



Gazing Upon Christ

Review

In the last session, we looked at the practice of [meditation on scripture](#). Like the session before that on [spoken praise and worship](#), meditation on scripture is a tool we can use in our time with God to seek Christ dwelling in our hearts as in Ephesians 3.

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."



How did things go using this new practice of meditation on scripture in your time with God this week?

Introduction

This session introduces a new tool which is gazing upon Christ. It's slightly similar to the previous session of meditation on scripture. The difference is that the object of our meditation is Christ himself. We meditate on, admire and adore Christ whom we know through scripture and by the Holy Spirit.

Obviously, we don't literally gaze upon Christ physically. This brings up some questions. If it is not the physical Christ we see, then what do we see? Also, what do we mean by gazing or seeing? Is it looking with our actual eyes or is it something else? Let's unpack these important questions by turning to the Bible.

Seeing Glory

Jesus prayed to the Father that we would be with Him and see His glory.

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.
- John 17:24

John Owen, a puritan theologian from the 1600's, wrote an entire book on this verse called "The Glory of Christ". Owen says that while the verse speaks of us seeing Christ's glory when we are with him in eternity, the Bible also speaks of seeing His glory by faith and not sight this side of heaven. "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Cor. 13:12)



What does it mean to see Christ's glory by faith today? If we are not looking with our eyes, what exactly is going on? What does the Bible say about this?

The rest of this session will explore these questions. This session may be a little more challenging than the previous ones. If you haven't gone through the previous sessions and started putting their respective tools into practice in your time with God, it may be best to go through the early sessions before continuing on here.

Eyes of our Heart

The Bible talks about a type of seeing which does not use our physical eyes. In one of Paul's prayers for the church in Ephesus, he talks about seeing with the eyes of our heart.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,
- Ephesians 1:18

In this verse, Paul is saying that we can perceive *spiritual* things with the eyes of our hearts.



What do you think he means by the eyes of our heart?

Let's start by thinking about our biological eyes. Biological eyes receive physical light which is reflected from the objects around us and through an amazing series of steps produce images in our brain. This lets us know about the physical objects around us. Also, with our biological eyes we read scripture which enables us to know about God. But Ephesians 1:18 seems to suggest that something other than our biological eyes is at work for us to know God and deeply comprehend what He has done for us in Christ. Paul calls this the *eyes of our heart*. Let's dive into this phrase by first looking at what he means by the heart.

As a start, *heart* in this context is not the organ that pumps blood around our body. The Greek word for heart used in this verse means the centre of our thoughts, emotions, and desires. It is the core of who we are as a person.

How does this heart know the things of God? How does it know God himself? The Bible says in many places that we are naturally spiritually blind to God. By default, we don't know him. When Paul prays that God would enlighten the eyes of people's hearts, he shows that it is necessary for spiritual light to enter the eyes of our heart for us to know the things of God. And we can't do this ourselves. God has to switch on the lights, so to speak, in order for us to spiritually see and know him.

If Paul prayed for God's illumination so that Ephesian church would see at the heart level and know God, then surely we can pray a similar prayer for ourselves and others. Let's stop and do that now before we delve deeper.



God, you can act in the depths of our being so that we can see the gracious things you have done for us through your son Jesus. So we can see His glory. Without your intervention we can see nothing. We pray that you would do that illuminating work in the eyes of our hearts so that we can deeply know what you

have done for us in Christ and see His glory. Amen.

What We See When We Gaze upon Christ

So when the eyes of our hearts are enlightened and we gaze upon Christ, what will we see?

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 4:6

This is a little complicated, so let's break it down into steps.

1. The light of God shines in our hearts.
2. Light helps us to see or know something.
3. The thing that we know (have heart knowledge of) is the glory of God.
4. We "see" this glory in the face of Christ.

