

**Christian Meditation for Trauma-Based Rumination:
A Four-Week Program¹**

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¹ This four-week meditative program, including some of the material in this manual, is based on the empirical study by Knabb, Vazquez, and Pate (2018). Some of the wording has been drawn from a previous manual (Knabb, Vazquez, Bates, Garzon, Ford, & Wang, 2018), and the weekly structure (e.g., a theme, tasks, handouts, homework) is consistent with Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2012).

Week 1: Introducing the Program and Developing Christian Attention

Verse

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”²

Theme

Because of the fall of humankind,³ Christians in the 21st century will inevitably have to endure a variety of traumatic events. Upon experiencing the death of a loved one, sexual or physical abuse, an assault, a car accident, or some other type of trauma, we may end up struggling with unwanted and intrusive memories about the occurrence. In order to attempt to cope with these distressing symptoms, we may ruminate on “why” (e.g., “Why did this happen?”) and “what if” (e.g., “What if it happens again?”) questions surrounding the event, as well as God’s perceived role or absence (e.g., “Why did God allow this to happen?” “Why did God abandon me?”).⁴ Although we may repetitively think about the event in an effort to avoid the intrusive memories and corresponding emotional distress, this perseverative thinking style may end up making things worse in the long run.⁵ Therefore, in this four-week program, you will learn how to shift from trauma-based ruminations to focusing on God, using a distinct skillset—referred to throughout the program as adaptive mental skills—to help you make this intentional pivot.⁶ Each week, you will focus on a particular skill, drawing from the Christian tradition to help you relate differently to intrusive memories and ruminations. In this first week, you will cultivate sustained attention on God, with the second, third, and fourth weeks emphasizing present focus, awareness, and acceptance, respectively, in your relationship with him.⁷ Along the way, you will be drawing from distinctly Christian meditative practices from within a number of historical Christian writings. In doing so, our hope is that you will develop the ability to “set your mind on things above,”⁸ given that rumination does not help over time and may distract you in your relationship with God.

Goals

1. Understand the link between trauma-related intrusive memories and ruminations.
2. Understand the role that Christian adaptive mental skills (i.e., Christian attention, Christian present focus, Christian awareness, and Christian acceptance) can play in helping you shift from trauma-related ruminations to focusing on God.

² Colossians 3:1-2.

³ Genesis 3:14-19.

⁴ Knabb, Vazquez, and Pate (2018).

⁵ Ehlers and Clark (2000); Ehring and Ehlers (2014); Michael et al. (2007).

⁶ Knabb, Vazquez, and Pate (2018).

⁷ Feldman et al. (2007).

⁸ Colossians 3:2.

3. Learn about the role that Christian meditation, drawn from Puritan spirituality, Medieval spirituality, Orthodox spirituality, and Jesuit spirituality, can play in helping you develop the four Christian adaptive mental skills.
4. Practice Christian attention as the first adaptive mental skill, meditating exclusively on God's promises for an extended period of time.

Tasks

1. Complete the measures for the first week on your smartphone or laptop.
2. Get into groups of two to introduce yourself, providing your first name and a personal goal for the four-week class.
3. Review the verse and theme for the first week.
4. Review the four-week program (Week 1: Handout 1 and Week 1: Handout 2).
5. As a group, discuss the handouts, addressing any questions that may come up.
6. Discuss the importance of stopping the practice at any time if experiencing significant distress or discomfort.
7. Review and practice meditating on God's promises in class for 10 minutes with the corresponding audio recording (Week 1: Handout 3).
8. Get into groups of two to describe the experience, then discuss any questions or concerns in the larger group, including any barriers to practice and ways to overcome the barriers.
9. Review the homework handout (Week 1: Handout 4). You will be practicing meditating on God's promises every day for the next week and recording your experiences on the handout (Week 1: Handout 4).

Week 1: Handout 1⁹

The Relationship Between Trauma, Intrusive Memories, and Rumination

Trauma-Related Events, Intrusive Memories, and Rumination

Because we live in a fallen world, Christians are vulnerable to experiencing a range of traumatic events, including car accidents, natural disasters, physical and sexual abuse, assaults, and the death of a friend or family member.¹⁰ Confirming this reality, a recent study revealed that over three out of four American adults have experienced a traumatic event.¹¹ Although less than 10% will go on to develop a formal diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD),¹² many trauma survivors will struggle with intrusive memories about the event, engaging in rumination in an effort to avoid the symptoms they are experiencing.¹³

In the context of trauma, rumination involves repeatedly thinking about (i.e., perseverating on) the past event, employing a distinctly cognitive strategy to avoid the emotional distress that accompanies the intrusive memory.¹⁴ Rumination may involve thought content linked to the trauma itself¹⁵ or, for Christians, God's perceived role or absence in the event¹⁶:

- Thinking about the ways in which life might have gone differently in the absence of the event.
- Thinking about the ways in which the event might have been avoided.
- Thinking about why the event actually occurred.
- Thinking about a similar event happening in the future.
- Thinking about being betrayed by God.
- Thinking about being abandoned by God.
- Thinking about being neglected by God.

Although rumination is utilized as an avoidance strategy, it may actually increase the frequency and intensity of intrusive memories and distressing emotions.¹⁷ Therefore, a specific skillset is needed to shift from rumination to another point of focus when struggling with perseverative thinking.

⁹ This handout is adapted from Knabb, Vazquez, and Pate (2018).

¹⁰ Gray et al. (2004).

¹¹ Kilpatrick et al. (2013).

¹² Kessler et al. (2005).

¹³ Michael et al. (2007).

¹⁴ Michael et al. (2007); Steil and Ehlers (2000).

¹⁵ Adapted from Steil and Ehlers (2000).

¹⁶ Adapted from Wilt et al. (2017).

¹⁷ Ehlers and Clark (2000); Ehling and Ehlers (2014); Michael et al. (2007).

Adaptive Mental Skills

Newly researched mental skills are currently being recognized in the clinical psychology literature as helpful for pivoting from rumination to another avenue of awareness.¹⁸ These four skills¹⁹ are developed through formal mental practices, such as meditation:

- Attention: concentrating on one activity over an extended period.
- Present focus: focus on the present moment, rather than the past or future.
- Awareness: maintaining an awareness of trauma-related thoughts and feelings with non-judgment.
- Acceptance: tolerating and accepting trauma-related thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

As a quick example, a common type of mental practice involves focusing on the breath for a 10- to 20-minute period of time each day, which can help to develop the above four skills. When the mind becomes distracted with a thought or feeling, practitioners gently and non-judgmentally return their attention to the breath in the present moment. Yet, because this practice has roots in non-Christian religious traditions, some Christians may prefer to turn to their own faith heritage, especially since Christian meditation involves focusing on God.

Research on Trauma-Related Rumination, Adaptive Mental Skills, and Focusing on God²⁰

In a recent study among a community sample of Christian adults who experienced a traumatic event, findings revealed the skillset described above may play a key role in helping you shift from perseverative thinking to focusing on God when experiencing intrusive, trauma-related memories. With this study in mind, we sought to develop a brief program for Christians with intrusive memories, employing a Christian-sensitive alternative to other strategies that allows Christians to pivot from rumination to focusing on God as a coping strategy.

