

The Significance of the “Seemingly” Insignificant

A Hybrid Nine Week
Study in God’s Word



Schedule

Date	Topic	Presenter
October 8	Meditation on the Insignificant: Engaging the Word with Heart and Mind	Walt Townshend
October 15	When Little Becomes Great: Mustard Seeds	Walt Townshend
October 22	The Meaning of Yeast in Scripture	Walt Townshend
October 29	A Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax	Walt Townshend
November 5	David (Shepherd to King)	Ben Peddicord
November 12	TBD	Tom Fox
November 19	TBD	Pastor Matt
December 3	In the Beginning was the Word: The Story of John	Brian Fish
December 10	“A Small Town—A Great King”	Walt Townshend

Why this study?

- More than 20 years ago (sermon impacts)...
- What is “significance”?
 - Origin of the word: From Latin, “*significans*”
 - **signum**: “sign, mark, token”
 - **facere**: “to make, to do”
- So, at its root: “Having meaning, showing by a sign. Conveying importance”
- The word itself has changed over time... “statistically significant”
- In the Bible, what makes something significant versus insignificant?
- Meditation on Scriptures

Significance vs. Insignificance

Consider:

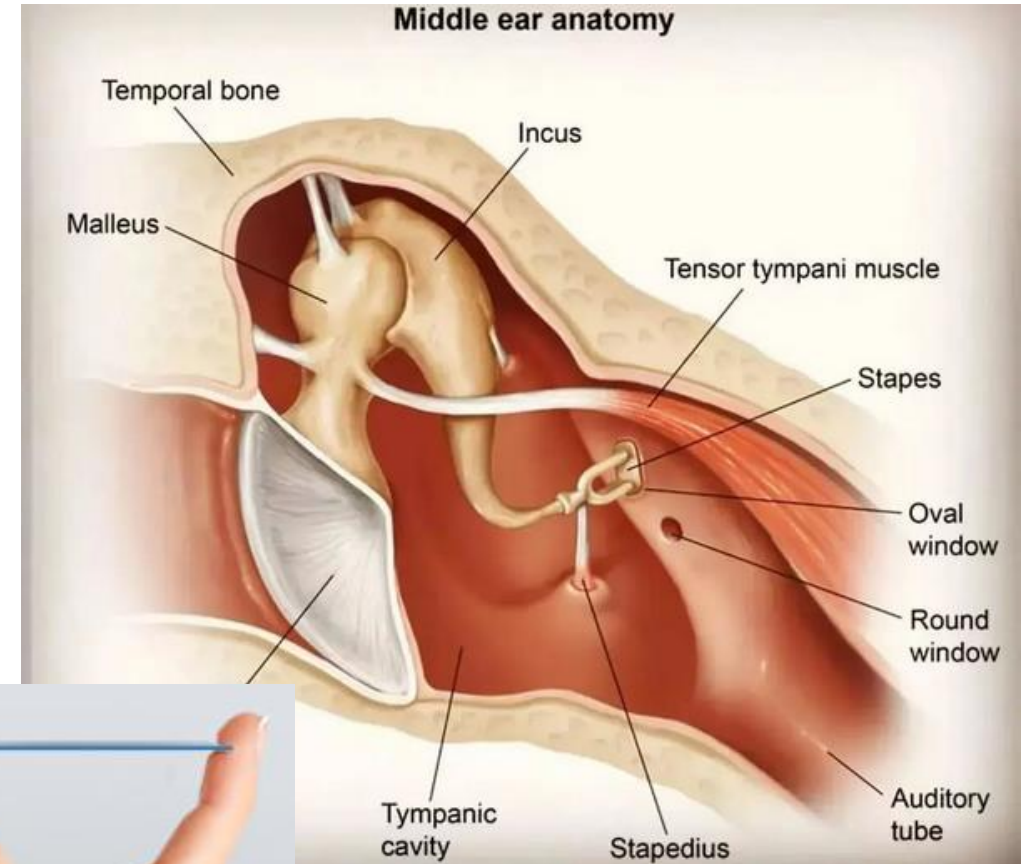
What is the **largest** muscle in the body?

What is the **smallest** muscle in the body?

Illustrations



Gluteus Maximus Muscle



Stapedius Muscle

What did Paul write about the parts of the body?