Face should not be thought of as an image of Jesus' physical face but rather the person or true identity of Jesus as fully God and fully human. So to answer our earlier question, we will see God's glory displayed in the person of Christ. God has given us spiritual eyes to see, so when we gaze upon Christ we see God's glory.

Glory is mentioned a lot in the Bible. We all know what glory means...or do we?



What do you think about when you hear the term "God's glory"?

As a start we can think of glory as a manifestation of God's attributes or his essence in a way that we can perceive. We may never know God's glory fully until we see Christ face to face in heaven. But as 2 Corinthians 4:6 shows, until we see Christ face to face, we can know God's glory partially through our earthly view of Christ through the eyes of our hearts.

What Happens To Us As We Gaze Upon Christ

As we take in God's glory, what happens? Many different things can happen, but let's look at one mentioned earlier in 2 Corinthians.

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
- 2 Corinthians 3:18

Breaking this down:

1. We contemplate the Lord's glory.
2. As we do, we are transformed into his image.

By gazing upon Christ, we become more like Him by a work of God's Spirit. Many people want to become like Christ. If we try to do this only in our own strength we can become discouraged and perhaps lose hope. But as we spend time with God gazing upon Christ, the Spirit does this wonderful work that makes us more like Jesus.

Gazing upon Christ Examples

We will go through some examples of gazing upon Christ from a number of angles including:

- Christ Pre-existent
- Christ Prophesied
- Christ Incarnate
- Christ in Authority
- Christ Crucified
- Christ Resurrected
- Christ's Return

The goal of this devotional practice is to have the eyes of our hearts enlightened by the Holy Spirit as we read scriptures about Christ so that we can see his glory, admire him and worship him. For each example, there will be scripture about Christ, a brief reflection and a sample prayer echoing the scripture that leads into gazing upon Christ. If you are in a group and are time-

constrained, the facilitator can choose just a few from the collection.

The Pre-existent Divine Christ

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- John 1:1

John 1:1 says the Word (Jesus Christ) has existed from the beginning. It has echoes of Genesis 1 "In the beginning God ..." Unlike us, Jesus was not just born but existed beforehand. We know the nature of his existence before his earthly birth is divine because the end of the verse says "the Word was God".

"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"
- John 8:58

Jesus himself knew of his pre-existence as we can see in John 8:58. Abraham was long dead by the time Jesus was born yet he says that he existed *before* Abraham. Also, Jesus uses the term "I am", an Old Testament name of God. In doing so, he shows understanding of his divinity. In these two verses, we see Jesus as pre-existing and divine.

Read slowly through the following, fixing your gaze upon the glory of Christ in his divine pre-existence.



Lord Jesus, you have existed from the beginning. You existed before Abraham and everyone who was born before him. You existed before the creation of the universe. You were not created but instead your word says that through you all things have been made. You were with God in the beginning and you are God. You are our God who has always been and always will be. Open our eyes to see

your glory in your pre-existence, in you as the eternal divine Christ.

- ⏸ Pause now for a couple of minutes to continue gazing upon Christ in the context of the glory of his pre-existence. Dwell on the glory of his pre-existence without looking at the words above. You can close your eyes if that helps. Then with these thoughts of his pre-existence remaining in your mind, gaze upon Christ's glory, admiring and adoring him in prayer and meditation.

The Prophesied Christ

The Old Testament holds many prophecies about the coming of a saviour and eternal king.

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
- Genesis 3:15

Genesis 3:15 comes just after Adam sinned (what is known as "the Fall"). In Eden, humankind lived in perfect relationship with God. There was just one thing that God said people couldn't do if they were to continue in Eden. As we know, they disobeyed God and lost Paradise.

In the verse above, God is cursing the serpent who tempted Eve. The serpent is Satan, or at least represents Satan, and God is saying that Eve's offspring will crush Satan's head and, by implication, restore humankind to right relationship to God. The Old Testament tells of many who showed hope in being the one to crush the head of the serpent including prophets and kings. However, it is Jesus who ultimately fulfils this prophecy. Crushing the head signifies the taking away of power and this is what Hebrews 2:14 says Jesus has done. "Since the children have flesh

and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—"

Let's look at one more Old Testament scripture that prophesies the coming of Jesus.

