermon on the Mount:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the

floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it (Matthew 7:24–27).

As those who sit in the pew, under a faithful ministry of the Word, we often forget that we will give an account for how we have heard each sermon we have sat under. What a fearful thing to consider. By God's grace, many of us are under faithful weekly preaching. But with this gift comes great responsibility. Think of all the preachers we have heard over the years. Think of all the sound books we have in the church and at home. Has it changed us? Has it made us more like Jesus? Are we always being reformed under the Word? Jesus said, "*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*" (Luke 11:28). The one who hears the Word and does it will be like the wise man who built his house on a rock.

Conclusion: Hearing the Word with Profit

As we conclude, having seen the ministry we must sit under and considered how to receive such a ministry, we must ask ourselves how we can profit from such a ministry.

1. Come to hear the Word with a prayerful heart. Ask God to have dealings with you by His Spirit, through His Word.
2. Sit attentively to the preaching of God's Word as God dealing with you from the text.
3. Once the hearing of the Word is done, pray again! Ask the Lord to seal His Word to you. Confess, if necessary, and plead for help to live in light of the text you have heard.

The preaching of God's Word is one of His means of grace to grow you into Christlikeness. May we tremble at His Word.

The Pulsebeat of Every Prayer

By Joshua Mills

When a child is born, the first sign of life is found in their first cry. For those who have been born of God, the cry of life is found in the cry of prayer to God. In his poem, *The Calvinist*, John Piper sets before us this cry in the Christian life:

*See him on his knees,
Hear his constant pleas:
Heart of ev'ry aim:*

'Hallowed be Your name.' (i)

This article will argue that the pulsebeat of our every prayer must be “*hallowed be Your name*” (Matthew 6:9). I will support this claim by setting before



you Matthew 6:9-13, and specifically, the first petition in this prayer. This familiar prayer has often been called “*The Lord’s Prayer*”, but really, it is a model for prayer in the school of Christ’s disciples. The Lord, in His kindness, is giving us a pattern to direct our prayer life. We see that in verse 9, “*pray then like this.*” To understand the pulsebeat of our every prayer, we will first consider the posture of prayer, and then the petition in prayer.

The Posture of Prayer

In Matthew 6:9, before our Lord Jesus mentions the content of our prayer requests, He focuses on how we ought to approach God. First, in prayer remember that you are coming to “*our Father*” (Matthew 6:9). Now, God is only your Father if Jesus Christ is your personal Savior. In John 14:6, Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.*” We are born into this world as children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2). God becomes our Father when we embrace Jesus Christ by grace, through faith. For those who are joined to Christ, we have the privilege of knowing the Father of glory as our Father in heaven.

Not only is He our Father, but we also need to remember that our Father is seated “*in heaven.*” According to Matthew 6:9, in Jesus Christ, we have a Father who is in heaven. He is the King of the universe. As one poet put it, “Kings and nations tremble at His voice.” His throne is above all other thrones. All things were created by Him, through Him, and for Him. Oh, how amazing it is to have access to the Triune God in prayer.

John Bunyan defined prayer as “a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to his Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God.”(ii) The posture of prayer, for the believer, is one of intimate communion with our Father in heaven, through Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Petition of Prayer

Now that we have briefly considered the posture of prayer, let us now consider the petition of prayer. The first petition in the Lord's Prayer should be the heartbeat of our every prayer: *"Hallowed be your name."* Or, as Piper would say, that is the "heart of every aim" in your prayer life.

When you are passionate about something, you cannot help but talk about it. We all have hobbyhorses that keep us talking! If you had a "hobbyhorse" in prayer, what would it be? What is often the first thing on your heart in prayer? Is it, *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name"*?

What does it mean when we say the word "hallowed"? The word "hallowed" can be translated as *"sanctified be your name"* or *"set apart be your name."* In the Old Testament, some items were of common use, and other items were set apart for special use and/or service in the sanctuary.

What does it mean to "hallow" our Father's "name"? The name of God is how He has graciously revealed Himself to unworthy sinners. It speaks of who He is and what He's has done. In Exodus 33:18, Moses prayed, *"Please show me your glory."* The Lord responded by saying: *"I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.'"* Later, in Exodus 34:5–8, we read:

The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.' And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

The Lord is set apart. When we pray that His name would be hallowed,

we are not praying for something that is not already a reality for the Triune God. He is *holy, holy, holy* (Isaiah 6). He is infinitely set apart from all things since He

is the sovereign Lord and Creator of all things. Instead, when we pray that His name would be hallowed, we are praying that His glory and majesty would be displayed in this world.

“God delights to save sinners by His name.”

The chief end of our life as image bearers of God is to glorify Him, to hallow His name, and to enjoy Him forever. In our sin and rebellion against God, we would rather set apart self, and everything other than God in our life. That is what sin is. Sin is *“falling short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). All of us have failed to glorify and hallow God’s name in our life. As a result of that, we deserve God’s judgment. But by that same name that we have failed to glorify, we find salvation.

God delights to save sinners by His name. In Isaiah 48:9–11, we read: *“For my name’s sake I defer my anger; for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.”* It is the name of Jesus Christ, the only name under heaven, by which men are saved (Acts 4:12). So, to pray that God’s name would be “hallowed” is also to pray a missionary prayer. We are praying that God would magnify His name in the salvation of sinners. We pray that God would turn those who blaspheme His name into those who praise His name. And in our life, as redeemed sinners, before we pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread,”* our first pulsebeat is *“Hallowed be your name.”*

The Heart of Every Aim

To conclude, this article has argued that the pulsebeat of your every prayer must be *“Hallowed be Your name”* (Matthew 6:9). This has been supported by con-

sidering the posture of prayer and the first petition in prayer.

In Matthew 6:9, we see that prayer is more than simply an avenue to bring our petitions to God. Prayer is first and foremost a place where God's people can fellowship with God. First and foremost, prayer begins and ends in worship. We set our gaze heavenward with awe, beholding the beauty of our Father in heaven. We pray that the same name we know, and have beheld with the eye of faith, would continue to show us His glory and display His beauty to a lost and dying world.

We move from worship to the mission field on our knees in prayer. Can you be found on your knees? If there were a glimpse into your room, would we hear your constant pleas? May the sweet sound of your constant pleas be *"hallowed be your name."*

References:

- i. John Piper, *The Calvinist*.
- ii. John Bunyan, *Prayer* (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh).

Mysticism and the Authority of Scripture: Why the Word is Enough

By Dave Jenkins



We live in an age of spiritual restlessness. Many professing Christians long for something more—something deeper, mysterious, and seemingly transformative. This has fueled a resurgence of mystical practices: contemplative prayer, monastic silence, labyrinth walks, and even New Age-inspired tools like the Enneagram. But here's the vital question: Is the Word of God enough? The Bible answers with a resounding *yes*.

In 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Paul writes that, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* The inspired Word of God is sufficient; com-

plete in itself to equip the believer for every good work. Mysticism in contrast whispers that Scripture is not enough. It suggests that true spirituality requires an “experience” beyond the Word. But this is not the path of biblical Christianity.

Defining Mysticism and its Appeal

Mysticism is notoriously slippery to define, but at its core, it seeks direct, unmediated experience of God apart from His Word. Historically, it arose in the early monastic movement. Desert fathers in the 3rd and 4th centuries sought sol-

itude, silence, and inner visions.

Medieval mystics like Teresa of Ávila and Meister Eckhart emphasized inner experiences of the divine more than Scripture’s clear testimony.

“Everything we need to know God, walk with Him, and grow in holiness is revealed in Scripture.”

Today, the names have changed but the pull is the same. Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* popularized contemplative practices

drawn from Catholic mysticism.

Dallas Willard’s *Spirit of the Disciplines* suggested a similar turn. John Mark Comer’s recent advocacy of silence and solitude borrows from these same traditions.

Why is this attractive? In a noisy, distracted, and secular age, people crave meaning. Mysticism promises intimacy with God through “techniques” — whether “breath prayers”, *Lectio Divina*, or “listening prayer”. But notice the authority shifts from the *objective Word of God* to *subjective experience*. That is dangerous ground.

The Authority and Sufficiency of God's Word

The Reformation stood or fell on *Sola Scriptura*, that is “Scripture alone”, as the final authority. Psalm 19 celebrates the perfection and sufficiency of God's Word: “*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple*” (v. 7). Hebrews 4:12 describes the Word as “*living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.*”

God has not left His people wandering in darkness, guessing at His will. As Peter declares: “*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him*” (2 Peter 1:3). Everything we need to know God, walk with Him, and grow in holiness is revealed in Scripture. Experience is not bad in itself. The psalmists often speak of tasting and seeing the goodness of the Lord (Psalms 34:8). But our experiences must always be interpreted, tested, and governed by the Word. Otherwise, we elevate feelings above God's revelation.

Where Mysticism Goes Wrong

Mysticism makes inner impressions authoritative. Instead of asking, “What does God's Word say?” the mystic asks, “What did I feel in prayer?” This is a subtle shift, but it replaces the voice of God in Scripture with the voice of one's own heart. Jeremiah 17:9 warns: “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*”

Doctrinal Drift

Mystics frequently downplay sin, the Cross, and justification by faith alone. In Teresa of Ávila's visions, the centrality of Christ's atoning work is often blurred. Modern Contemplatives rarely emphasize repentance or the exclusivity of Christ.

Confusion of the Means of Grace

The ordinary means of grace—preaching of the Word, prayer, sacraments,

and fellowship become overshadowed by “techniques” like “centering prayer” or “mantras”. These practices mimic Eastern meditation more than biblical prayer. Jesus warned in Matthew 6:7 against *“heaping up empty phrases as the Gentiles do.”*

The Apostle Paul confronted similar errors in Colossians 2, where false teachers promoted ascetic practices and visions. He exhorted believers: *“Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind”* (Colossians 2:18). Mysticism is not new; it is a recycled error.