Four Christian Adaptive Mental Skills to Shift from Trauma-Related Rumination to Focusing on God

As a Christian alternative to the above four mental skills,²¹ our program helps Christians to develop the following skills in their relationship with God, which can be especially helpful when attempting to shift from rumination to an awareness of God's active, loving presence:

- Christian attention
 - Concentrating exclusively on God's perfect promises for an extended period of time.

¹⁸ Segal et al. (2012).

¹⁹ Adapted from Feldman et al. (2007).

²⁰ Knabb, Vazquez, and Pate (2018).

²¹ Adapted from Feldman et al. (2007).

- Christian present focus
 - Focusing on God’s active, loving presence in the here-and-now, rather than being preoccupied with the past or future.
- Christian awareness
 - Maintaining an awareness of trauma-related thoughts and feelings without judgment by asking for God’s merciful responsiveness.
- Christian acceptance
 - Accepting trauma-related thoughts, feelings, and events by surrendering to God’s providential care.

Rather than utilizing meditation methods derived from other religions, we will be drawing from Christian writings that emphasize a variety of Christian meditative practices. In doing so, we will be offering a skillset that is firmly planted in the Christian tradition, helping you cultivate a deeper awareness of God’s active, loving presence during instances of trauma-related intrusive memories, distressing emotions, and rumination.

Historical Writings in the Christian Tradition

Although there are a wide variety of meditative practices to draw from within the Christian tradition, we have elected to utilize four bodies of writings that we believe closely align with the four aforementioned mental skills:

- Puritan Christian writings (i.e., *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, *The Promises of God*) to cultivate attentiveness to God’s perfect promises.
 - The Puritans were devout Christians from England in the 1500s and 1600s who strived to apply biblical teachings to every area of life. In Puritan writings, several authors advocated for meditating on God, including his promises, as a way to find comfort, joy, and contentment in the midst of life’s struggles.²²
- Medieval Christian writings (i.e., Brother Lawrence’s *The Practice of the Presence of God*) to cultivate a sustained focus on God’s active, loving presence.
 - Well-known Medieval Christian writers include Thomas Kempis, John of the Cross, and Theresa of Avila. One such Medieval author, Brother Lawrence, advocated for maintaining an inner awareness of God’s loving presence from moment to

²² Beeke and Jones (2012); Byfield (2013); Spurstowe (2012).

moment as a way to relinquish the preoccupations of the world and find comfort in him.²³

- Orthodox Christian writings on the Jesus prayer (i.e., the *Philokalia*) to cultivate awareness of God’s mercy.
 - The *Philokalia* consists of Christian spiritual writings from the 4th to 15th centuries.²⁴ As one of many topics in this famous collection of teachings, the Jesus prayer—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”—is presented as a way to shift the distracted mind to God, ask for his compassionate reply, and cultivate inner watchfulness and peace.
- Jesuit Christian writings on surrendering to God’s providence (i.e., *Trustful Surrender to Divine Providence*) and “finding God in all things” (i.e., *Spiritual Exercises*) to cultivate acceptance of both God’s presence in emotional experiences throughout the day and his providential care in daily life.
 - The Jesuits, or, more formally, Society of Jesus, began in the 1500s with Ignatius Loyola. Linked to the Roman Catholic Church, Jesuit writings over the years have emphasized the importance of “finding God in all things,” even in experiences of emotional pain and suffering. Some 500 years ago, Ignatius wrote *Spiritual Exercises*, a collection of teachings and meditations (e.g., “the Examen”) that are still commonly used today and can help Christians detect God’s presence in emotional experiences throughout the day. In addition, in the 1600s, several important Jesuit writings emerged that point to God’s providential role in suffering, arguing that Christians can yield to God’s sovereign, wise, and loving care as a way to develop peace in the midst of inner and outer stressors because God’s perfect plan is unfolding from moment-to-moment.²⁵

Each week, we introduce (a) a specific adaptive mental skill that aligns with the Christian faith, and (b) a Christian meditative practice embedded within Christian writings that can help you develop the corresponding skill. In doing so, we want to simultaneously help you cultivate these requisite skills and deepen your relationship with God. In the first week, we will be focusing on developing Christian attention, starting with God’s promises in the Bible.

²³ Lawrence (2015).

²⁴ Pyrne (2015).

²⁵ Colombiere (1980).

Week 1: Handout 2

Developing Christian Attention

Shifting from Trauma-Based Rumination to Focusing on God's Promises

As Christians, what we choose to focus our attention on can play an influential role in daily living. As the Apostle Paul taught in his letter to the Philippians, we should be focusing on what is “true,” “noble,” “right,” “pure,” “lovely,” “admirable,” “excellent,” and “praiseworthy.”²⁶ The Puritans referred to this type of thinking as “heavenly-mindedness,” contrasting it with “earthly-mindedness,”²⁷ with Christian meditation serving as the vehicle through which “heavenly-mindedness” can be cultivated. In fact, one such area of meditative focus for the Puritans was God’s promises. In the current four-week program, we believe meditating on God’s promises is a fitting starting point for shifting from trauma-based rumination to focusing on God. Whereas ruminative thought tends to be filled with doubt and uncertainty, God’s promises are trustworthy, given they are expressions of his enduring, unwavering goodness, which he will inevitably fulfill.

A definition of God’s promises. Generally speaking, “a promise is a word that reaches into the future, creating a bond of obligation on the part of the one who gives it and of expectation on the part of the one who receives it.”²⁸ Therefore, in considering God’s promises, the main ingredients consist of an enduring relationship, along with distinct roles and responsibilities on the part of both God and his followers. For example, in *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, the Puritan author William Spurstowe defined God’s promises as “a declaration of God’s will, in which he signifies what particular good things he will freely bestow, and the evils that he will remove.”²⁹ In other words, God’s promises are “a kind of middle thing between his purpose and performance, his intendment of good and the execution of it on those whom he loves.”³⁰ As Christians, then, our role is to cultivate a deeper trust in God’s promises, given God has already established them in the Bible.³¹

When discussing the various types of God’s promises, in *The Promises of God*, the Puritan author Nicholas Byfield noted that many point to the comfort that God provides for Christians:

“the second [type of God’s promises] may contain comforts; that is, places of Scripture which foretell what goodness the Lord will show to his people in affliction. For here belong

²⁶ Philippians 4:8.

²⁷ Beeke and Jones (2012).

²⁸ Packer (2009).

²⁹ Spurstone (2012).

³⁰ Spurstone (2012).