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

- Daniel 7:13-14

One of the titles that Jesus used to refer to himself is the *Son of Man*. This name brings to mind the Daniel 7 passage speaking of one who is given authority, glory and power from God. It says everyone will worship him and his kingdom will continue forever.

Read slowly through the following sample fixing your gaze upon the glory of Christ that you see in what the sample says of the prophesied Christ.



Jesus, our prophesied saviour and king. You are the one who has been given power and authority to crush the head of Satan and free us from the power of sin. From the beginning, it was you who was destined to come and save. It is you who was to be, and is now, worshipped by the many nations of the earth in many languages. Your everlasting and indestructible kingdom began when you entered into the world and will be complete when you return again.

- Pause now for a couple of minutes to continue gazing upon Christ in the context of the glory of Christ the prophesied Saviour. Dwell on the glory of the prophesied Christ without looking at the words above. You can close your eyes if that helps. Then with these thoughts of the prophesied Christ remaining in your mind, gaze upon Christ's glory, admiring and adoring him in prayer and meditation.

The Incarnation

The incarnation, God the Son taking on the nature of humankind, is an amazing lens of revelation into God's glory in Christ.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- John 1:14

The scripture above says the Word (referring to Christ), became flesh. When Christ entered into the world he created, he who is God and divine also took on a human nature. Unlike us, his human nature was perfect and sinless but it was still human. There is glorious humility in the agent of creation taking on the nature of created humanity.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!
- Philipians 2:6-8

Although Jesus has a divine nature and is equal to God, he displays glory in humbling himself to take on human nature.

Read slowly through the following, fixing your gaze upon the glory of Christ in his incarnation.



Jesus, you are God and you created this universe. You were outside of the space, time and physics you created. You saw the sad and helpless state of our lost selves. You entered into your creation to rescue us. You took on a lowly human form and nature while retaining your divine nature. That showed such loving humility. You, the holy, omnipotent God, took on our nature to be with us and to save us. How glorious are you Immanuel, God with us. You have become flesh, dwelt among us, died for us and will return to continue to dwell with us for eternity.



Pause now for a couple of minutes to continue gazing upon Christ in the context of the glory of his incarnation. Dwell on the glory of his incarnation without looking at the words above. You can close your eyes if that helps. Then with these thoughts of his incarnation remaining in your mind, gaze upon Christ's glory, admiring and adoring him in prayer and meditation.

Christ in Authority

When the Gospels describe the ministry of Jesus apart from his teaching ministry, they show us

his power and authority over both the natural and spiritual realms. Jesus heals the sick, raises the dead, performs miracles over nature and casts out impure spirits.

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

- Mark 1:40-42

As God spoke in Genesis and the world was created, Jesus just speaks and the man is healed. Jesus demonstrates that he has the power and authority of God to restore broken creation.

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

- John 11: 43-44

Jesus demonstrates his power and authority over death by raising Lazarus who had been dead for four days. As in the healings, it is solely the spoken word of Jesus that is needed. This mighty act both shows his glorious power and gives us who believe great hope. Earlier in John 11:25 Jesus says "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." If we believe in him, though we physically die, we have the promise of a resurrection. That resurrection is not like Lazarus', who died again, but like Jesus' own resurrection to eternal life.

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

- Like 8:22-25

Upon reading the account of Jesus calming the storm, perhaps we too are as amazed as the disciples were when we think deeply about what actually happened. They were both fearful and amazed as they witnessed firsthand Jesus' power over nature. They asked a very worthy question "Who is this?" That is a question that is good for us all to continually ask and respond to in submission and worship.

Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him."

