

Abbey Baptist Church, Reading
Worship Service 10:30am 8 February 2026
Simon Bird leading and Zoltan Biro preaching
www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk
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Meditation and Reflection

Introduction

Zoltan has talked about the flow of the service; the songs are prayers. This morning we are consciously following a model of approaching God, as set out in the Tabernacle or Ps 100. We gather from a scattered world and join a movement into his presence.

Call to worship (Psalm 100:1-2)

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. **Let us worship the Lord with gladness**
Come before him with joyful songs. **Let us worship the Lord with gladness**

Hymn for gathering to God BPW566/MP708

To God be the glory! great things He hath done
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin
And opened the life gates that all may go in
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear His voice
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice
O come to the Father through Jesus the Son
And give Him the glory great things He has done

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood
To ev'ry believer the promise of God
The vilest offender who truly believes
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives

Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son
But purer and higher and greater will be

Our wonder our transport when Jesus we see
Fanny Jane Crosby (1820-1915) CCLI Licence No.152160

Praise

Loving God, we worship you, we honour you. We turn our thoughts from earthly things to heavenly things. It is our desire to draw near to you, and your promise is that you will draw near to us. **Amen**

Family time Using a spiritual mirror

Worshipping God with our offering

The offering will be taken during the singing of this song

Song for entering his presence BPW11/MP307 (Ps 100:4)

I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart
I will enter His courts with praise
I will say This is the day the Lord has made
I will rejoice for He has made me glad

He has made me glad, He has made me glad

I will rejoice for He has made me glad

He has made me glad, He has made me glad

I will rejoice for He has made me glad

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Church offering

Thanksgiving for offering and prayer for Sunday School (1Chron 29:11)

Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

We give back to you just a little of what you give to us.

Children leave for their classes

Confession, coming to God in humility Ps 24:3-4

Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?
The one who has clean hands and a pure heart.

We take a moment of quiet to think back over the last week.

We are sorry for the times we forgot about you and the great love you have for us.

When did we not trust you; to protect and provide?

When have we been proud?

When have we held on to bitterness, and not forgiven?

When have we grieved you?

Thank you for your promise that when we say sorry you are quick to forgive us and wash us clean.

We ask for your power and presence to be more like Jesus in the week ahead, **Amen**

Song for coming into his presence to listen BPW5/MP50

Be still, for the presence of the Lord

The Holy One is here

Come bow before Him now

With reverence and fear

In Him no sin is found

We stand on holy ground

Be still, for the presence of the Lord

The Holy One is here

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around

Be still, for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still, for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place

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Listening for his word

Bible readings Psalm 1:1-3 and James 1:22-25

Sermon Holy Habits: Meditation and Reflection – How to use a spiritual mirror

In our series about the Holy Habits, we have talked about the habit of *reading the Bible, regular prayer, practicing fasting and restraint*. Those habits are like the water nutrients and warmth for the seed. The truth is that seeds don't grow just because they're planted. They grow when they actually absorb the nutrients, water and warmth.

Overwatering (drowning), overfeeding (root-burn) and overheating (cooking) the plant won't result to growth. So just as, plants need to absorb the nutrients, water and warmth to grow, so do we need to give ourselves time to absorb God's nourishment through bible reading, prayer and focus. If we don't, we can damage the seed God planted in us... we won't grow...

But let me tell you about a much greater danger. Being exposed to Biblical teaching, and we could even routinely pray, maybe we even practice restraint occasionally, we will by default know how growth looks like, but without absorbing it we will not experience growth! AND THEN... we will start faking it... We will become like artificial plants... They look good from the distance, but they will never produce fruits! Jesus calls these people hypocrites.

Meditation and reflection is the way we absorb God's teaching through the bible, God's presence through prayer and God's reproach through restraint.

So here is an advice right at the beginning of this sermon. When you feel stuck it is often not because God hasn't spoken, but because what He has spoken hasn't been processed, absorbed, and lived out. So, When we feel stuck, often we don't need more Bible reading, more prayer, and more fasting, what we **need is more meditation and reflection**,

This is what we are going to talk about today, how to:

I. What is meditation and reflection?

To answer this question, I would like to the illustration of the Mirror used in James 1:22–25.

A mirror is powerful, but it has its limits! It can reveal dirt on your face. It can show your hair out of place, but it **cannot fix those issues**.

Imagine looking into a mirror, seeing toothpaste all over your face, nodding in agreement, and walking away unchanged. That would be strange, but James tells us that we do this spiritually all the time. According to James the Bible is a *mirror*. Hearing it without acting is pointless and leads to self-deception. Blessing and growth come not from looking into our spiritual mirror but acting on what we have seen in it.

Now, *meditation* is a practice calming the mind, focusing on the present moment, while *reflection* is the active process of reviewing thoughts, experiences, and behaviours to gain self-awareness and insights. Meditation reduces the mental chatter and racing thoughts, while reflection examines the important things left after de-cluttering our thoughts.

Meditation creates a calm, focused state that acts as a base for reflection, making the mind more receptive to deep, honest, and productive self-reflection. Together, they can create emotional balance and promote personal and spiritual growth.

Let me go back to the original illustration. Imagine... (Two faulty examples of using a mirror: Looking too briefly and looking at something else).

Meditation and reflection are both required to be able to absorb our experience of God. Meditation enables us to look into the mirror while reflection helps us focus on what we see. Together they help us *staying in front of the mirror long enough to respond appropriately*.

Meditation asks: "Where can I see God now?" (Illustration: where is Wallie...)

Reflection asks: "What does this reveal about me - and what must change?"