³¹ Beeke and La Belle (2010).

all those promises which are given of purpose for the comforting and supporting of the godly in all their trials.”³²

Although we live in a fallen world and are vulnerable to all sorts of “afflictions,” including “losses,” “wrongs,” and “troubles,” God knows all about our suffering, has compassion for us in our fallen state, is present in the midst of our struggles, is responsive to our pain, and is working everything out for good.³³ Therefore, regularly meditating on God’s unwavering declarations may bear much-needed psychological fruit:

“When a Christian first turns his thoughts towards the promises, the appearance of light and comfort which shine from them do oft-times seem to be as weak and imperfect rays which neither scatter fears nor darkness; [but] when again he sets himself to ripen and improve his thoughts upon them, then the evidence and comfort which they yield to the soul is both more clear and distinct; but when the heart and affections are fully fixed in the meditation of a promise, Oh! What a bright mirror is the promise then to the eye of faith!”³⁴

Overall, God’s promises can offer a deeper sense of the current and future good that God will accomplish in the Christian life, even in the midst of psychological suffering. In the context of trauma, many of God’s promises focus on the comforts he will provide, helping Christians to confidently pivot from the past to the present and future in prioritizing God’s good will above the preoccupations of a traumatic event. Thus, even when struggling with intrusive memories, God’s promises can serve as a trustworthy starting point, allowing trauma survivors to shift their attention from the often unanswerable “why” and “what if” questions to God’s loving declarations of what he will accomplish in this life.

Key passages in the Bible that focus on God’s promises. One of the psalmists offered the following about God’s promises: “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is trustworthy *in all he promises* and faithful in all he does.”³⁵ Therefore, God’s “very great and precious promises”³⁶ can help us better understand his compassion, mercy, and love, inviting Christians to trust in the perfect, timely fulfillment of his good will.

Other key verses in the Bible that reveal God’s promises³⁷ include the following:

³² Byfield (2013).

³³ Byfield (2013); Romans 8:28.

³⁴ Spurstowe quoted in Beeke and Jones (2012).

³⁵ Psalm 145:13 (italics added)

³⁶ 2 Peter 1:4.

³⁷ Beeke and La Belle (2010).

Exodus 34:6-7: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Psalms 91:14-16: “‘Because he loves me,’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, and I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.’”

Isaiah 43:1-2: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Isaiah 43:5: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.”

James 4:8: “Come near to God and he will come near to you.”

1 Peter 5:7: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

In these passages, God promises his protection, presence, comfort, and love. When struggling with intrusive memories about a prior traumatic event, meditating on God’s promises can help you shift from unhelpful rumination (e.g., “why” and “what if” questions about the event, questions about God’s role or availability in the event) to focusing on God’s trustworthy, unalterable declarations, rooted in his unchanging, immutable love.

Puritan meditation. In the 1600s, the Puritans wrote extensively on Christian meditation, consistently grounding these writings in Scripture. One of the more popular Hebrew words in the Old Testament for meditation, *hagah*, is used over two-dozen times.³⁸ In the Psalms, for example, one of the psalmists stated the following:

“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who *meditates* on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.”³⁹

Among the Puritans, Christian meditation was defined as

³⁸ Strong (2001).

³⁹ Psalm 1:1-3 (italics added).

“the steadfast and earnest bending of the mind on some spiritual and heavenly matter, discoursing on it with ourselves, until we bring it to some profitable point, both for the settling of our judgments, and the bettering of our hearts and lives.”⁴⁰

With Christian meditation, the attention is focused on “spiritual and heavenly matters,” aiming for the “bettering of our hearts and lives.”⁴¹ As a result, in the first week of our program, we believe that repeatedly shifting from unhelpful ruminations to God’s promises, via Christian meditation, can help you develop the adaptive mental skill of attention.

Puritan meditation to focus on God’s promises. In *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, the Puritan author William Spurstowe advocated for regularly meditating on God’s promises: “One promise thoroughly ruminated and meditated on is likened to a morsel of meat well chewed and digested, which distributes more nourishment and strength to the body than great quantities taken down whole.”⁴² For the first week of the program, you will meditate on three of God’s promises in order to shift from trauma-based rumination to focusing on God, cultivating the adaptive mental skill of attention along the way. In subsequent weeks, you will build on this skill by utilizing various forms of Christian meditation to develop present focus, awareness, and acceptance, all in the context of your relationship with God.

⁴⁰ Ball (2016).

⁴¹ Ball (2016).

⁴² Spurstowe (2012).

Week 1: Handout 3⁴³

Meditating on God's Promises

Each day this week, once per day, you will meditate on a promise of God. Remember to set a specific time each day to meditate, find a quiet place that is free from distractions, silence your smart phone/tablet/computer, and meditate for the full 10 minutes. Close your eyes, and sit up straight as you meditate on the pre-selected Bible verse. You will be using the corresponding audio version of the meditation to guide your practice (see "Tracks 1-3" at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9ufkpmq7albs1mv/AACnYfJoZCCMs72paze8HmwVa?dl=0>).

Please remember to stop the practice at any time if you experience significant distress or discomfort.

Meditating on God's Promises: God Will Never Leave You or Give Up on You (see "Track 1")

1. For the next 10 minutes, you will be focusing on the Bible verse, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."⁴⁴
2. Say a short prayer to God, asking him for guidance during the next 10 minutes.
3. Shift your focus from "earthly-mindedness" to "heavenly-mindedness," letting go of rumination and pivoting towards the "Never will I leave you" Bible verse.
4. Repeat this promise in Scripture with focused, sustained attention.
5. When your mind inevitably wanders to something other than the "Never will I leave you" verse, exercise a spirit of grace toward yourself by non-judgmentally refocusing your attention on the biblical promise.
6. Begin to move from your "brain" to your "heart," focusing on how your heart feels as you consider that God will never leave you or give up on you.
7. Allow yourself to deeply feel God's presence.
8. As you conclude the meditation, make a commitment to act on this deeper awareness of God's promise in a Christ-like manner.
9. Say a short prayer to God, thanking him for his promise to you.

Meditating on God's Promises: God is with You (see "Track 2")

1. For the next 10 minutes, you will be focusing on the Bible verse, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you."⁴⁵
2. Say a short prayer to God, asking him for guidance during the next 10 minutes.
3. Shift your focus from "earthly-mindedness" to "heavenly-mindedness," letting go of rumination and pivoting towards the "I am with you" Bible verse.
4. Repeat this promise in Scripture with focused, sustained attention.

⁴³ This nine-step meditation is based on Ball (2016), Baxter (2015), Beeke and Jones (2012), Hall (2016), and Watson (2012), and the language is slightly adapted from Knabb (2018).

⁴⁴ Hebrews 13:5; Deuteronomy 31:6.

⁴⁵ Isaiah 43:5.

5. When your mind inevitably wanders to something other than the “I am with you” verse, exercise a spirit of grace toward yourself by non-judgmentally refocusing your attention on the biblical promise.
6. Begin to move from your “brain” to your “heart,” focusing on how your heart feels as you consider that God is with you.
7. Allow yourself to deeply feel God’s presence.
8. As you conclude the meditation, make a commitment to act on this deeper awareness of God’s promise in a Christ-like manner.
9. Say a short prayer to God, thanking him for his promise to you.