Standing Firm on the Word in a Mystical Age

The way forward is not mystery, but clarity; not chasing hidden techniques, but holding fast to God’s sufficient revelation. The Reformers insisted that Scripture is clear and complete. John Calvin wrote in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, “The Word of God is the fountain of all wisdom, affording the only sure rule for the guidance of our life.”

Charles Spurgeon likewise urged, “Visit many good books, but live in the Bible.” J.C. Ryle reminded believers that it is not visions or impressions that sanctify, but the Spirit working through the Word.

The ordinary means of grace may not feel as exciting as mystical practices, but they are God’s appointed path for His people. Hearing the Word preached, praying according to Scripture, receiving the sacraments, and walking with the saints—these are the ways God conforms us to Christ.

Practical Counsel for the Church

- **Test all things by Scripture.** As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, *“test everything; hold fast what is good.”* No practice or teaching is above examination by the Word.
- **Teach discernment.** Pastors and teachers must equip God’s people to recognize and reject mystical distortions.

- **Anchor assurance in Christ.** Our confidence is not in subjective impressions but in Christ's finished work.
- **Cultivate deep Scripture reading.** Encourage slow, meditative reading of the Bible itself, not man-made techniques. True meditation is filling the mind with God's Word (Joshua 1:8), not emptying it.

In Summary: The Word is Enough

In every generation, mysticism tempts the Church to look beyond God's Word. But to do so is to echo the serpent's question in the garden: "*Did God really say?*" The good news is that God has spoken finally, sufficiently, and authoritatively in His Son (Hebrews 1:1–2), and in the Scriptures that bear His Spirit's breath. We do not need mystical techniques to know God. We need Christ, as He is revealed in His Word.

So, Dear Christian, take up and read the Word, feast on it, and trust that when you open your Bible, you are hearing the voice of the living God. That is enough.

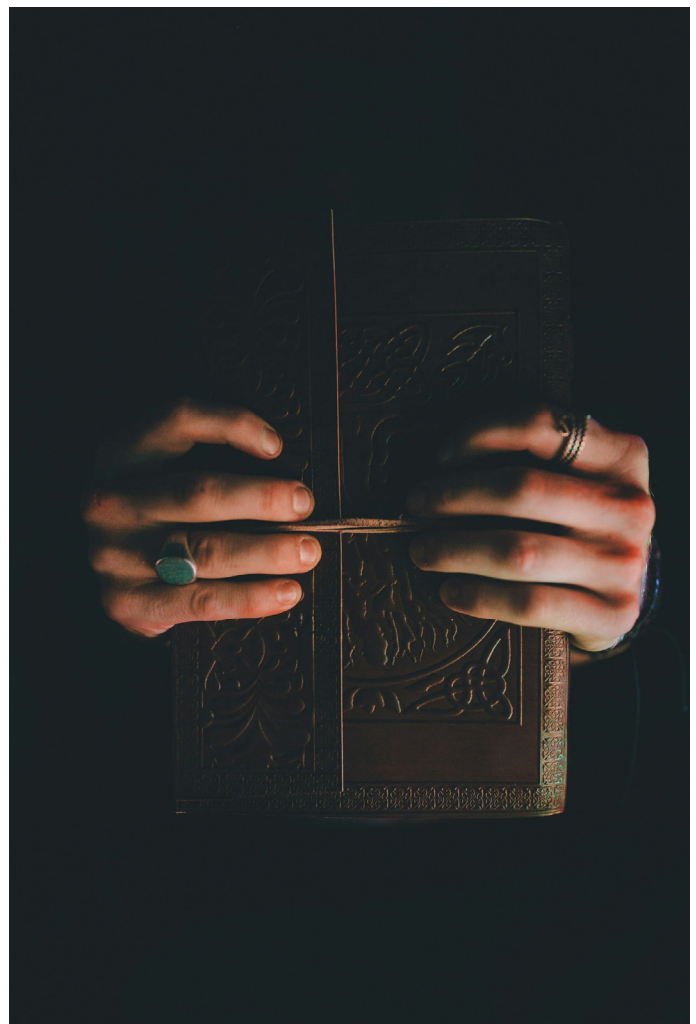
For Further Study:

- Dave Jenkins, *The Word Explored*
- Justin Peters, *Do Not Hinder Them*
- John Owen, *Communion with God*
- J.C. Ryle, *Practical Religion*

Holding Fast to the Word: A Biblical Response to Mystical Spirituality

By Dave Jenkins

From the earliest centuries of the Church, Christians have wrestled with competing voices that promise *more than the gospel*. Mystical spirituality, whether in ancient monasticism, medieval mysticism, or modern contemplative movements, presents itself as a pathway to a deeper, richer experience of God. It often emphasizes silence, visions, spiritual sensations, or secret wisdom. In this age, it comes in many forms: contemplative prayer modeled after non-Christian meditation, “thin places” spirituality, or claims of new revelation beyond the Bible. But these questions must be asked: “Is Christ sufficient? Is His Word enough?”



The apostle Paul, writing to the Colossians, confronted believers tempted by visions, ascetic practices, and angelic worship. Likewise, he warned Timothy about false teachers who maintained *“a form of godliness”* but denied its power (2 Timothy 3:5). These passages remind us that mystical substitutes for the gospel are neither new nor harmless. They diminish Christ’s sufficiency and lead God’s people away from the only sure foundation—His Word.

This article will examine Paul’s warnings in Colossians 2 and 2 Timothy 3, showing how they equip the Church to resist mystical spirituality and hold fast to the Word of God.

Exegesis of Colossians 2: Christ Alone is Sufficient

The Colossian believers lived in a world shaped by Jewish law, pagan philosophy, and local folk religion. The “Colossian heresy” appears to have been a blend of Jewish regulations, mystical visions, and ascetic practices. Paul’s pastoral concern was simple: anything that distracted the Church from Christ was a spiritual danger.

Warning Against Captivity

“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

Paul depicts false teaching as a kidnapper taking believers hostage through *“empty deceit”*. The *“elemental spirits”* may refer to primitive spiritual forces or demonic influences masquerading as wisdom. For our day, mystical practices that rely on secret techniques, spiritual intermediaries, or non-biblical rituals function in the same way. They draw attention away from the sufficiency of Christ and toward human tradition.

Completeness in Christ

“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority” (Colossians 2:9–10).

The antidote to mystical deception is the sufficiency of Christ. He is not partly God; He is fully God. Believers are not lacking spiritual resources; they are complete in Him. Mysticism whispers, “You need more—more visions, more experiences, more secrets.” Paul answers, “You already have everything in Christ.”

Shadows vs. Substance

“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2:16–17).

Mystical or legalistic systems often elevate rituals above reality. Whether through diets, calendars, or ascetic practices, they substitute shadows for substance. Christ is the reality; the rest are signposts. When Christians elevate practices above the person of Christ, they risk turning temporary aids into ultimate ends.

False Humility and Visions

“Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head” (Colossians 2:18–19).

Here Paul directly addresses mystical spirituality. Claims of visions, encounters with angels, or spiritual elitism are not signs of maturity but of pride. The danger is subtle: such experiences feel spiritual, but they disconnect the believer from Christ, the true Head of the Church. Mysticism often creates a two-tier Christianity: the “ordinary” and the “elite.” Paul says all believers are joined to Christ, the Head, and receive nourishment from Him.

Worthless Asceticism

“These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians 2:20–23).

Mystical spirituality promises power but delivers weakness. Severe disci-

plines and mystical techniques may *look* wise, but they cannot transform the heart. Only the gospel can do that. Paul strips mystical systems of their glamour: they are powerless against sin because they substitute human methods for divine grace.

Exegesis of 2 Timothy 3: The Sufficiency of Scripture

Paul's final letter to Timothy is written under the shadow of his impending death (2 Timothy 4:6–8). Against the backdrop of false teachers in Ephesus and the trials of ministry, Paul charges Timothy to remain steadfast. The battle line is clear: false teachers distort the truth, while faithful ministers hold fast to Scripture.

Perilous Times and False Teachers

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people” (2 Timothy 3:1–5).

Paul paints a dark portrait of the “*last days*”, not merely describing secular society but warning of those within the Church who mimic spirituality without substance. They have “*the appearance of godliness*”—perhaps through religious practices, rituals, or mystical experiences—yet they’re “*denying its power.*”

Mystical spirituality fits this warning. It may cloak itself in Christian language and practice, but if it sidelines the gospel or the Word of God, it denies the true power of godliness: union with Christ through His Word and Spirit.

Paul continues by naming false teachers who “*creep into households*” (2 Timothy 3:6), exploiting the vulnerable, preying on the undiscerning. The danger is not only doctrinal but is deeply pastoral, since souls are led captive by empty promises. Paul contrasts false teachers with his own example: “*You, however, have*

followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings..." (2 Timothy 3:10–13). Mystical systems often promote leaders who boast of visions or claim secret insight. Paul points not to mystical experience but to suffering, faith, and steadfast love. The true Christian life is not marked by spiritual elitism, but by endurance and conformity to Christ.

Continuing in the Word

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14–15).

Paul exhorts Timothy to stay rooted in the Scriptures. Notice that the Scriptures are *sufficient for salvation*, they lead to wisdom that results in faith in Christ. Paul also says the Scriptures are *trustworthy*, Timothy has known them from childhood and seen their fruit in his life.

Mystical spirituality says, "Go beyond the Word to find deeper wisdom." Paul says, "Stay in the Word it brings you to Christ and equips you for salvation."

The Inspiration and Sufficiency of Scripture

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

This climactic statement is a death blow to mystical claims of "new revelation" or "higher spirituality." Scripture is:

- **God-breathed** (*theopneustos*) - its origin is divine, not human.
- **Profitable** - for every aspect of Christian growth: doctrine, rebuke, correction, instruction.
- **Sufficient** - equipping the believer for *every* good work, not just

some.