Reading waters the seed. **Prayer** warms the soil. **Fasting/Restrain** removes the debris. **Meditation** presses the seed deeper into the soil. **Reflection** evolves roots.

II. What is the outcome of meditation and reflection

Psalm 1:3 says the ones who meditate become like a **tree planted by streams of water**, producing fruit **in season** and their leaves do not fade.

Let's just slow down a bit and notice: The tree is not there by mistake or chance, it is not a wild tree, it is intentionally planted

1. **Meditation and reflection creates:**

- a. **Deep roots**, a little drought doesn't bother the tree the roots go deep and find water and nutrient... It is connected to the source.
- b. **Spiritual resilience**, they anchor us, so we are not blown over easily.
- c. **Emotional stability**, a tree stabilises the ground around it. We have a calming effect on our surrounding.

2. **Think of Meditation and reflection is like brewing a tea.**

Some of us treat the Bible like instant coffee... Boil the kettle, pour it on the granules, drink it on the go...

Meditation and reflection lets the tea bag **brew**. The longer it stays, the stronger the flavour. Our encounters with God begins to colour our thoughts, attitudes, and reactions. A rushed dip gives weak results. A slow soak brings lasting transformation.

3. **Obedience Is the Goal, Not Information**

James 1:25 says the blessed person: looks intently, continues in the Word, does what it says. Meditation without obedience becomes spiritual entertainment. Going to bible studies and prayer meetings, listening to podcast and reading books is good fun, but has no real benefit to our spiritual growth. The Bible was never meant to impress us it was meant to **transform us**.

III. Practical Guide: How to Practice Meditation & Reflection

1. **Choose a Small Portion of Scripture, or go for a short walk, sit by the river**

Not quantity—**quality**. One word, image, or smell can shape a whole day.

Ask: What caught my attention (words, flowers, bird songs)?
 Why did this catch my attention? (What is on my mind?)

2. Ask Reflective Questions

- What does this teach me about God?
- What does this reveal about me?
- Is there a command to obey, a promise to trust, or a habit to change?

3. Sit With It

- Quietness is not wasted time – it is a sacred space.
- Let the words, the image or smell confront, comfort, or correct you.

4. Take One Action Step

Reflection must end in action. Ask: "What is one small step of obedience today?"
Regular small steps = big growth over time.
The journey of 1000 miles start with a single step!

5. Journal or Pray It Back to God

- Writing things down helps move knowledge from: Mind → Heart → Life
- Praying it back to God allows us to move truth from: doctrine to practice

Conclusion

- **Reading the Bible** - Creates the right environment
- **Prayer** - Connects us with God, by rooting us in him
- **Fasting** - Removes distractions and toxins
- **Meditation & Reflection** - Grows what God planted

Without this habit, the seeds will never grow.

This week's Challenge:

Don't rush past the mirror:

Slow down

Look honestly

Respond obediently

The goal is not to know more Scripture, to pray for hours and fast for days, but to **become more like Christ**.

Responding to the word Song BPW280/MP48

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am God

Prayers of intercession Adenor Leme and Doris Wong

Everlasting Father, We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. We believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, and we believe in the Holy Spirit.

Today within your temple, we meditate on your unfailing love (Psalms 48:9) and with grateful heart, we thank You for your grace upon us. Thank you for the increase in number of newcomers to our church. We pray for their spiritual path; may your Holy Spirit fill all of us every day, guide us to You and to connect with each other. Thank You for everyone who is taking part in the Bed 4 the Night. May you grant wisdom, courage and strength to all the leaders and volunteers. Keep all the refugees safe under your wings. **Amen**

Lord, calm the hearts of those waiting for the VISAs and permissions to stay in this country, and those troubled by the changes in VISA policies. May we learn to cast our anxieties to You because You care for us (1 Peter 5:7). **Amen**

Dear God, we intercede for the immigrants all around the world during this time of increased intolerance, especially those living in fear in the US. May they find comfort in Your love because there is no fear in love (1 John 4:18), and we know that You work righteousness and justice for all the oppressed (Psalms 103:6). **Amen**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for one more step towards peace in GAZA by the reopening of the Rafah border crossing for medical evacuation. We pray that help comes to all those in need. Dear Lord, we humbly ask that You bring peace to Iran, the peace which transcends all understanding, guard people's hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). May you intervene in the conflict in Ukraine which is completing 4 years this month. Comfort those families who have lost their loved ones. **Amen**

We pray for those in our fellowship who are in particular need, such as waiting for accommodation, and especially for Gwen in hospital. We pray that you will keep them in peace.

Lord, You are the wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Hymn for going out BPW535/MP428

Lord for the years Your love has kept and guided
Urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way
Sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today

Lord for that word, the word of life which fires us
Speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze
Teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us
Lord of the word, receive Your people's praise

Lord for our land, in this our generation
Spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care
For young and old, for commonwealth and nation
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer

Lord for ourselves, in living power remake us
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne
Past put behind us, for the future take us
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone

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Closing Prayer (from Lectio 365)

Father, help us to live this week to the full, being true to You, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. **Amen.**

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, **Amen.**

Events to highlight

Today	After service	Fairtrade Church lunch (Chinese food)
Tuesday 10	8:00pm	Church prayer meeting on Zoom
Wednesday 11	10:30 12:00 2:00	Renew Café Bible study ICaf English lesson and First Steps course
Thursday 12	10:30 10:30	Toddlers Bible Study
Friday 13	5:00pm	Table Tennis
Sunday 15	10:30	Worship and Communion
	17	Chinese New Year (for information!)
Sunday 22	After service	Special church meeting