Meditating on God’s Promises: God Cares for You (see “Track 3”)

1. For the next 10 minutes, you will be focusing on the Bible verse, “Cast all your anxiety on [me] because [I] care for you.”⁴⁶
2. Say a short prayer to God, asking him for guidance during the next 10 minutes.
3. Shift your focus from “earthly-mindedness” to “heavenly-mindedness,” letting go of rumination and pivoting towards the “[I] care for you” Bible verse.
4. Repeat this promise in Scripture with focused, sustained attention.
5. When your mind inevitably wanders to something other than the “[I] care for you” verse, exercise a spirit of grace toward yourself by non-judgmentally refocusing your attention on the biblical promise.
6. Begin to move from your “brain” to your “heart,” focusing on how your heart feels as you consider that God cares for you.
7. Allow yourself to deeply feel God’s care.
8. As you conclude the meditation, make a commitment to act on this deeper awareness of God’s promise in a Christ-like manner.
9. Say a short prayer to God, thanking him for his promise to you.

⁴⁶ 1 Peter 5:7.

Week 1: Handout 4

Homework Form: Meditating on God’s Promises⁴⁷

Please fill out this form each day of the week, noting the date, whether or not you practiced, and anything else that comes up in the “comments” section. Please remember to use the corresponding audio recording (see “Tracks 1-3” at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9ufkpmq7albs1mv/AACnYfJoZCCMs72paze8HmwVa?dl=0>).

Please also remember to stop the practice at any time if you experience significant distress or discomfort.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments on the Experience ⁴⁸
Wednesday Date: _____	Puritan Meditation (“Never will I leave you”):	
Thursday Date: _____	Puritan Meditation (“I am with you”):	
Friday Date: _____	Puritan Meditation (“[I] care for you”):	
Saturday Date: _____	Puritan Meditation (“Never will I leave you”):	
Sunday Date: _____	Puritan Meditation (“I am with you”):	
Monday Date: _____	Puritan Meditation (“[I] care for you”):	
Tuesday Date: _____	Puritan Meditation (“Never will I leave you”):	

⁴⁷ This form is adapted from Segal et al. (2012).

⁴⁸ In this section, please note the number of minutes you practiced if less than the full time.

Week 2: Developing Christian Present Focus

Verse

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”⁴⁹

Theme

In response to intrusive memories about a traumatic experience, you may struggle with ruminating on either the event itself (e.g., “why” or “what if” questions) or God’s role or availability in the event.⁵⁰ Yet, in doing so, you may end up increasing the frequency and intensity of the intrusive memories and emotional distress associated with the trauma.⁵¹ Because of this, rather than mentally time traveling to the past over and over again in your mind,⁵² in the second week of the program, you will practice cultivating the adaptive mental skill of present focus, “practicing the presence of God” with Brother Lawrence’s recommendations. In doing so, you will be aiming to develop a deeper awareness of God’s active, loving presence, which can help you gently shift from trauma-related ruminations to him. By maintaining an awareness of God’s loving presence from moment-to-moment, you will be striving towards anchoring yourself to the here-and-now, instead of getting stuck in the “why” and “what if” questions of the past. In the process, our hope is that the frequency of your intrusive memories will decrease and that you will be able to better manage your trauma-related emotional distress, given God is with you.

Goals

1. Understand the relationship between trauma-related intrusive memories, rumination, and present focus as the second of four adaptive mental skills.
2. Understand the role that God plays in helping you to stay focused on the present moment.
3. Practice Christian present focus as the second adaptive mental skill, utilizing Brother Lawrence’s *The Practice of the Presence of God* to focus on God’s active, loving presence in the here-and-now, rather than being preoccupied with the past or future.

Tasks

1. Review last week’s log (Week 1: Handout 4).
2. Review the verse and theme for the second week.
3. Review the handouts for the second week (Week 2: Handout 1 and Week 2: Handout 2).

⁴⁹ Psalm 139:7-10.

⁵⁰ Knabb, Vazquez, and Pate (2018).

⁵¹ Ehlers and Clark (2000); Ehring and Ehlers (2014); Michael et al. (2007).

⁵² Teasdale, Williams, and Segal (2014).

4. As a group, discuss the handouts, addressing any questions that may come up.
5. Discuss the importance of stopping the practice at any time if experiencing significant distress or discomfort.
6. Review and practice focusing on God's presence through meditation in class for 10 minutes with the corresponding audio recording (Week 2: Handout 2).
7. Get into groups of two to describe the experience, then discuss any questions or concerns in the larger group, including any barriers to practice and ways to overcome the barriers.
8. Review the homework handout (Week 2: Handout 3). You will be practicing focusing on God's presence through meditation every day for the next week and recording your experiences on the handout (Week 2: Handout 3).

Week 2: Handout 1

Developing Christian Present Focus

Shifting from Trauma-Based Rumination to Focusing on God's Presence

When experiencing an intrusive memory about a traumatic event, you may end up ruminating about why it happened, what life might have been like if the event had not happened, or God's role or availability in the event, all in an effort to shift from the intrusive memory and accompanying emotional distress to a cognitive coping strategy.⁵³ Yet, when you mentally time travel to the past,⁵⁴ you may actually increase the frequency and intensity of the intrusive memories and emotional distress.⁵⁵ Therefore, this week, you will be working on anchoring yourself to the present moment, focusing on God's active, loving presence in the here-and-now.

Present focus: An alternative to ruminating about the past. When you ruminate about the traumatic event, you may end up distracting yourself from the present moment, struggling to live the life you want to live. Since life unfolds in the here-and-now, ruminating about the past can keep you stuck on "automatic pilot,"⁵⁶ given you are entangled and preoccupied with unhelpful thinking patterns. When this happens, you may be unable to focus on God's active, loving presence, similar to being lost in your head when you are having a conversation with a close friend. Rather than enjoying the conversation, being on "automatic pilot" means you are revisiting the past at the expense of savoring the relationship in front of you.

On the other hand, practicing focusing on God's presence is like enjoying a conversation at a party with a close friend.⁵⁷ Although there are a variety of distractions in your environment, such as other conversations unfolding around you, a glass plate breaking on the floor nearby, the doorbell ringing, and classical music playing in the background, you are focused on the words and gestures of your friend, cherishing each unfolding moment. In a similar vein, focusing on God's presence is like enjoying your bond with him, recognizing that he is active and present in both your inner and outer world, loving you, and drawing you closer to him. Because of this, staying connected to this awareness can help you shift from trauma-based rumination to God, over and over again. One way to do so involves "practicing the presence of God," as outlined by the Medieval Christian writer, Brother Lawrence.

The Practice of the Presence of God: Focusing on God in the here-and-now. Brother Lawrence—a monk from the 1600s who washed dishes and made sandals during his humble life—built a reputation among his peers for staying connected to God's presence from moment-to-moment. His experiences are recorded in the book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*,

⁵³ Knabb, Vazquez, and Pate (2018).

⁵⁴ Teasdale, Williams, and Segal (2014).

⁵⁵ Ehlers and Clark (2000); Ehring and Ehlers (2014); Michael et al. (2007).

⁵⁶ Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2012).