If Scripture equips believers completely, then no mystical practice, no hidden knowledge, no visionary experience is necessary to bring us closer to God. The sufficiency of Scripture is both doctrinal truth and pastoral balm; it assures believers that God has given them everything they need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

Holding Fast to the Word in an Age of Mysticism

Both passages address the same fundamental danger: substituting human tradition or mystical experience for the sufficiency of Christ and His Word. In Colossians 2, the temptation was mystical visions, angelic worship, and ascetic practices—things that appeared deeply spiritual but actually severed believers from Christ the Head. And in 2 Timothy 3, the temptation was false teachers who offered a *form of godliness* without power, who preyed on the undiscerning and distracted from the inspired Scriptures that equip the believer fully. In both cases, Paul's response is the same: hold fast to Christ and the Word.

Why Mystical Spirituality Appeals Today

Mystical and contemplative practices often gain traction because they offer:

- **Experience over doctrine** - a felt sense of God's presence, rather than trust in His promises.
- **Elitism over equality** - a two-tier spirituality, where some have "deeper" knowledge or encounters.
- **Ambiguity over clarity** - spiritual vagueness can feel liberating compared to the precision of Scripture.
- **Escape over endurance** - mystical practices promise escape from the ordinary trials of life, while Scripture calls us to perseverance through them.

The draw is real. People long for intimacy with God, and when the ordinary means of grace feel too ordinary, they chase the extraordinary. But in doing

so, they risk trading substance for shadow.

Biblical Means of Grace vs. Mystical Substitutes

The Lord has given His people true means of grace:

- **The Word of God** - preached, read, studied, meditated upon.
- **The Sacraments/Ordinances** - baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly proclaim the gospel.
- **Prayer** - both corporate and private, shaped by Scripture and empowered by the Spirit.
- **Fellowship** - the gathered body building one another up in love and good works.

Mystical substitutes—whether mantras, emptying the mind, or seeking ecstatic visions shift authority away from God's appointed means and onto human imagination.

Answering Common Objections

Objection 1: “But don’t contemplative practices make me feel closer to God?” Feelings are real, but they are not final. Scripture, not sensation, determines true intimacy with God. The Psalms show us that God can feel near or far, but His Word anchors His people regardless of experience.

Objection 2: “Isn’t meditation biblical?” Yes, but biblical meditation is not emptying the mind, rather it is *filling it with the Word*. Psalm 1 describes the “blessed man” as one who “*meditates day and night*” on God’s law. Mystical meditation seeks a void; biblical meditation seeks Christ.

Objection 3: “Isn’t mystical spirituality part of Church history?” Certain strands of Church history (such as medieval mystics, monastics) did emphasize mystical experience, but where they contradicted Scripture, they must be tested. History is not the standard; the Bible is.

Pastoral Implications for Today’s Church

Leaders must teach sufficiency with clarity. Many Christians pursue mys-

tical practices because they have not been taught the sufficiency of Christ and His Word. Pastors and other church leaders must proclaim these truths with boldness and gentleness.

Shepherd the spiritually hungry. Often, those drawn to mysticism are genuinely thirsty for God. The solution is not ridicule but redirection—to the living water of Christ through His Word.

“Mystical spirituality is not merely a harmless preference; it is a rival to the sufficiency of Christ and His Word.”

Guard against spiritual elitism. Remind believers that all Christians share equally in Christ. There is no “inner circle” of the spiritually advanced.

Model ordinary faithfulness. Pastors and leaders must show that joy, intimacy, and power come not through secret practices but through daily faithfulness—reading Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and obedience.

The Call to Hold Fast

In every age, the Church faces movements that promise more than Christ. But Paul’s words still ring true:

“You have been filled in Him” (Colossians 2:10).

“All Scripture is breathed out by God... that the man of God may be complete” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Christ is sufficient. Scripture is sufficient. To look elsewhere is to exchange the riches of Christ for the rags of human invention.

Conclusion: Why the Word is Enough

Mystical spirituality is not merely a harmless preference; it is a rival to the sufficiency of Christ and His Word. While it may promise deeper intimacy or higher experience, it ultimately distracts from the Head and diminishes the

inspired Scriptures that make us wise for salvation. The way forward for the Church is not to chase shadows but to cling to substance. God has given His people the means of grace: the Word, prayer, sacraments, and fellowship. Through these, He nourishes, sustains, and grows His people.

The message of Colossians 2 and 2 Timothy 3 is clear:

Christ is enough, His Word is enough, His grace is enough. So, dear Christian, do not be taken captive by visions, techniques, or mystical promises. Hold fast to the Word. In Christ, you are complete. In Scripture, you are equipped. And by the Spirit, you are secure—now and forever.

Inner Healing and Its Dangerous Teachings

By Dawn Hill



Would you listen to someone as a Bible-believing Christian who subscribed to such things as universalism, pantheism, New Age, and New Thought practices? As a Christian, would you accept counsel from a minister who had attended seances

or reportedly had demons cast out? What if a minister held to the belief of visualizing Jesus as a spirit guide in order to be healed, or that astral travel was an acceptable practice? Your answer to these questions as a Christian would be, no.

All of these things would hopefully be indicators that you should seek Godly and mature Biblical counsel. Yet these beliefs and practices were held by the pioneer of inner healing, Agnes Sanford. Those who are contemplating inner healing or who have participated in it in some form (inner healing, SOZO, Theophostic prayer) need to know its origins and why it is concerning and even dangerous. The practice of inner healing has become a more popular mode of “healing” and “deliverance” in Charismatic circles, and the truth is her teaching is *not* rooted in Scripture or in the God of the Bible.

A few years ago, I took time to read two of Sanford’s books, one of which was her most well-known, *The Healing Light*. I tested what she said against Scripture, and the findings were disturbing. It led me to a few conclusions. First, many Christians do not understand what spiritual healing really means because the Word of God and the finished work on the cross have been misunderstood or diminished. Second, many have adopted superstitious and/or occultic beliefs without realizing it. Lastly, and I do not say this lightly, another “christ” has been presented in these practices. Using the name of Christ does not guarantee one to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We must be aware of the root of inner healing. If the root system is bad, the fruit will bear that affliction.

“The core teaching of inner healing is the healing of memories. Agnes believed that salvation and healing can only come through uprooting negative memories buried in the subconscious...”

Though Agnes professed to be a Christian, her practices ran contrary to

teachings of the Bible, and she was heavily influenced by Carl Jung, a psychologist who taught about the healing of the collective unconscious, held to occultic practices, and who had his own personal “spirit guide” named Philemon. Agnes held to the belief that God was “a force” and that there was great power in visualization. She spoke in her books of being ill due to negative vibrations, while healing others through positive vibrations.

The core teaching of inner healing is the healing of memories. Agnes believed that salvation and healing can only come through uprooting negative memories buried in the subconscious, and these memories are said to dictate our behavior. There is a focus in this teaching on being wronged by others rather than taking personal responsibility for actions and sinful behavior. The practice of visualization is used to recreate a past event. “Jesus” is brought in as a “spirit guide” to sanctify the memory, forgive the person, and create a new memory that is affirmed by the visualized “Jesus”. These practices in and of themselves should be problematic for any believer in Christ Jesus.

In some of her books, Agnes took issue with the blood of Jesus Christ, as well as being conscious of her own sin. In her book, *The Healing Light*, she stated, “Let us tell Him [“Jesus”] that we do not really understand the need for Calvary and ask Him to help us understand it.”(i) Her lack of understanding of sin and for the Savior is evident in her misuse of atonement as “at-one-ment”. This is the belief that we achieve harmony with God and essentially *become* God. She is quoted as saying, “Our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane undertook the great work that we call the atonement- the at-one-ment which reunited man with God. He literally lowered His thought-vibrations to the thought-vibrations of humanity and received into Himself man’s thoughts of sin and sickness, pain and death.”(ii)

Her experience took precedence over theology, which she expressed in several of her writings. John Sandford, a minister who credited Agnes as the pioneer

of inner healing, stated in a documented conversation that he exorcised demons from Agnes while she was in ministry. She believed in the pre-existence of the soul, and she noted in her books that we are all children of God. When ministering to a man with a broken bone who was not born again, she counseled him on how to be healed saying, "Ask that something come into you. Just say, "Whoever you are, whatever you are, come into me now and help nature in my body to mend this bone and do it quick.""(ii)

Her belief in pantheism is noted throughout her body of work. One example occurred in her recollection of being near a snake while outdoors. She spoke of being conscious of her oneness with God and with the snake. She also made a distinction between Jesus and the Christ, "Think of the Christ only as the spirit of God that abides in all of us and of Jesus only as the first demonstrator of that spirit."(iv) Though she attended a few seances as a professing Christian, Agnes referred to Jesus as "the only departed person we should deliberately contact."(v) Let us take note of something here: Jesus Christ is resurrected. He *is not* departed.

She spoke of Peter utilizing levitation to walk on water, and she stated in her book, *The Healing Gifts of the Spirit*, that, "We can enter into the accumulated thought vibrations of the ages, and feel the feelings and think the thoughts of someone who lived long ago...this connection can reach back through time and forward through time and can make rapport with the thinking of someone who lived long ago or of someone who has not yet come upon this earth." She even posed the question on this train of thought, wondering if we could send our prayers back in time and alluding to it as essential to inner healing.(vi)

There are great concerns with all of these beliefs mentioned. The roots of inner healing are certainly cloaked in darkness, and we need to test these against Scripture. When we do so, we will be set free by the truth, and this is the truth: our moral choices determine our actions and responsibility falls on us.

This is supported by Ezekiel 18:19-20, a passage among many that helps us to understand our personal responsibility for sins and transgressions. We are unable to repent for another person's sins. Scripture makes it clear that we will give an account for our own actions before the judgment seat of Christ, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

There is no biblical precedent of any prophet or apostle in the Bible dealing with inner healing in their personal lives, nor did they teach this as necessary in the life of believers. Inner healing is refuted by Philippians 3:13-14, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, and 2 Corinthians 5:17. We forgive others because the Lord has forgiven us. We *do not* need to forgive God, and He does not apologize to us. God is incapable of sin or committing trespasses. We are to ask God to forgive us of sin and trespasses that are ultimately against Him (Colossians 3:13). Jesus Christ doesn't need our permission to do anything. He is God. He commands our obedience. He is the only Mediator between God and man. We are not to participate in visualizing Jesus or in beliefs mentioned here that run contrary to Scripture.