- Mark 1:23-26

Jesus demonstrated his power and authority over not just the natural realm but also the supernatural. Demonic influence was acutely recognized in Jesus' time and place on earth. In this context Jesus asserted and demonstrated that nothing natural or supernatural would stand in the way of the Kingdom of God which he was ushering in.

Read slowly through the following, fixing your gaze upon the glory of Christ in his authority.



Our Lord Jesus, you have shown us your authority to heal our sicknesses, raise us from the dead, protect us and deliver us from evil through what you did while you were on the earth. You have been given power and authority as the only begotten Son of God. Your power is above all others and you do not abuse your power. You selflessly use it for the benefit of people and the glory of your Father.

- ⏸ Pause now for a couple of minutes to continue gazing upon Christ in the context of the glory of his authority. Dwell on the glory of his authority without looking at the words above. You can close your eyes if that helps. Then with these thoughts of his authority remaining in your mind, gaze upon Christ's glory, admiring and adoring him in prayer and meditation.

Christ Crucified

The crucifixion of Christ is the climax of Christ's earthly ministry. It is God's means of salvation that was totally unexpected at the time of Jesus. People at that time were expecting a powerful saviour, similar to the judges and kings of the Old Testament, who would free them from Roman oppression. The last thing they were expecting was a saviour who would suffer and die. But a crucified, sacrificial, divine saviour was what they needed, and is what we need to be delivered from the power of sin and death, and this was God's plan from way back.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

- 1 Peter 1:18-20

The death of Christ at the hands of those he came to save may seem sadly ironic, but it was the plan of God from the beginning. 1 Peter shows that God's provision of Christ as a sacrificial lamb for our sins was pre-meditated from even before the world was created.

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

- Luke 23:44-66

But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

- Hebrews 9:11-12

At Jesus' death, the temple curtain was torn in two with no recorded visible force tearing it. The curtain separated out the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. Only the high priest could go into this place and only once a year. This place represented the presence of God, and its limited access reflected the absence of people's direct access to God. The tearing of the temple curtain means that Jesus' death has opened up a new way of access to God. The priestly system with its sacrifices are no longer needed with our new High Priest Jesus and his once-and-for-all sacrifice.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

- Colossians 2:13-15

As Colossians shows, the cross of Christ has nullified the penalty required for our sins. Jesus' work on the cross has paid the price of death and we no longer owe it. As well, a power change has happened at the cross. The power of Satan has been overcome at the cross so that we are no longer ultimately under the power of sin. The cross of Christ both forgives and frees.

Read slowly through the following, fixing your gaze upon the glory of Christ in his crucifixion.



Oh Lord, what love that you laid down your life for us, your friends. You, who were chosen from before the creation of the world, in love for us and obedience to the Father, willingly gave your life so that we could be forgiven and live forever with you. You are our high priest who enables us to come to the Father through you. You have conquered sin and death for us so that even before you come again, we are no longer under the power of sin.



Pause now for a couple of minutes to continue gazing upon Christ in the context of the glory of his crucifixion. Dwell on the glory of his crucifixion without looking at the words above. You can close your eyes if that helps. Then with these thoughts of his crucifixion remaining in your mind, gaze upon Christ's glory, admiring and adoring him in prayer and meditation.

The Resurrected Christ

A central point of the Christian faith is that Christ was raised from the dead. Paul says if that is not true we still have a huge problem with sin. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:17)

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

- Mark 8:31

Jesus predicted his death and resurrection numerous times. In Mark 8 he says he would be killed and rise again after three days. He knew that was his glorious purpose in coming to earth. "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do." (John 17:4)

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

- Luke 24:36

Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

- Matthew 28:9

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

- Acts 1:3

The Bible records many eyewitness accounts of people seeing the resurrected Christ.