⁵⁷ Pennington (1982).

providing simple guidelines for recognizing God’s active, loving presence in even the most mundane tasks. By “slowly,” “carefully,” “deliberately,” “gently,” and “lovingly” completing daily activities, he emphasized that we can invite God into the here-and-now, conversing with him and cherishing his presence from moment to moment.⁵⁸ In describing this practice, Brother Lawrence noted the following:

“The holiest, most ordinary, and most necessary practice of the spiritual life is that of the presence of God. It is to take delight in and become accustomed to his divine company, speaking humbly and conversing lovingly with him all the time, at every moment, without rule or measure, especially in times of temptation, suffering, or weariness.”⁵⁹

To do so, he recommended the following:

“We must continually apply ourselves so that all our actions, without exception, become a kind of brief conversation with God, not in a contrived manner but coming from the purity and simplicity of our hearts.”⁶⁰

“We must perform all our actions carefully and deliberately, not impulsively or hurriedly, for such would characterize a distracted mind. We must work gently and lovingly with God, asking him to accept our work.”⁶¹

For Brother Lawrence, focusing on God in the present moment is about applying “our mind to God, or a remembrance of God present” by “[formulating] a few words interiorly, such as: ‘My God, I am completely yours.’”⁶² Therefore, this week, you will be practicing focusing on God’s presence with a simple daily activity as you simultaneously and “interiorly” recite “My God, I am completely yours.” In doing so, you will be working towards shifting from trauma-based rumination to God’s active, loving presence, over and over again, reducing the tendency to move throughout your day on “automatic pilot.”⁶³

⁵⁸ Lawrence (2015).

⁵⁹ Lawrence (2015).

⁶⁰ Lawrence (2015).

⁶¹ Lawrence (2015).

⁶² Lawrence (2015).

⁶³ Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2012).

Week 2: Handout 2

Focusing on God's Presence⁶⁴

This week, you will be engaging in the daily activity of walking, simultaneously focusing on God's presence. Remember to set a specific time each day to walk, find a quiet environment to walk that is relatively free from distractions, silence your smart phone/tablet/computer, and slowly walk for the full 10 minutes while you listen to the audio recording. As you walk, you will be using the corresponding audio version of the meditation to guide your practice (see "Track 4" at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9ufkpmq7albs1mv/AACnYfJoZCCMs72paze8HmwVa?dl=0>).

Please remember to stop the practice at any time if you experience significant distress or discomfort.

1. "Slowly," "carefully," "deliberately," "gently," and "lovingly" complete the designated activity.
2. As you complete the activity, "interiorly" say to yourself "My God, I am completely yours."
3. When your mind wanders to something else, such as trauma-based rumination, gently return to the activity and phrase, pairing the two together again during the 10-minute activity.

⁶⁴ Adapted from Lawrence (2015).

Week 2: Handout 3

Homework Form: Focusing on God’s Presence⁶⁵

Please fill out this form each day of the week, noting the date, whether or not you practiced, and anything else that comes up in the “comments” section. Please remember to use the corresponding audio recording (see “Track 4” at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9ufkpmq7albs1mv/AACnYfJoZCCMs72paze8HmwVa?dl=0>).

Please also remember to stop the practice at any time if you experience significant distress or discomfort.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments on the Experience ⁶⁶
Wednesday Date: _____	Practicing God’s Presence:	
Thursday Date: _____	Practicing God’s Presence:	
Friday Date: _____	Practicing God’s Presence:	
Saturday Date: _____	Practicing God’s Presence:	
Sunday Date: _____	Practicing God’s Presence:	
Monday Date: _____	Practicing God’s Presence:	
Tuesday Date: _____	Practicing God’s Presence:	

⁶⁵ This form is adapted from Segal et al. (2012).

⁶⁶ In this section, please note the number of minutes you practiced if less than the full time.

Week 3: Developing Christian Awareness

Verse

“As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.’ He called out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ ‘Lord, I want to see,’ he replied. Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.”⁶⁷

Theme

When struggling with trauma-related intrusive memories, we may end up ruminating about the event in an effort to avoid the accompanying emotional distress, which can actually increase the very symptoms we are trying to get rid of.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, in this process, we can end up struggling to maintain an awareness of our unfolding thoughts and feelings in the here-and-now. Yet, meditation can help us to remain aware—with a gentle, curious attitude—of what we are thinking and feeling, preventing us from spending our life on “automatic pilot.”⁶⁹ If meditation is succinctly defined as “moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness,”⁷⁰ we can utilize this meditative practice to bring a more compassionate awareness to all our psychological experiences, not just those we deem to be positive or pleasant. In doing so, we are learning to relate differently to trauma-related experiences, exercising an attitude of openness, rather than ruminating in a futile effort to avoid intrusive thoughts and distressing emotions. Similarly, in the Christian tradition, the Jesus prayer can be utilized to develop awareness, since we are cultivating sustained attention on God, an inner state of watchfulness, and inner stillness, quiet, and rest.⁷¹

Goals

1. Understand the relationship between trauma-related intrusive memories, rumination, and awareness as the third of four adaptive mental skills.
2. Understand the role that the Jesus prayer plays in helping you maintain compassionate, kind, non-judgmental awareness of the inner world.
3. Practice Christian awareness as the third adaptive mental skill, utilizing the Jesus prayer to cultivate sustained attention on God (the Greek word, *proseuch*), an inner state of

⁶⁷ Luke 18:35-43.

⁶⁸ Ehlers and Clark (2000); Ehring and Ehlers (2014); Michael et al. (2007).

⁶⁹ Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2012).

⁷⁰ Kabat-Zinn (2013).

⁷¹ Johnson (2010); Mathewes-Green (2009).

watchfulness (the Greek word, *nepsis*), and inner stillness, quiet, and rest (the Greek word, *hesychia*).⁷²

Tasks

1. Review last week's log (Week 2: Handout 3).
2. Review the verse and theme for the third week.
3. Review the handouts for the third week (Week 3: Handout 1 and Week 3: Handout 2).
4. As a group, discuss the handouts, addressing any questions that may come up.
5. Discuss the importance of stopping the practice at any time if experiencing significant distress or discomfort.
6. Review and practice the Jesus prayer in class for 10 minutes with the corresponding audio recording (Week 3: Handout 2).
7. Get into groups of two to describe the experience, then discuss any questions or concerns in the larger group, including any barriers to practice and ways to overcome the barriers.
8. Review the homework handout (Week 3: Handout 3). You will be practicing the Jesus prayer every day for the next week and recording your experiences on the handout (Week 3: Handout 3).

⁷² Johnson (2010); Mathewes-Green (2009).

Week 3: Handout 1

Developing Christian Awareness

Shifting from Trauma-Based Rumination to an Awareness of the Inner World

When struggling with trauma-related intrusive memories, we may end up ruminating about the event in an effort to avoid the accompanying emotional distress, which can actually increase the very symptoms we are striving to get rid of.⁷³ In trying to avoid our inner experiences, though, we may end up struggling to maintain a gentle, kind, and curious awareness of our unfolding thoughts and feelings in the here-and-now. Instead, we may strive to avoid our thoughts and feelings because we have judged them to be “bad,” “evil,” “dangerous,” and so on. Over time, we may end up developing an adversarial relationship with our inner world, struggling to respond to our thoughts and feelings in a healthy manner. Yet, daily meditative practice can allow us to cultivate a watchful attitude, observing our inner world from a safe distance. In other words, getting into a “tug-of-war” with our inner experiences (e.g., intrusive memories, distressing emotions) is not our only option.