As Christians, we are to trust in the finished work on the cross at Calvary, the atonement for our sins so that we could be reconciled to the Father and clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We trust that God has forgiven us of our sins through Jesus Christ, and we trust in the Lord to sanctify us daily. We are to seek Godly and Biblical counsel and to stay in the written Word of God daily. You and I are going to face struggles and difficulties in life, but we are to cast our cares upon the Lord while trusting that what Jesus Christ did on the cross is sufficient to make us spiritually whole.

References:

- i. Sanford, Agnes, *The Healing Light*, (Random House, Ballantine, New York), 114.
- ii. Sanford, Agnes, *ibid.*, 106.
- iii. Sanford, Agnes, *ibid.*, 19.
- iv. Sanford, Agnes, *ibid.*, 123.
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Mindfulness and Christianity

By Doreen Virtue

Mindfulness has been widely promoted in modern Western culture as a therapeutic practice for stress reduction, emotional regulation, and mental health support. However, Christians must mark and avoid Mindfulness because its roots are drawn from Buddhism, Hinduism, and yoga.

Many people are confused by the term “Mindfulness”. In this article, I’ll be addressing a particular teaching style of meditation, which is different than the wisdom to “be mindful” (as in being *sober-minded* and *alert*, c.f., 1 Peter 5:8) to avoid physically or spiritually stumbling.



The founder of Mindfulness meditation is Jon Kabat-Zinn, who was raised in a Jewish home but immersed himself in Eastern spirituality during the 1960s and 70s counterculture movement. He studied with Buddhist monks and teachers, practiced Zen Buddhism, and was influenced by the Hindu and yoga popularity that the Beatles and the “hippie movement” ushered into the West.

In 1979, Kabat-Zinn founded the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn attempted to secularize Buddhist meditation by rebranding it in scientific and therapeutic terms, yet the essence of the practice remained intact.

By removing overt Buddhist symbols and language, Kabat-Zinn introduced Mindfulness to hospitals, universities, and public schools, paving the way for what’s now a multi-billion-dollar industry of apps, books, classes, and corporate programs that claim to train the mind through non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. What’s marketed as a neutral mental health tool is tragically a spiritually dangerous practice that’s contrary to Scripture.

The core practice of Mindfulness is to focus on the present moment through breathing exercises, bodily awareness, or mental observation. The goal is to notice thoughts and feelings without judgment. Yet Scripture repeatedly calls believers to actively discipline their thoughts and submit them to the authority of Christ.

God’s Word commands that *“we take every thought captive to obey Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Unlike Mindfulness meditation, which teaches practitioners to let thoughts pass by like clouds drifting through the mind, Christians are to subject their thoughts to the truth of the gospel and to reject and repent for those that are sinful, deceitful, or destructive.

Mindfulness instead teaches detachment from moral discernment, and an attitude of neutrality toward thoughts that Scripture says must be judged according to God’s standard. Jesus’ teaching from Sermon on the Mount went beyond

external actions and explained that sinful thoughts are equivalent to sinful deeds. Lustful thoughts are adultery of the heart, and angry thoughts are murder in the heart (Matthew 5:21-30).

Therefore, to practice Mindfulness by noticing your thoughts without judgment is to stand in direct contradiction to Christ's teaching. Neutrality toward sinful thoughts is never an option for the believer, because what dwells in the heart shapes words, actions, and ultimately one's character.

The second major problem with Mindfulness is its foundation in Eastern meditation practices that cultivate altered states of consciousness. These states may feel peaceful, expansive, or detached, yet they're spiritually dangerous because they dull the alertness that God commands of us. Since Mindfulness has Buddhist and Hindu roots, let's examine why this foundation is another reason for Christians to avoid these practices.

Buddhism and Hinduism both employ meditation techniques to "transcend" the self, dissolve the sense of ego, and connect with a universal consciousness—this is sometimes described as "nirvana" or "union with the divine". The Hindu practice of yoga, too, has always been historically for its purpose to unite the practitioner with Hindu deities and to prepare the body as a vehicle for altered awareness.

Mindfulness borrows directly from these traditions; though under the guise of secular science, it rarely acknowledges the spiritual realities behind them. For Christians, the call is precisely the opposite. God commands, *"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"* (1 Peter 5:8).

The Christian life requires vigilance, clarity, and readiness for spiritual warfare, not the passive emptying of the mind or drifting into altered states. To cultivate a mental state in which judgment is suspended and consciousness is altered is to lower one's defenses against the schemes of Satan. The adversary

thrives when people abandon discernment, because it is in those moments of vacancy that deception enters most easily.

To understand the incompatibility of Mindfulness with biblical Christianity, one must also consider how its rise in the West parallels a broader acceptance of Eastern spirituality disguised as “wellness” practices. Kabat-Zinn (and others) stripped Mindfulness of overt Buddhist terminology so that it could be introduced into secular institutions. Yet Kabat-Zinn himself acknowledged that the practice is inseparable from its roots in Buddhism, likening Mindfulness training to planting “Dharma seeds” in unsuspecting soil.

In other words, the secular cloak doesn’t erase the spiritual substance. When Mindfulness is taught in schools to children, in therapy to trauma survivors, or in corporations to stressed employees, they’re engaging in a practice meant to cultivate Buddhist awareness of reality. Scripture repeatedly warns against adopting the practices of pagan religions, even if those practices seem

helpful, because they carry with them the worldview and spiritual influences of their origin.

“Mindfulness meditation isn’t analogous to the redeemed meat in 1 Corinthians 8; it’s analogous to the unredeemable pagan temples and pagan prayers.”

Israel was warned not to imitate the nations in divination, sorcery, or spiritual practices, for *“whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord”* (Deuteronomy 18:12). It’s naïve to assume that by removing Sanskrit terms or Buddhist statues the practice itself becomes acceptable;

the root remains the same, and so do the spiritual consequences. Mindfulness meditation isn’t analogous to the redeemed meat in 1 Corinthians 8; it’s analogous to the unredeemable pagan temples and pagan prayers.

Another concern is that Mindfulness fosters a focus on the self rather than on God. The promise is that by observing your own thoughts and sensations, you can find peace, resilience, or healing within yourself. Yet Scripture is clear that the heart is deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9). Peace doesn't come from gazing inward, but from fixing our eyes on Christ, the Prince of Peace (c.f., Isaiah 26:3; John 14:27).

Mindfulness may train people to *tolerate* distress by detaching from their thoughts, but it can't cleanse guilt, transform desires, or provide eternal hope. Only God's Word can cut to the division of soul and spirit, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). Only the gospel can forgive sin and bring true peace with God through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

In contrast, Mindfulness offers a counterfeit peace rooted in altered awareness rather than reconciliation with God. It numbs the conscience, instead of purifying it by the blood of Christ. This false peace is spiritually hazardous because it may convince a person that they've found contentment, when in reality they're alienated from God, the only source of true peace.

For people suffering from anxiety, trauma, or depression, Mindfulness may initially bring relief, and this is often used as evidence of its validity. Yet sin seems to promise short-term comfort while leading to long-term destruction. Israel was repeatedly tempted to adopt the practices of surrounding nations because they seemed beneficial, yet those practices led them into idolatry.

The same is true today if a Christian thinks that there's no harm in practicing breathing exercises or thought observation. What begins as stress management can evolve into dependence upon meditation, fascination with Eastern philosophy, and openness to further New Age practices. The progression is subtle but real, because Mindfulness isn't spiritually neutral.

To cultivate emptiness of mind without filling it with Scripture is to invite deception. Instead, Christians are exhorted to *meditate upon God's Word day and*

night (Psalm 1:2), *to set their minds on things above* (Colossians 3:2), and *to let the Word of Christ dwell in them richly* (Colossians 3:16). The biblical model of meditation is to saturate the mind with God's truth and to let it transform the inner life.

The Bible tells us to meditate upon Scripture day and night in Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2. The word "meditate" in biblical Hebrew is "*haggah*", which means to "mutter aloud". So, we are to quietly speak Scripture aloud to ourselves while reading the Bible. In other words, our meditations need to completely focus upon the Bible. That's the biblical definition of meditation.

Furthermore, Mindfulness distorts the concept of judgment itself. In Scripture, judgment is discernment between good and evil, truth and lies, righteousness and sin. Christians are called to "*test the spirits to see whether they are from God*" (1 John 4:1) and to "*test everything; hold fast what is good*" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). To suspend judgment is to refuse discernment, which leaves the believer defenseless in a spiritual battlefield.

A thought observed without moral evaluation may slowly shape attitudes and desires in ungodly directions. For example, noticing lust without judgment is adultery of the heart. Noticing envy without judgment is to cultivate discontent. Noticing anger without judgment is to harbor resentment.

Sin isn't defeated through detachment but by confession, repentance, and renewal in Christ. We are to mortify sin by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13). Mindfulness bypasses this battle entirely, offering a false sense of peace while sin continues to fester.

The broader cultural acceptance of Mindfulness also reveals how dangerously deceptive Mindfulness can be. Because it's marketed as a medical or psychological intervention, many Christians assume it must be safe, forgetting that not all practices embraced by science or education are aligned with God's truth.

The biblical alternative to Mindfulness is a Spirit-filled discipline of the mind. *God hasn't given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind*

(2 Timothy 1:7). The believer's mind is renewed by Scripture, *transformed to discern the will of God* (Romans 12:2). Instead of noticing thoughts without judgment, we are to *cast down arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Instead of emptying the mind, we are to fill it with *whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy* (Philippians 4:8). Instead of detaching from our thoughts, we are to align them with Christ, letting His Word and His Spirit govern our inner life.