Christ's resurrection is glorious in that it shows that the curse of Genesis 3 is undone and our ultimate destination is no longer death in the ground,. "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:19)

Our ultimate destination is eternal life in Christ if we believe. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

Christ's death purchases forgiveness of sins and in his resurrection, he is the firstfruits showing

our future resurrection "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Cor 15:20)

Read slowly through the following, fixing your gaze upon the glory of Christ in his resurrection.



Jesus, you are the risen Lord. Your paying for our sins through your death on the cross shows us God's great love for us and your resurrection shows God's great and glorious power over the grave. You, who have taken on our nature through coming into the world you created, have been raised from the dead with a glorious resurrected body. Death could not hold you because you have conquered over sin and death. And you share that victory with us who believe in you.



Pause now for a couple of minutes to continue gazing upon Christ in the context of the glory of his resurrection. Dwell on the glory of his resurrection without looking at the words above. You can close your eyes if that helps. Then with these thoughts of his resurrection remaining in your mind, gaze upon Christ's glory, admiring and adoring him in prayer and meditation.

The Return of Christ

Jesus is now at the right hand of God and all power and authority has been given to him. But his story and our part in his story is not complete. He has promised to return to us in his glory to rule as king and be worshipped.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne."

- Matthew 25:31

When Jesus comes to earth again, it will be very much unlike the first time. First of all, he will be accompanied by angels. Although angels announced his birth when he previously came to earth, they were not with him at that time, and their appearance was restricted to a select group of people. In his second coming, angels will be with him and his appearance will be to all people on earth. While with the first coming there was no throne for him, in his second coming he will be revealed as our ruling king on a glorious throne.

Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."

- Matthew 24:30

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven".

- Daniel 7:13

Matthew 24:30 says that everyone will see Jesus this time and echoes an end times vision of Daniel.

When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud.

- Exodus 24:15-16

The connection between clouds and God's glory starts back in Exodus. The clouds covering Mount Sinai relate to God's glory settling on the mountain. Taking this back to the Matthew verse above, at Jesus' second coming, God's glory in Christ will be manifest for all to see. It will be unlike any other time, including Jesus' first coming to earth.



Can you imagine what it will be like to see Jesus in his glory when he returns?

... and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

- Revelation 1:13-18

Some idea may be gleaned from the revelation of Jesus Christ to John in the book of Revelation. The similes John uses to describe Jesus suggest that it was a sight unlike any he had seen before. The passage indicates that Jesus' glory is overwhelming and even frightening. John fell down like he was dead in the presence of Christ's glory.

Read slowly through the following, fixing your gaze upon the glory of Christ in his return.



Jesus you will come into the world again to complete your kingdom establishment and reign forever. We cannot fathom what that return will be like. We do know that the fullness of your glory, that was veiled when you first came to earth, will be manifest for all to see. It will cause all knees to bow and all tongues to declare that you are Lord.

- ⏸ Pause now for a couple of minutes to continue gazing upon Christ in the context of the glory of his return. Dwell on the glory of his return without looking at the words above. You can close your eyes if that helps. Then with these thoughts of his return remaining in your mind, gaze upon Christ's glory, admiring and adoring him in prayer and meditation.

On Your Own: Developing the Practice

Take some time now to spend time alone gazing upon Christ. If you're in a group, separate out to find your own quiet spot to be alone with Jesus. Pick one of the scriptures above and create your own prayer based upon it. If you are one who journals or benefits from writing things down, you may want to write down your prayers. As you pray and meditate consider Christ's glory in the context of the verse you choose seeking God's Spirit to help you gaze, admire and adore Christ.

If you are in a group, when time is up, you can reconvene and discuss with others your experience with gazing upon Christ.

Tomorrow, when you spend some dedicated time with God, try the new practice of gazing upon Christ. Find a place that's quiet where you feel you can keep your thoughts focussed on Jesus. You can spend at least 15-20 minutes there (or as long as you like) asking God to help keep your heart and mind focussed on Christ himself.

As you gaze on Christ more and more in your times alone with God, you may find that you naturally start to do this at other times throughout your day as well.