Developing awareness with meditation to enhance adaptive mental skills. These meditations can help us remain aware of what we are thinking and feeling, preventing us from spending our life on “automatic pilot”⁷⁴ by using rumination as an avoidance strategy. If meditation is succinctly defined as “moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness,”⁷⁵ we can utilize meditative practices to bring a compassionate, gentle awareness to all our psychological experiences. In doing so, we are learning to relate differently to trauma-related experiences, exercising an attitude of curiosity, rather than ruminating in a futile effort to avoid our intrusive thoughts and distressing emotions. More specifically, we are developing “metacognitive awareness,” which involves “[being] a neutral observer of [our] own experiences.”⁷⁶

The Jesus prayer as an alternative to other meditation strategies to enhance adaptive mental skills. In the Christian tradition, the Jesus prayer—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”—can be utilized to develop this “metacognitive awareness.” This famous prayer slowly developed over time among the early desert Christians, who moved to the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria beginning in the 3rd and 4th centuries. Initially, these desert dwellers recited the Psalms as a way to focus on God, and eventually developed the Jesus prayer. Likely influenced by the various instances in the gospels where people asked Jesus for mercy and Paul’s instructions to “pray without ceasing,”⁷⁷ the prayer was first mentioned in the *Philokalia*, a

⁷³ Ehlers and Clark (2000); Ehring and Ehlers (2014); Michael et al. (2007).

⁷⁴ Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2012).

⁷⁵ Kabat-Zinn (2013).

⁷⁶ Smalley and Winston (2010).

⁷⁷ Luke 18:35-43; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

collection of spiritual writings from the 4th to 15th centuries, by Abba Philimon in the 6th or 7th century.⁷⁸

With this daily practice, which can occur formally or informally, we are cultivating the following:

- Sustained attention on God (the Greek word, *proseuch*).
- An inner state of watchfulness (the Greek word, *nepsis*).
- Inner stillness, quiet, and rest (the Greek word, *hesychia*).⁷⁹

In slowly, intentionally, and interiorly repeating the Jesus prayer, we are recognizing that Jesus is the Lord of our life and asking for his merciful reply. By asking Jesus to have mercy on us, we are asking for his compassionate empathy⁸⁰ and “loving kindness”⁸¹ in the midst of intrusive memories and distressing emotions. Yet, rather than struggling to trust that he will actually respond in our time of need, we are asking him as a way to acknowledge that we need him to be with us within our inner world, putting our faith in the fact that he consistently responds to those who ask for his mercy.⁸²

When reciting the Jesus prayer in solitude and silence over a 10- to 20-minute period of time, we are learning to notice the inner world (i.e., watchfulness). Although we are aware of trauma-based ruminations, we are gently and repeatedly shifting from these forms of perseverative thinking to the 10-word prayer. What is more, we are keeping our focus on God (i.e., attention) for an extended period of time, as well as cultivating an inner peace and quiet (i.e., stillness). In saying the prayer interiorly over the course of 10 or 20 minutes, “Repetition will assist us in stilling our ever-active mind, and so will enable us to acquire prayer of interior silence.”⁸³

Interestingly, the Greek word for mercy, *eleos*, is similar to the Greek word used for “olive oil,” *elaion*: “a substance which was used extensively as a soothing agent for bruises and minor wounds: The oil was poured onto the wound and gently massaged in, thus soothing, comforting and making whole the injured part.”⁸⁴ Therefore, when we repeat the Jesus prayer in the context of trauma-related symptoms, we are asking for him to be with us, soothing and comforting our inner distress as we cultivate an interior watchfulness over our thoughts and feelings. In doing so, we are aware of our trauma-related symptoms, but approach them with non-judgmental awareness as we repeatedly return to the prayer.

When practicing the prayer, the first half can be interiorly recited with the in-breath—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God”—and the second half can be interiorly recited with the out-breath—“have

⁷⁸ Pyrne (2015).

⁷⁹ Johnson (2010); Mathewes-Green (2009).

⁸⁰ Talbot (2013).

⁸¹ Ware (2014).

⁸² Gelinas (2013).

⁸³ Ware (2014).

⁸⁴ Coniaris (1998).

mercy on me.”⁸⁵ In doing so, we are inviting Jesus into our inner world as we breathe in his presence, then breathing out our petition for his soothing, compassionate comfort. Over time, we are learning to remain watchful over the inner world—the Christian equivalent of other meditative practices that cultivate awareness—with an attitude of loving kindness and compassion, given that Jesus is with us from moment-to-moment as we experience the trauma-related symptoms.

⁸⁵ Talbot (2013).

Week 3: Handout 2

Developing Awareness with the Jesus Prayer⁸⁶

This week, you will be formally practicing the Jesus prayer for 10 minutes at a time. Remember to set a specific time each day, find a quiet environment that is free from distractions, silence your smart phone/tablet/computer, and listen to the audio recording for the full amount of time. As you practice the Jesus prayer, you will be using the corresponding audio version (see “Track 5” at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9ufkpmq7albs1mv/AACnYfJoZCCMs72paze8HmwVa?dl=0>). Please remember to stop the practice at any time if you experience significant distress or discomfort.

1. Begin to gently, slowly, and interiorly recite the Jesus prayer, inhaling “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,” and exhaling “have mercy on me.”
2. When your mind wanders to something else, such as trauma-based intrusive memories, distressing emotions, or rumination, non-judgmentally acknowledge the presence of these experiences, then gently return to the prayer, asking Jesus to soothe your inner experience with his perfect mercy.

⁸⁶ Adapted from Talbot (2013).

Week 3: Handout 3

Homework Form: The Jesus Prayer⁸⁷

Please fill out this form each day of the week, noting the date, whether or not you practiced, and anything else that comes up in the “comments” section. Please remember to use the corresponding audio recording (see “Track 5” at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9ufkpmq7albs1mv/AACnYfJoZCCMs72paze8HmwVa?dl=0>).

Please also remember to stop the practice at any time if you experience significant distress or discomfort.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments on the Experience ⁸⁸
Wednesday Date: _____	The Jesus prayer:	
Thursday Date: _____	The Jesus prayer:	
Friday Date: _____	The Jesus prayer:	
Saturday Date: _____	The Jesus prayer:	
Sunday Date: _____	The Jesus prayer:	
Monday Date: _____	The Jesus prayer:	
Tuesday Date: _____	The Jesus prayer:	

⁸⁷ This form is adapted from Segal et al. (2012).

⁸⁸ In this section, please note the number of minutes you practiced if less than the full time.