This requires vigilance, humility, and constant dependence on God's grace, not self-directed observation. When anxiety threatens, the Christian needs to bring it before God in prayer with thanksgiving, trusting His *peace that surpasses understanding to guard the heart and mind* (Philippians 4:6-7).

Mindfulness meditation may be marketed as a stress-relieving technique, yet its roots, methods, and outcomes are at odds with biblical faith. Born out of Buddhist and Hindu meditation, rebranded by Jon Kabat-Zinn into a secular format, and spread through modern institutions, Mindfulness carries with it a worldview that denies God's truth.

By teaching people to notice thoughts without judgment, it contradicts the command to take every thought captive and ignores the reality that sinful thoughts are sinful deeds. By leading people into altered states of consciousness, it undermines the vigilance and sobriety God commands in spiritual warfare. By offering counterfeit peace, it distracts from the only true peace found in Christ.

Christians must therefore reject Mindfulness as incompatible with the gospel and instead embrace biblical meditation, filling the mind with God's Word, disciplining thoughts under Christ's lordship, and remaining sober-minded in the fight against sin and deception, resting in the true and lasting peace that comes only through Christ Jesus.

Contemplative Spirituality: Is it Biblical?

By Marcia Montenegro



“Contemplative Spirituality” is a term used to include what are called “contemplative practices”, which are also referred to as “Spiritual Disciplines”,

“Spiritual Formation”, or sometimes “Spiritual Practices”. In some cases, the use of such terms may *not* refer to contemplative practices (such as the use of the term “spiritual disciplines”, which is commonly and historically been used to describe practices such as studying the Word or praying), but the Christian must be discerning when reviewing such uses of these terms.

The origins of Contemplative Spirituality stem from several sources and include early monastic practices; Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox mys-

tics; the Roman Catholic monk, Thomas Merton; the late Trappist monks, Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington, and William Meninger, who started the modern “Centering Prayer” movement in the 1970s; the late Dallas Willard; and author of the popular book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster.

Some of these men were familiar with and endorsed the practices of Hindu and Buddhist meditation. Keating and his colleagues purposefully included meditation methods from Buddhism and from Transcendental Meditation (T.M.), a Hindu-based meditation taught in the United States by Hindu guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, starting in 1959 (although T.M. did not become popular until the 1970s).

During Fr. Keating’s term as abbot at St. Joseph’s and in response to the reforms of Vatican II, he invited teachers from the East to the monastery. As a result of this exposure to Eastern spiritual traditions, Fr. Keating and several of the monks at St. Joseph’s were led to develop the modern form of Christian contemplative prayer called Centering Prayer.⁽ⁱ⁾

Keating and his team also drew from the fourteenth century anonymous book, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, believed by historians to have been written by a monk. I read this book; it is very obtuse and teaches that one must let go of thoughts, knowledge, and sensory experiences in order to encounter God in a state of “unknowing”. This is similar to the “beginner’s mind” of Zen Buddhism, which I was involved in during my years in the New Age. The basic idea is that one must erase past knowledge in order to encounter new knowledge, usually viewed as superior.

Contemplative practices got a boost from Quaker mystic, Richard Foster, author of the bestselling and still popular book, *Celebration of Discipline*, and from philosopher Dallas Willard, who had written a book in 1984 on how to hear God, *In Search of Guidance*, later re-titled *Hearing God*. Foster’s organization, Renovare, became instrumental in introducing these practices to evangelicals,

along with the popular *Be Still* DVD, put out by Foster and Willard in 2006.

Eventually “spiritual disciplines” in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox monasteries, as well as the practices and teachings of mystics, such as Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, and others, became incorporated into the broader field of Contemplative practices. There are numerous contemporary books teaching these practices.

A Deeper Look at Contemplative Spirituality

Although these teachings include some biblical truth, those become swallowed by the Contemplative concepts. The major concerns are that these practices are not based on Scripture, and they stem from mysticism.

There are different definitions given for mysticism, but mysticism is the attempt to have unmediated contact with the Divine or ultimate reality in order to have union with the Divine. There is belief in other realities that cannot be perceived by thought or by the senses, or expressed in words, and in these realities, one encounters the Divine (or God).

The methods to bring this about usually involve meditation, chanting, repetitive movements, or other practices that put one’s mind in an altered state. An altered state is a conscious, but non-thinking, suggestible state (it is the same as a light trance or light hypnotic state). The mind is in neutral, and critical thinking and judgment are suspended.

Another aspect of mysticism, aside from altered states, is putting a priority on spiritual inner experiences that cannot be communicated in words. These experiences are viewed as having higher worth than anything in verbal form (written or spoken) and are considered to be superior to reason or using the mind (this view exists also in the New Age). Therefore, it is commonplace to find Contemplative teachers placing experiences above reading or knowing the Bible, though this is not always overtly stated.

Contemplative Practices

Some of the Contemplative Practices include Lectio Divina (sacred reading); Visio Divina (contemplating nature or an object of art for spiritual insight or to hear from God); Spiritual Direction, which is allegedly helping someone “hear” what the Holy Spirit or God might be saying to them; Imaginative Prayer (usually visualizing Jesus speaking to you or doing something with you); and specific “disciplines” such as the practices of silence, stillness, solitude, fasting, Sabbath, and others (which will be further explained in the next section).

The Misappropriation of Biblical Practices

Many Christians hear or read terms from Contemplative teachers such as “silence”, “stillness”, “meditation”, or “centering” and assume they are biblical. How are these terms used in Contemplative Practices and what should one be aware of?

The practice of Contemplative Silence is not just being quiet. It involves being still and in solitude in order to “hear” or experience God through the silence. One is told to breathe slowly in a certain way. In fact, breathing slowly is always recommended for most of these practices. Some Contemplatives teach that one will “hear” God within, and they base this on “the still, small voice” of 1st Kings 19. Having thoughts or being busy is viewed as a barrier to hearing or experiencing God.

Contemplative Prayer, as taught by Contemplatives, is similar to Eastern meditation methods, which involves certain forms of breathing, being still, and closing one’s eyes. These techniques are done to still the mind and to discard thoughts. It is taught that this non-verbal stillness and silence is the best way to encounter God and to feel His presence and/or love, and is superior to verbal prayer. The silence and solitude are actually states of mind; it is not the same as merely being quiet or being alone.

Lectio Divina, or “Sacred reading”, involves reading a passage slowly several times and noticing a word or phrase that seems to resonate with you. The

reader is to repeat and ponder this word, viewing it as a private message from God. The passage is not read in context and there is no attempt to study or ponder the passage for its meaning. This is supposedly a way to experience God's word more intimately.

The False Distinction

The so-called disciplines of silence, solitude, being still, and others always involve getting into a state that discourages thinking or study. A false distinction

is made between head (or mind) and heart, with the heart (feelings) being emphasized.

Contemplatives frame the issue as the “Western Church” being too “head-oriented” and too focused on theology and doctrine, thus being ignorant of the practices which allow one to know God...

Contemplatives typically imply that the Bible is insufficient, dry, or too “intellectual”, and that one is therefore missing out on a deeper experience of God. It is taught that one cannot have true intimacy with God without these spiritual disciplines of silence, stillness, and solitude.

Jesus is said to have practiced these disciplines. However, references to Jesus going off alone in the wilderness do not support a discipline of Contemplative silence or solitude. Jesus went to pray alone or to be alone since he was often surrounded by crowds and always with the disciples. These actions by Jesus are normal and do not indicate any specific practices or disciplines.

Contemplatives frame the issue as the “Western Church” being too “head-oriented” and too focused on theology and doctrine, thus being ignorant of the practices which allow one to know God on a deeper level with what they term “the heart.” What they are referring to are the mystical practices of monasteries,

mystics, and even practices found in other religions or in pagan beliefs.

One way the Contemplative movement lures Christians into its teachings is to make Christians, who may feel disillusioned or have had some difficulties, feel that they can have a richer spiritual life and be closer to God through contemplative practices.

Response to the Head vs. Heart Issue

Reading or studying Scripture is not merely intellectual. God's Word is living and also affects one's feelings and has a spiritual impact (Hebrews 4:12).

When Jesus said to *"love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind"* (Matthew 22:37), this refers to loving God with your whole being. One cannot love separately with the heart, then with the soul, and then with the mind. God wired humans that so that it all works together. The word translated as "heart" in the Old Testament refers to the will, mind, and emotions of the person—to the whole person.

Misuse of Scripture and Response

Contemplative teachings consistently misuse Scripture by taking it out of context, reading other meanings into it, or misinterpreting it. There are dozens of examples but here are two to consider.

One of the most common misuses is Psalm 46:10 (KJV), *"Be still and know that I am God."* This is used to support the teaching that one must be still in mind and body in order to meditate. However, that is not the meaning. This Psalm is a reminder of the sovereignty of God, and verse 10 is more accurately translated as *"cease striving"* or *"stop fighting."*

Another example is the *"still, small voice"* found in verse 12 of the 1st Kings 19 account of Elijah, who has fled Jezebel. However, there are different ways to interpret the Hebrew. It can also mean a *"gentle stirring"*, *"gentle blowing"*, *"low whisper"*, *"gentle breeze"*, among other meanings. This sound, whatever it was, is what got Elijah's attention; but afterwards, God verbally spoke to

him (v.13).

Since there are many ways to interpret this phrase, it cannot be used to support a teaching that one should listen for a “*still, small voice*” from God. Another reason it cannot support any teaching is because this is a narrative, not prescriptive. Moreover, no other biblical passage teaches to listen for such a voice. Elijah was a prophet who heard from God, and this was a unique situation.

Theological and Scriptural Lens

Does contemplative Christianity align with biblical doctrine? First, contemplative practices are nowhere supported in Scripture and when Contemplatives try to do so, they consistently misuse the Bible.