Week 4: Developing Christian Acceptance

Verse

“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”⁸⁹

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”⁹⁰

Theme

When experiencing trauma, we may end up ruminating about the event in an effort to avoid the ensuing intrusive memories and distressing emotions; yet, when doing so, we may actually increase the frequency and intensity of the very symptoms we are trying to avoid.⁹¹ Therefore, meditation can be helpful in extending a non-judgmental attitude towards trauma-related thoughts, feelings, and sensations, before shifting our focus towards another avenue of awareness (e.g., the breath, the five senses).⁹² Over time, we are cultivating acceptance, which can help us let go of the tendency to overly rely on avoidance as an ineffective coping strategy. For Christians, ruminating about the past and worrying about the future in an effort to avoid intrusive memories and distressing emotions can prevent us from keeping our eyes on God. Thus, for Christian trauma survivors who struggle with rumination, the Christian tradition has its own meditative practices that can allow us to deepen our trust in God’s providential care in the here-and-now, including his availability in the midst of trauma-related thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Along the way, we are learning to let go of unhelpful avoidance strategies. Yet, rather than accepting these symptoms merely for pragmatic purposes (e.g., simply because the alternative, avoidance, does not work in the long run), as is the case with certain types of meditation, Christians can learn to surrender to God’s providence as a way to cultivate peace and contentment in the midst of psychological suffering.⁹³ In a variety of Jesuit writings, the phrase “finding God in all things” is employed to capture the reality that God is active and present from

⁸⁹ Philippians 3:10-13.

⁹⁰ Matthew 6:25-27.

⁹¹ Ehlers and Clark (2000); Ehring and Ehlers (2014); Michael et al. (2007).

⁹² Sears and Chard (2016).

⁹³ Colombiere (1982).

moment-to-moment, even revealing himself to us in our emotional experiences throughout the day. To “find God in all things,” we can practice the “Daily Examen,”⁹⁴ which can help us accept trauma-related symptoms, rather than turn to rumination and avoidance, by recognizing God’s role in our inner pain and surrendering our psychological struggles to him. This week, you will have the opportunity to practice the “Daily Examen” in the context of four common struggles, “fears,” “attachments,” “need for control,” and “entitlements,”⁹⁵ which may emerge when you are preoccupied with a traumatic event. In doing so, you will be shifting from trauma-related rumination to God, accepting your experiences because God is revealing himself to you from moment-to-moment. Certainly, he has a plan for even your most difficult struggles, grounded in his perfect providence.

Goals

1. Understand the relationship between trauma-related intrusive memories, rumination, and acceptance as the fourth and final adaptive mental skill.
2. Understand the role that God plays in helping you accept trauma-related thoughts, feelings, and sensations.
3. Practice Christian acceptance as the fourth adaptive mental skill, utilizing the “Daily Examen” to surrender to God’s providential care, rather than avoid trauma-related symptoms.

Tasks

1. Complete the measures for the fourth week via your laptop or smartphone.
2. Review last week’s log (Week 3: Handout 3).
3. Review the verse and theme for the fourth and final week.
4. Review the handouts for the fourth and final week (Week 4: Handout 1 and Week 4: Handout 2).
5. As a group, discuss the handouts, answering any questions that may come up.
6. Discuss the importance of stopping the practice at any time if experiencing significant distress or discomfort.
7. Review and practice the “Daily Examen” in class for 10 minutes with the corresponding audio recording (Week 4: Handout 2).
8. Get into groups of two to describe the experience, then discuss any questions or concerns in the larger group, including any barriers to practice and ways to overcome the barriers.
9. Get into groups of two to describe the entire experience of the program. Then, share your experience with the larger group.

⁹⁴ <http://jesuits.org/spirituality?PAGE=DTN-20130520125910>.

⁹⁵ Adapted from <http://jesuits.org/spirituality?PAGE=DTN-20130520125910>; Thibodeaux (2015).

10. Review the homework handout (Week 4: Handout 3). You will be practicing the “Daily Examen” every day for the next week and recording your experiences on the handout (Week 4: Handout 3).
11. Discuss completing the final measures in one week.

Week 4: Handout 1

Developing Christian Acceptance

Shifting from Trauma-Based Rumination to Surrendering to God's Providence

Trauma survivors may use rumination as a cognitive coping strategy to get rid of intrusive memories and the accompanying emotional distress; however, when perseverating on “why” and “what if” questions about the trauma, we may actually increase the very intrusive memories and distressing emotions we are trying to avoid, given we are stuck in unhelpful forms of thinking.⁹⁶ Because avoidance does not work in the long run, meditation can be helpful in developing experiential acceptance, learning to tolerate trauma-related thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

Trauma-based rumination, adaptive mental skills, and acceptance. Non-Christian meditation forms have been commonly used to address a variety of trauma-related symptoms (e.g., hyperarousal, ruminative thoughts, intrusive memories) by helping practitioners notice their symptoms with non-judgment, then gently pivot from symptom preoccupation and “why” and “what if” questions to the breath and senses.⁹⁷ Increasingly, practitioners are learning to relate to the inner world differently, practicing non-judgment to accept—instead of avoid—trauma-related thoughts and feelings, given avoidance does not work over time.⁹⁸

Surrendering to God's providence. The Christian alternative to acceptance, though, involves surrendering to God's providence, recognizing his loving presence in suffering and trusting in his perfect plan because he is infinitely powerful, wise, and good. As Jesus revealed in Matthew's gospel, Christians need not worry because God provides for his creation.⁹⁹ In fact, a variety of Christian writers in the last millennia have emphasized the importance of surrendering to God's providential care as a way to cultivate a deeper contentment in life.

In the Jesuit tradition, “finding God in all things” is a common saying. With this popular phrase, we are learning to “find God” in the midst of suffering, given that God is sovereign over his creation. When we are faced with the “why” and “what if” questions of trauma-related rumination, along with the accompanying emotional distress, we can learn to shift our focus to God, surrendering to his perfect plan because he is infinitely powerful, wise, and loving, and he has a plan for good. Similar to Joseph being sold into slavery in Genesis (i.e., “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good”),¹⁰⁰ as well as the Apostle Paul's teaching that “all things God works for the good of those who love him,”¹⁰¹ we can find contentment in even the most

⁹⁶ Ehlers and Clark (2000); Ehring and Ehlers (2014); Michael et al. (2007).

⁹⁷ Ehlers and Clark (2000); Sears and Chard (2016).

⁹⁸ Sears and Chard (2016).

⁹⁹ Matthew 6:25-27.

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 50:20.

¹⁰¹ Romans 8:28.

difficult of situations¹⁰² when we learn to find God in suffering and trust in his providential plan. Although certainly not an easy task, doing so can help us to simultaneously be more accepting of difficult inner experiences and deepen our relationship with God.

In the 1600s, several Jesuit writers argued for the importance of yielding to God's providence as a strategy for cultivating a deeper peace in this life, despite the inevitable hardships that Christians endure. In *Trustful Surrender to Divine Providence*, Claude de la Colombiere advocated for yielding to God's loving care as a way to attain happiness. By trusting in God's infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, we can attain peace in even the most difficult of situations, putting our faith in God during instances of suffering like we would as a parent who trusts a surgeon to remove a tumor from our child's body.¹⁰³ The author went on to explain:

"The happiness of the person whose will is entirely submitted to God's is constant, unchangeable and endless. No fear comes to disturb it for no accident can destroy it. He is like a man seated on a rock in the middle of the ocean who looks on the fury of the waves without dismay and can amuse himself watching and counting them as they roar and break at his feet. Whether the sea is calm or rough, whichever way the waves are carried by the wind is a matter of indifference to him, for the place where he is [sitting] is firm and unshakable."¹⁰⁴

Ultimately, when we remain stuck in trauma-related "why" and "what if" questions, we can undermine our ability to trust in God's perfect plan, consistent with Jesus' three-word instruction: "Do not worry."¹⁰⁵ Whether we are mentally time traveling to the past or future,¹⁰⁶ rumination and worry can get in the way of yielding to God's loving care, resting confidently "on a rock in the middle of the ocean" as we look upon the "fury of [life's] waves,"¹⁰⁷ knowing God is the author of all. To "find God in all things," cultivating a trusting, yielding attitude of acceptance towards God's plan in response to trauma-related symptoms, we can practice the "Daily Examen," a popular meditative practice in the Jesuit tradition to cultivate an awareness of God's activity in our daily emotional experiences.

The "Daily Examen" as a meditative exercise for surrendering to God's providence. In Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, he presented a meditative exercise called the "Daily Examen," which typically consists of five steps. In this practice, which can take place several times per day, we are striving to "find God in all things," thanking him for being present, connecting to our feelings, asking God for a better understanding of his role in our emotional experiences, and asking God to be with us and help us as we face the road ahead.¹⁰⁸ In fact, in this program, one of the more

¹⁰² Philippians 4:11-13.

¹⁰³ Colombiere (1982).

¹⁰⁴ Colombiere (1982).

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 6:25-27.

¹⁰⁶ Teasdale, Williams, and Segal (2014).

¹⁰⁷ Colombiere (1982).

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>.

important parts of the “Daily Examen” involves learning to detect God’s presence in your emotional experiences, even the more painful feelings you are experiencing throughout the day; in doing so, you are learning to relate differently to your inner world, accepting—rather than avoiding—your feelings because God is using them to communicate with you and reveal his presence.¹⁰⁹

One adaptation of the “Daily Examen” involves focusing on our “fears,” “attachments,” “need for control,” and “entitlements” (*FACE*),¹¹⁰ inviting God into our struggles, asking him to reveal his role in them, surrendering them to him, and accepting and trusting in God’s providential plan. In other words, by examining our inner world with God, surrendering our psychological pain to him, and trusting in his infinite power, wisdom, and love, we are cultivating the Christian version of acceptance, rather than ruminating in an effort to exercise our own, unilateral control, divorced from his perfect will.

1. Ask God to be with you during this 10-minute practice, recognizing he is active and present in this very moment and thanking him for his perfect, enduring love.
2. Ask for God’s grace, praying that he will reveal himself in today’s struggles, lovingly respond to you as you surrender them to him, and help you more fully trust in his providential care from moment-to-moment.
3. Reflect on the day thus far, asking God to show you how the following experiences may have emerged in the context of the trauma and to reveal himself to you in them:
 - a. Fears: What am I afraid of, God? What do I believe I am in danger of? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - b. Attachments: What am I clinging to, God? What am I afraid of surrendering to you? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - c. Control: What am I trying to unilaterally control, God? What am I scared of losing power over? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - d. Entitlements: What do I believe I am entitled to, God? What am I demanding from you? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
4. Place these four areas—“fears,” “attachments,” “control,” and “entitlements”—in God’s loving hands, asking him to take control of them, do with them what he wishes in this very moment, and help you accept and trust in his perfect plan for your life.
5. Look out into the future, surrendering your “fears,” “attachments,” “control,” and “entitlements” to God’s providential care in the minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months ahead by concluding with Ignatius’ famous prayer.¹¹¹
 - a. “Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, All I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/how-can-i-pray>.

¹¹⁰ This five-step “Daily Examen” is adapted from <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>; Thibodeaux (2015); Colombiere (1982); Aschenbrenner (2007).

¹¹¹ <https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/suscipe-prayer-saint-ignatius-of-loyola>.

return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.”

Week 4: Handout 2

Developing Christian Acceptance through Surrender

Each day this week, once per day, you will meditate by slowly moving through the below steps of the “Daily Examen,” cultivating acceptance and an attitude of surrender in the process. Remember to set a specific time each day to meditate, find a quiet place that is free from distractions, silence your smart phone/tablet/computer, and meditate for the full 10 minutes. Close your eyes, and sit up straight as you meditate on the below steps. You will be using the corresponding audio version of the meditation to guide your practice (see “Track 6” at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9ufkpmq7albs1mv/AACnYfJoZCCMs72paze8HmwVa?dl=0>). Please remember to stop the practice at any time if you experience significant distress or discomfort.

Meditating with the “Daily Examen”¹¹²

1. Ask God to be with you during this 10-minute practice, recognizing he is active and present in this very moment and thanking him for his perfect, enduring love.
2. Ask for God’s grace, praying that he will reveal himself in today’s struggles, lovingly respond to you as you surrender them to him, and help you more fully trust in his providential care from moment-to-moment.
3. Reflect on the day thus far, asking God to show you how the following experiences may have emerged in the context of the trauma and to reveal himself to you in them:
 - a. Fears: What am I afraid of, God? What do I believe I am in danger of? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - b. Attachments: What am I clinging to, God? What am I afraid of surrendering to you? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - c. Control: What am I trying to unilaterally control, God? What am I scared of losing power over? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - d. Entitlements: What do I believe I am entitled to, God? What am I demanding from you? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
4. Place these four areas—“fears,” “attachments,” “control,” and “entitlements”—in God’s loving hands, asking him to take control of them, do with them what he wishes in this very moment, and help you accept and trust in his perfect plan for your life.
5. Look out into the future, surrendering your “fears,” “attachments,” “control,” and “entitlements” to God’s providential care in the minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months ahead by concluding with Ignatius’ famous prayer.¹¹³

¹¹² This five-step “Daily Examen” is adapted from <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>; Thibodeaux (2015); Colombiere (1982); Aschenbrenner (2007).

¹¹³ <https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/suscipe-prayer-saint-ignatius-of-loyola>.

- a. "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, All I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me."

Week 1: Handout 4

Homework Form: Meditating on God’s Promises¹¹⁴

Please fill out this form each day of the week, noting the date, whether or not you practiced, and anything else that comes up in the “comments” section. Please remember to use the corresponding audio recording (see “Track 6” at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9ufkpmq7albs1mv/AACnYfJoZCCMs72paze8HmwVa?dl=0>).

Please also remember to stop the practice at any time if you experience significant distress or discomfort.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments on the Experience ¹¹⁵
Wednesday Date: _____	“Daily Examen”:	
Thursday Date: _____	“Daily Examen”:	
Friday Date: _____	“Daily Examen”:	
Saturday Date: _____	“Daily Examen”:	
Sunday Date: _____	“Daily Examen”:	
Monday Date: _____	“Daily Examen”:	
Tuesday Date: _____	“Daily Examen”:	

¹¹⁴ This form is adapted from Segal et al. (2012).

¹¹⁵ In this section, please note the number of minutes you practiced if less than the full time.

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