Secondly, the mysticism of contemplative teachings goes against the character of God. Reason and logic reflect God’s character, so any teaching that encourages one to discard reason or thinking is not from God, especially when it is advising that one can be closer to God if not thinking. One Contemplative even stated that when praying, one should not think about God.

Biblical meditation is pondering and reflecting *on Scripture*. It involves the active use of the mind. Contemplative teachers downgrade thinking and the use of reason, but God’s Word encourages us to *be sober-minded* and use reason (Psalms 16:7; Proverbs 1:2-9, 18:15, 22:17; Isaiah 1:18; Matthew 22:37; Acts 17:2, 17, 18:4, 19; 1 Corinthians 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8; 2 Timothy 2:17; Hebrews 10:16; James 3:17; 1 Peter 1:13, 4:7). The Bible is written using words, and language is based on logic and reason, which are rooted in the character of God. The New Testament instructs us to be discerning, which requires using the mind. There is no biblical passage that demeans the use of the mind for godly reasoning and judgment.

Third, Contemplatives take Bible passages out of context, read another meaning into it, or twist the meaning. Passages taken out of context lead to all manner of heretical teachings, and eisegesis forces one’s opinion on passages, in-

stead of relying on the meaning provided by the author/context.

The fourth way Contemplative ideas are unbiblical is that they go against the sufficiency of Scripture. They do this by teaching that one can have a closer or superior relationship with God through these extrabiblical methods, and that one should hear God through these methods or have ongoing dialogues with God. These teachings ignore the fact that everything needed to know about God and how to live the Christian life has been given in the Bible and comes from God (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:21).

Church Culture is Growing More Contemplative

Aside from the perennial popularity of Dallas Willard and Richard Foster, Contemplative teachings and concepts from mysticism are growing through people in the Church, such as John Mark Comer, Ruth Haley Barton, Tyler Staton, Jared Boyd, and numerous others, as well as dozens of Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Direction organizations.

There is an influence from Richard Rohr as well. Although Rohr is a Franciscan friar, he is a follower of Perennial Wisdom and is an influence on Progressive Christianity. Perennial Wisdom holds that there was originally one pure religion from which all the world religions came. By going on a journey within through silence and contemplation, one can encounter this reality and one's "True Self," which was always in God. Thus, there is a strong link between Contemplative practices and Perennial Wisdom.

Why Does This Matter?

Introducing Contemplative practices into the Church—Spiritual Disciplines (see the note at the beginning of this article), Spiritual Formation, or even Contemplative Prayer and Lectio Divina alone, is introducing doctrines that are not only not supported in God's Word but work against it. The gospel is never highlighted—and sometimes not even mentioned—in Contemplative material and Scripture is misused.

Another danger is that one may experience a false peace through these practices, which may be so alluring that regular Bible study and prayer are neglected. One might think they are hearing from God outside of Scripture and come to prefer that over the Bible itself. Experiences are addictive and lead only to a further desire for them.

The outcome from Contemplative teachings, since they are not grounded in God's truth, can only be harmful to the Church and to a Christian's relationship with God.

[H]aving been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form... (Colossians 2:7-9; NAS).

References:

- i. <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/fr-thomas-keating/>

Related Reading from Christian Answers for the New Age:

Contemplating Contemplative Prayer: Is It Really Prayer? (Part 1)

<https://www.christiananswersnewage.com/article/contemplating-contemplative-prayer-is-it-really-prayer-part-1>

Lecture and Meditation Session Led By Thomas Keating

<https://www.christiananswersnewage.com/article/lecture-and-meditation-session-led-by-thomas-keating>

Lectio Divina: Sacred Reading or Sabotage?

<https://www.christiananswersnewage.com/article/lectio-divina-sacred-reading-or-sabotage>

The Be Still DVD: An Ode to Silence

<https://www.christiananswersnewage.com/article/the-be-still-dvd-an-ode-to-silence>

Psalms 46:10 (Be Still) and Meditation

<https://www.christiananswersnewage.com/article/meditation-and-psalm-4610>

Perennial Wisdom and Christianity: Compatible?

<https://www.christiananswersnewage.com/article/perennial-wisdom-and-christianity-compatible>

8 Questions to Ask Before Joining a Spiritual Formation Class

By Dave Jenkins

Spiritual formation is one of the most talked-about concepts in evangelical circles today.

Churches, colleges, and ministries frequently advertise classes, workshops, or retreats

promising “deep transformation” or “ancient practices for today”. While the desire for spiritual maturity is good, not every path offered under the label of “spiritual formation” is rooted in Scripture. Before signing up for a spiritual formation class, here are some essential questions to ask.



One: How is Spiritual Formation Defined?

Is the class built on biblical sanctification—growing in Christlikeness by the

Spirit, through the Word—or does it lean on mystical language about “union with God” apart from Scripture? A biblical class should define spiritual formation as *conformity to Christ* (Romans 8:29), not as self-discovery or mystical experience.

Two: What Role Does Scripture Play?

Is the Bible central in the class, or is it supplemented (or even overshadowed) by contemplative practices, journaling exercises, or silence? Spiritual growth comes through the Word (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16–17), not apart from it.

Three: Who are the Recommended Authors and Influences?

Are voices like Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, John Mark Comer, Henri Nouwen, or Brennan Manning promoted? These authors frequently introduce mystical practices not rooted in Scripture. A trustworthy class should point students to biblical teachers who emphasize the sufficiency of the Word.

Four: What Practices are Encouraged?

Does the syllabus include centering prayer, breath prayers, *Lectio Divina* (as a mystical technique), labyrinth walks, or visualization? These are *not* biblical disciplines. Instead, look for practices that the Scriptures command: prayer, fasting, Bible reading, worship, fellowship, and service.

Five: How Does the Class Describe Prayer?

Is prayer presented as conversation with God shaped by His Word, or as silence, stillness, and inner impressions? Jesus taught His disciples to pray with words grounded in Scripture (Matthew 6:9–13), not through emptying the mind.

Six: What View of the Gospel is Presented?

Does the class emphasize repentance, faith, and obedience flowing from the finished work of Christ, or does it reduce the gospel to therapeutic well-being and personal wholeness? True formation begins at the Cross and continues

through sanctification in Christ.

Seven: How is Community Understood?

Is spiritual growth primarily seen as an inward, individual journey, or is it rooted in the gathered life of the Church—under sound preaching, sacraments,

and fellowship? Scripture presents sanctification as both personal and corporate.

“Not every spiritual formation class is dangerous, but many borrow heavily from Contemplative Spirituality.”

Eight: How Does the Class Address Discernment?

Are warnings about false teaching and unbiblical practices dismissed as “divisive” or “legalistic”? Or does the class encourage believers to “*test everything, hold fast what is good*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21)? Bibli-

cal spiritual formation will never pit discernment against love.

Conclusion: Test Everything by the Word

Not every spiritual formation class is dangerous, but many borrow heavily from Contemplative Spirituality and/or mystical traditions. As with any teaching, the standard must be the Word of God.

Before joining, ask hard questions. Ensure the class exalts Christ, depends on Scripture, and directs you to the ordinary means of grace God has appointed for His people. Spiritual maturity comes not through novelty or mystical shortcuts, but through steady growth in the truth of God’s Word by the Spirit of God, within the Church of God.

Practical Shepherding Note: How to Shepherd People Out of Contemplative Practices

By Dave Jenkins



Pastors and ministry leaders are increasingly encountering believers drawn into Contemplative practices—centering prayer, silence-as-prayer, Lectio Divina as “fresh revelation”, or even

“hearing God” through inner impressions (particularly with no discernment or attempt to check against Scripture). Often, people are not trying to abandon Scripture but are sincerely seeking deeper intimacy with God. This makes shepherding them out of these practices a delicate but necessary task.

One: Begin with Patience and Compassion

Do not assume rebellion. Many have been taught contemplative practices

by well-meaning leaders or popular books. Begin with listening. Ask them what they find appealing. Show genuine care for their spiritual hunger and acknowledge their desire to grow. Shepherding requires building trust before offering correction.

Two: Anchor Them in the Sufficiency of Scripture

Gently open 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Psalm 19, or Hebrews 4:12. Show that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness through His Word. Contrast biblical meditation—filling the mind with Scripture—with mystical techniques that seek God beyond the text.

Three: Expose the Subtle Dangers

Help them see that contemplative practices elevate feelings above God's revelation. Use fact-finding prompts, such as: "When your inner impression contradicts Scripture, which one wins?" By asking questions, you help them discover the authority issue themselves rather than only telling them.

Four: Offer a Better Way

People must not only be warned, but also disciplined into healthier practices. Teach them to pray through Scripture (the Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, etc.), to meditate by memorization and reflection, and to delight in the ordinary means of grace—the Word, prayer, sacraments, and fellowship.

Five: Shepherd with Ongoing Care

Walking out of Contemplative Spirituality is not always immediate. Be ready for repeated conversations, accountability, and encouragement. Remind them that joy and intimacy with God are found not in mystical shortcuts, but in steady communion with Him through His appointed means.

Final Word

The goal is not simply to critique false practices but to shepherd people into a deeper, lasting confidence in God's Word. As Paul reminded the Ephesian

elders, we commend the flock “to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts 20:32). That remains the shepherd’s sure foundation.

The Dangers of Contemplative Spirituality

By Gary Gilley

I recently received an email from an individual (some details edited for the sake of privacy), which lays out the concerns and confusion many church members face as they encounter Contemplative Spirituality, often termed “spiritual formation”. Part of the confusion has to do with

terminology. Who could possibly struggle with the idea of spiritual formation, if by that we mean discipleship and growing in Christ? But as we will see in this short article, that is not what is being expressed by those actually advocating Contemplative Spirituality. Below is the essence of this individual’s concerns:

Dear Pastor Gilley,

I purchased your book Out of Formation this week after hearing you on a podcast where you were interviewed regarding the Spiritual Formation



Movement. I knew nothing of this movement until I was referred to you last week by someone at the new church we started attending two weeks ago. The newly appointed pastor at our old church announced to the congregation, several weeks after he was declared our new pastor that he had been accused of some matters of orthodoxy centered around spiritual formation. (This church we'd been attending for many years was a non-denominational, conservative, evangelical church.) He said he was being accused of straying from Bible-centered teaching, orthodoxy and orthopraxy. He went on to say that he was enrolled in a Doctor of Theology program entitled "Spiritual Formation and Relational Neuroscience" at a well-known evangelical seminary. I'd not heard of the Spiritual Formation Movement, and didn't think anything about it. However, people that did know about it started leaving the church, and eventually we joined them. At the church we have started to attend we discovered that many of the church members are greatly concerned about the matter of the Spiritual Formation issue. Knowing nothing about the movement, I was referred to you by one of the leaders in the church.

I received your book on Wednesday of this week, and finished it today, Saturday of the same week. (Amazing for me.) I just wanted to thank you SO VERY MUCH for writing this book! I loved how you so very thoroughly explained the Spiritual Formation Movement and its roots. I had no idea, as I'm sure many of our former church members don't. Oh, how Satan loves to mix truth and error. I also loved that in Part 2 of the book you detailed the biblical disciplines complete with Scripture references. Love, love, love that part of the book. Thank you for including it.

This email reflects the misperceptions and lack of understanding that many Christians have of "spiritual formation" and Contemplative Spirituality. Because this approach goes by various names and makes attractive claims regarding its

importance in the Christian life, many buy into its teachings concerning spirituality without a true understanding of what is being promoted and how much it veers from biblical Christianity. In response to the author of this email, and many like him, this article will give a thumbnail sketch of the roots, modern-day promoters, and fundamental teachings of “spiritual formation” and Contemplative Spirituality.

Roots

Perhaps one of the most important factors in analyzing “spiritual formation” is its source or origin. Its teachers are fond of stating that their disciplines have old roots, going back to the earliest days of the Church. By speaking in this manner, “spiritual formation” adherents often disguise the fact that they are not tracing their theology and/or ideas concerning spirituality back to the Scriptures, but to those who lived decades and sometimes centuries after the canon was closed.

While they often link their ideas with Scripture, use biblical terminology, and claim the spiritual high ground, they are not drawing most of their teachings from the Word of God. Instead, they embrace those they often call “spiritual masters”, who supposedly discovered spiritual insights through various mystical experiences rather than the revelation found in the Scriptures. This is the fatal flaw in the whole movement.

The early Church (post-apostolic, not the first century New Testament Church) did many things right and many things wrong. Its pronouncements, views, rituals, organizations, and structures can be examined with profit, but they were not without errors. In fact, the Church during the “classical stage” (2nd through 6th centuries), often moved both doctrinally and ecclesiastically away from the inspired Word of God and establishes its own views, doctrines, philosophies, rituals and formats. In addition, it accepted and developed a preference for allegorical interpretation of Scripture.

A good example of what emerged from this type of hermeneutic is the monastic movement in which the so-called “Desert Fathers and Mothers” migrated to the Egyptian wilderness to live as hermits and supposedly contemplate God. In misguided zeal (and without direction from Scripture), these men and women would often starve themselves, expose their bodies to the elements, go as long as possible without sleep, and live isolated from civilization. Under these peculiar and extreme conditions, many of them claimed to have visions and encounters with the Lord that normal Christians did not have.

As a result, some declared these individuals to be super-saints and their visions and dreams as revelatory words from the Lord. They were elevated to the status of Christian celebrities. These are the very ones that modern proponents of Contemplative Spirituality call “spiritual masters” and from whom they draw their understanding of “spiritual formation”. The teachings, methods, and concepts behind the Spiritual Formation Movement are drawn from these early contemplative hermits, as well as medieval monks and nuns, principally from the Counter-Reformation period, and not from Scripture.

It is absolutely essential to get this connection. Many, if not most, of the disciplines and instructions found within “spiritual formation” are not drawn from Scripture; they are drawn from the imaginations of men and women passed along through tradition.

Bruce Demarest, a promoter of Contemplative Spirituality, tells his readers that for help in “spiritual formation”, we are to “turn to our Christian past—to men and women who understood how the soul finds satisfaction as we grow in God, and how His Spirit finds a more ready home in us.”(i) And just who are these people to whom we are supposed to turn? Demarest suggests John of the Cross, Henri Nouwen, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, and the Christian mystics.(ii) Other highly touted mystics include Thomas Keating, Thomas Merton, Francis De Sales, Thomas Kelly, Madame Guy-

on, Theophan the Recluse, Ignatius of Loyola, Meister Eckhart, and Julian of Norwich.

Virtually every author who has written a book on “spiritual formation” draws his or her understanding of the Christian life, and Christian experience from this stable of mystics. In other words, “spiritual formation” is not founded on the New Testament Scriptures and examples, but mostly on the experiences of Roman Catholic mystics, with a few Eastern Orthodox and Quakers thrown into the mix. It is important to understand that the Spiritual Formation Movement is not based on Scripture but on the experiences, writings, and claims of those who teach a false gospel and misunderstand the Christian life as detailed in God’s Word.

Modern-day Promoters

The source of the modern interest in Contemplative Spirituality can be traced to 1974, when Father William Menninger, a Trappist monk, found an ancient book entitled *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the library at St. Joseph’s Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts. This 14th century book offered a means by which contemplative practices, long used by Catholic monks, could be taught to lay people. Menninger, Thomas Keating, and Basil Pennington, all Roman Catholic monks, began teaching these methods within Catholic circles.(iii) Their concepts and patterns leaped into Protestant evangelicalism through the writings of Richard Foster, initially with the publication of his 1978 book, *The Celebration of Discipline*. It was by this landmark book, described by *Christianity Today* as one of the ten best books of the 20th century, that Catholic and Eastern Orthodox disciplines, practiced by the Desert Fathers and Mothers,(iv) as well as monks and hermits, were introduced to Protestant evangelicalism.

These disciplines were not completely unknown to evangelicals who were familiar with Church history, but they were now being repackaged and offered as a means of spiritual growth and maturity. In fact, the implication was that

without the use of these ancient contemplative methods true “spiritual formation” was not possible.

Long accepted biblical disciplines, such as Bible study and prayer, were framed as quaint and simplistic. Worse, believers were told that these biblical disciplines were forged from a Western “worldview of the head” (using one’s mind apart from their heart). If the believer wanted to move deeply into the things of God, such practices were not enough, for they never really reach the heart, leaving the unsuspecting Christian with little more than a superficial intellectual knowledge of the divine.

Richard Foster, an evangelical Quaker, relied much on the teachings of his

“Long accepted biblical disciplines, such as Bible study and prayer, were framed as quaint and simplistic.”

mentor Dallas Willard, a philosopher and professor at USC. Willard’s books, such as *The Divine Conspiracy* (1997), *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (1988), and *Hearing God* (1984), had profound impact not only on Foster but on all of the early framers of the Spiritual Formation Movement.

Richard Foster wrote in 2004:

When I first began writing in the field in the late 70s and early 80s the term “Spiritual For-

mation” was hardly known, except for highly specialized references in relation to the Catholic orders. Today it is a rare person who has not heard the term. Seminary courses in Spiritual Formation proliferate like baby rabbits. Huge numbers are seeking to become certified as Spiritual Directors to answer the cry of multiplied thousands for spiritual direction.

Some of the prominent leaders, besides Foster and Willard include John Ortberg, Bruce Demarest, Ruth Haley Barton, Ken Boa, Joan Chittister, Robert Webber, Dan Allender, Phyllis Tickle, Robert Benson, Scot McKnight, Nora Gallagher, Adele Calhoun, David deSilva, Jan Johnson, Leighton Ford, Larry Crabb, Calvin Miller, Tricia McCary Rhodes, Mindy Caliguire, Albert Haase, Eugene Peterson, M. Robert Mulholland Jr., Gordon Smith, Brian McLaren, Mark Yaconelli, Brennan Manning, and Henri Nouwen.

“The Bible clearly speaks of the discipline of studying Scripture...and prayer as being sources of spiritual development...”

And this might be barely scratching the surface. More recently, popular author and podcaster, John Mark Comer, has attempted to update the “spiritual formation” movement for a new generation. In his books, *Practicing the Way*, *God Has a Name*, and *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, Comer introduces Contemplative Spirituality teachings to a younger audience, who may have never heard of Richard Foster and would be unable to following the writings of Dallas Willard (Comer’s words).

This demonstrates well the popularity and spread of “spiritual formation”. Something that was only known in esoteric Roman Catholic circles less than 40 years ago is now demanding a front row seat in evangelical life. What has changed? The doctrines and teachings of Catholicism have not budged, but the willingness of evangelicals to compromise with the theology and practices of Rome have.

Fundamental Teachings: Spiritual Disciplines

At the heart of Contemplative Spirituality are the so-called “spiritual

disciplines". What are they? John Ortberg, a former teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, describes "spiritual disciplines" as "any activity that can help me gain power to live life as Jesus taught and modeled it. How many spiritual disciplines are there? As many as we can think of." (v) Comer, a disciple of Ortberg, agrees in his book, *Practicing the Way*.

Is this the case? Can virtually any activity be turned into a (biblical) spiritual discipline? Does God sanction all sorts of random practices, endorsing them as means of progressive sanctification? Biblical disciplines, which are indispensable for spiritual growth and discipleship, are, of course, positive things. But man-made disciplines are—at best—optional and are certainly not essential for discipleship, or else God's Word would have commanded them and provided instruction for their use.

The Bible clearly speaks of the discipline of studying Scripture (John 17:17; Psalm 1; Psalm 19; 2 Timothy 3:15-4:6) and prayer as being sources of spiritual development (Hebrews 4:15-16). And the need for the body of Christ—both in the teaching of truth and mutual encouragement and ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 10:24-25)—can be clearly found. But when we stray much beyond these, we run into trouble. Nevertheless, the Spiritual Formation Movement offers long lists of disciplines that are supposedly essential for spiritual development. These are often called the classical disciplines.

Foster, in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, provides a chapter on each of the following classical disciplines: meditation, [contemplative] prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. InterVarsity Press (IVP) has a line of books it calls *Formatio*, which offers individual books designed to teach each of the above disciplines, plus the sacramental life, silence, journaling, spiritual mentoring, pilgrimage, Sabbath keeping, sacred reading (*Lectio Divina*), and the need for spiritual directors.

Thomas Nelson Publishing has published an 8-volume set they call *The Ancient Practices Series*. The first book, written by Brian McLaren (which ought to tell the discerning reader something), is titled, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*. The other books in the series are: *In Constant Prayer*, *Sabbath*, *Fasting*, *Sacred Meal*, *Sacred Journey*, *The Liturgical Year*, and *Tithing*; all teaching spiritual disciplines as defined and explained by the mystics, rather than from the New Testament.

NavPress offers its “Spiritual Formation Line” to promote the spiritual disciplines. Many other major Christian publishers have followed suit including Zondervan, which links with Youth Specialties to offer books aimed toward teaching young people, as well as adults, the contemplative life.

This leads us to a fork in the road and a recognition of the danger of ancient spiritual disciplines drawn from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox mystics. Do we, as believers in *sola Scriptura*, take our marching orders from the written Word, or do we look to the “white spaces” in Scripture to determine

“Contemplative Spirituality is a side road that, if taken, will cause you to wander from biblical Christianity.”

how we live? Do we actually believe that the Lord has given us in Scripture the teachings and practices He wants us to follow, or do we believe that we must supplement the authentic words of God with our imagination and traditions of men? This is increasingly becoming an issue within almost every branch of evangelicalism. Once it is accepted that we can “enhance” the

Christian life by augmenting the inspired words of Scripture, there is no limit to where we might end up.

And so, my friend, I encourage you to turn to Scripture alone for your source of spiritual growth and discipleship.

Contemplative Spirituality is a side road that, if taken, will cause you to wander from biblical Christianity.

References:

- i. Bruce Demarest, *Satisfying Your Soul, Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999), p. 23.
- ii. Ibid., pp. 26-27, 34.
- iii. James D. Maxwell III, www.faith.edu/seminary/printerfriendly.php?article=../faithpulpit/2009_03-04.
- iv. Desert Fathers and Mothers were hermits, ascetics, monks, and nuns who lived in the desert of Egypt during A.D. third and fourth centuries. Their ascetic lifestyle was viewed as an alternative to martyrdom which previously had been seen as the highest possible sacrifice for the Lord.
- v. John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted, Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2002), p. 48.

Speaking the Truth in Love: How Church Members Can Address Contemplative Spirituality

By Dave Jenkins



Contemplative spirituality has become one of the most popular trends in the Church today.

From books and conferences to podcasts and small group studies, many Christians are being invited to

explore “new” ways of praying, listening, and seeking God. Often framed in terms of “silence and solitude” or “going deeper with Jesus”, these practices promise intimacy with God. Yet beneath the surface lies something deeply troubling: a move away from the sufficiency of Scripture toward mystical experiences.

As ordinary church members, it can be intimidating to raise concerns.

After all, who wants to be labeled divisive or judgmental? But Scripture calls all believers to *guard the truth* (Jude 3), to *test the spirits* (1 John 4:1), and to *speak the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15). Confronting Contemplative Spirituality is not about winning arguments, but about protecting Christ's Church and pointing people back to the Lord through the means of grace He has given.

What is Contemplative Spirituality?

Contemplative Spirituality is a broad term that describes practices designed to foster an inner, experiential union with God, often apart from His revealed Word. These practices are rooted in:

- **Mysticism:** Seeking direct experiences of God through inner voices, visions, or altered states.
- **Monastic traditions:** Practices like “centering prayer” or repeating mantras that originated in medieval Roman Catholicism.
- **Modern adaptations:** Popular books and teachers that encourage believers to “empty the mind”, focus on a “sacred word”, or wait in silence for God to speak apart from Scripture.

While often wrapped in biblical language, contemplative practices subtly shift authority away from Scripture and toward personal impressions and feelings. Instead of praying with our Bibles open, shaped by God's promises and petitions, Contemplative Spirituality often looks more like Eastern meditation dressed in Christian terminology.

Why Contemplative Spirituality is Dangerous

Scripture warns against anything that undermines the sufficiency of God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16–17). The danger of Contemplative Spirituality is not that silence, solitude, or reflection are bad in and of themselves, but that these practices:

- Replace God's voice with our own impressions. Rather than letting Scripture interpret Scripture, contemplative practices prioritize

subjective experiences.

- Devalue doctrine as “cold”. Sound teaching is treated as inferior to mystical encounters.
- Introduce pagan methods. Techniques borrowed from Hinduism or Buddhism (such as mantras and emptying the mind) are baptized into Christian language.
- Distort assurance. Believers are taught to seek peace in mystical feelings rather than in and through the finished work of Christ.

The Apostle Paul warned the Colossians against “*self-made religion and asceticism*” that may look spiritual but have “*no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*” (Colossians 2:23). Contemplative Spirituality is a modern version of the same error.

How Church Members Can Respond

You don’t need to be a seminary graduate or elder to recognize and address these concerns. Every Christian is called to be discerning (Acts 17:11). Below are practical ways church members can respond.

One: Discern Carefully

Test all teachings and practices against God’s Word. Ask: “Does this encourage deeper dependence on Scripture, or does it substitute human techniques for divine truth?”

Two: Approach Humbly

If you see Contemplative Spirituality promoted in your church, begin with prayer and humility. Paul reminds us that “*the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone... correcting his opponents with gentleness*” (2 Timothy 2:24–25).

Three: Ask Questions, Don’t Assume Motives

Instead of attacking, engage with curiosity. For example: “When you say,

‘contemplative prayer’, what do you mean? How is this different from praying Scripture?” Such questions can reveal whether a person understands the dangers or has simply adopted popular language.

Four: Point Back to Scripture

Encourage fellow believers by showing them how prayer, meditation, and communion with God are taught in Scripture. Demonstrate how the Psalms model honest prayer shaped by God’s Word. Remind them that Jesus taught us to pray (Matthew 6:9–13) and the Spirit intercedes for us (Romans 8:26–27).

Five: Follow Biblical Accountability

If a practice is being promoted in teaching or leadership, lovingly share your concerns with those responsible. If the error persists, follow the steps of Matthew 18 in submission to your church’s leadership.

Six: Speaking the Truth in Love

When addressing sensitive topics like Contemplative Spirituality, our tone matters as much as our content. Speaking the truth without love can crush and alienate, while love without truth leaves people in error. The balance is found in Christ, who is “*full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14).

Pray for your leaders and fellow members. Approach them as family, not as enemies. Remember, the goal is not to win a debate but to shepherd hearts back to the sufficiency of God’s Word and the riches of His grace in Christ.

Returning to the Means of Grace

The Church does not need mystical shortcuts. God has already given His people the ordinary yet powerful means of grace:

- The Word preached and read (Romans 10:17).
- Prayer shaped by Scripture (Philippians 4:6–7).
- Fellowship with the saints (Hebrews 10:24–25).
- The sacraments rightly practiced (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

These means are not flashy, but they are God's chosen instruments to conform us to Christ and build His Church. By clinging to them, we resist the temptation of spiritual fads and stand firm in what God has promised.

Hope for the Church

Contemplative Spirituality will continue to attract attention, but it cannot deliver what it promises. Only Christ can give the peace, intimacy, and assurance that our hearts crave. The good news is that He has already given us everything we need for life and godliness through His Word (2 Peter 1:3).

As members of Christ's Body, we have both the responsibility and the privilege of guarding one another against error. By speaking the truth in love, returning to the means of grace, and pointing always to Christ, we can help our churches remain rooted in the gospel and flourishing in the truth.



Recommended Reading on the Means of Grace and Contemplative Spirituality

For readers who want to go further in understanding the sufficiency of Scripture, the biblical means of grace, and the dangers of contemplative spirituality, here are some trusted resources:

On the Means of Grace

- **J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*** – A classic that anchors the Christian life in knowing God through His Word and promises.
- **T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*** – A thoughtful reminder of the centrality of preaching and hearing the Word.
- **Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*** – Rich insights from the Puritans on the ordinary means of grace.

On the Dangers of Mysticism and Contemplative Spirituality

- **D.A. Carson, *Worship by the Book*** – A balanced biblical theology of worship, contrasting with mystical distortions.
- **John MacArthur, *Strange Fire*** – Explores the dangers of subjective spiritual practices that undermine Scripture.
- **Marcia Montenegro & Don Veinot, *Richard Rohr***

and the Enneagram Secret – A focused look at mystical influences in today's church.

- **Gary Gilley, *This Little Church Stayed Home*** – Addresses how churches can resist cultural fads and remain faithful to God's Word.

On Discernment and Spiritual Clarity

- **R.C. Sproul, *Everyone's a Theologian*** – A helpful primer in systematic theology that grounds believers in truth.
- **John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*** – A Puritan classic reminding us that sanctification flows from God's Word and Spirit, not mystical techniques.
- **Justin Peters, *Do Not Hinder Them*** – Though focused on children, it contains strong warnings about experiential errors in church life.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

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Marcia Montenegro

Marcia Montenegro, after becoming a Christian and leaving the New Age, began a website called “Christian Answers for the New Age” to help Christians better understand the dangers of New Age/Eastern beliefs and how they are making inroads into the church and Christian community.



Gary Gilley

Gary Gilley has been pastoring at Southern View Chapel in Springfield, Illinois since 1975. He is general editor of the monthly contemporary theological issues publication, *Think on These Things*. He received his B. A. from Moody Bible Institute and his M.B.S and Th.D. from Cambridge Graduate School.

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Upcoming in the Winter 2025 Issue:
A Look at Sola Fide