1 Corinthians 12:12-37

Psalm 8:8

- ...the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the **paths of the seas.**

Psalm 107:23-24

*They that go down to the sea in ships,
that do business in great waters;
**These see the works of the Lord,
and his wonders in the deep.***

Eccl. 1:6-7

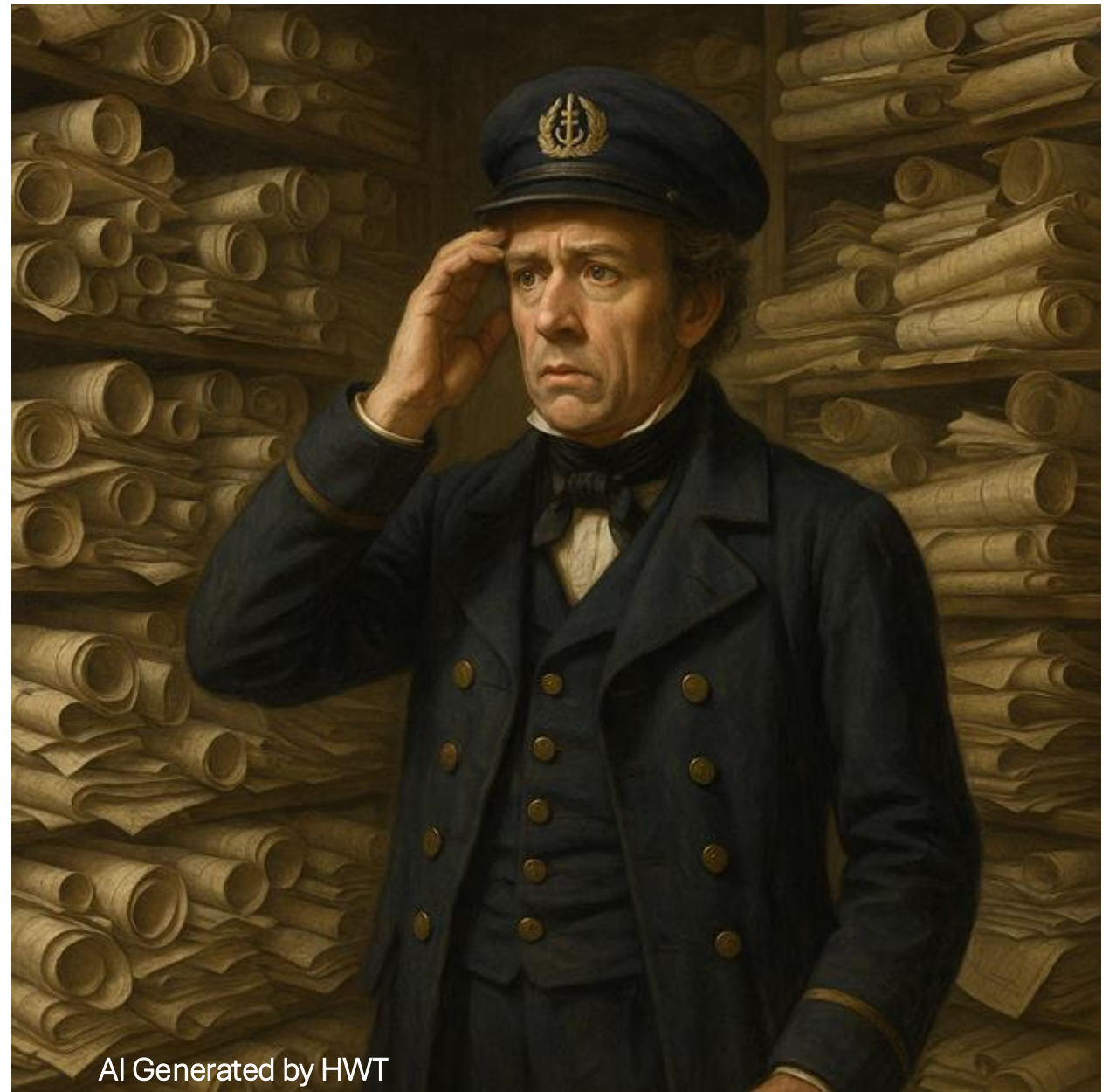
The **wind blows to the south
and turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its
course.**

All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.
To the place the streams
come from,
there they return again.

Commodore Matthew Fontaine Maury

- “Father” of Oceanography
- The first meteorologist
- Founder of the United States Hydrographic Office
- Founder and first superintendent of the U. S. Naval Observatory
- Founder of the Weather Bureau
- Creator of the International Hydrographic Bureau
- Ardent proponent of a U. S. Naval Academy.
- Known as “Pathfinder of the Seas”

Maury in 1855, engraving by Lemuel Punderson





Cecil Frances Alexander

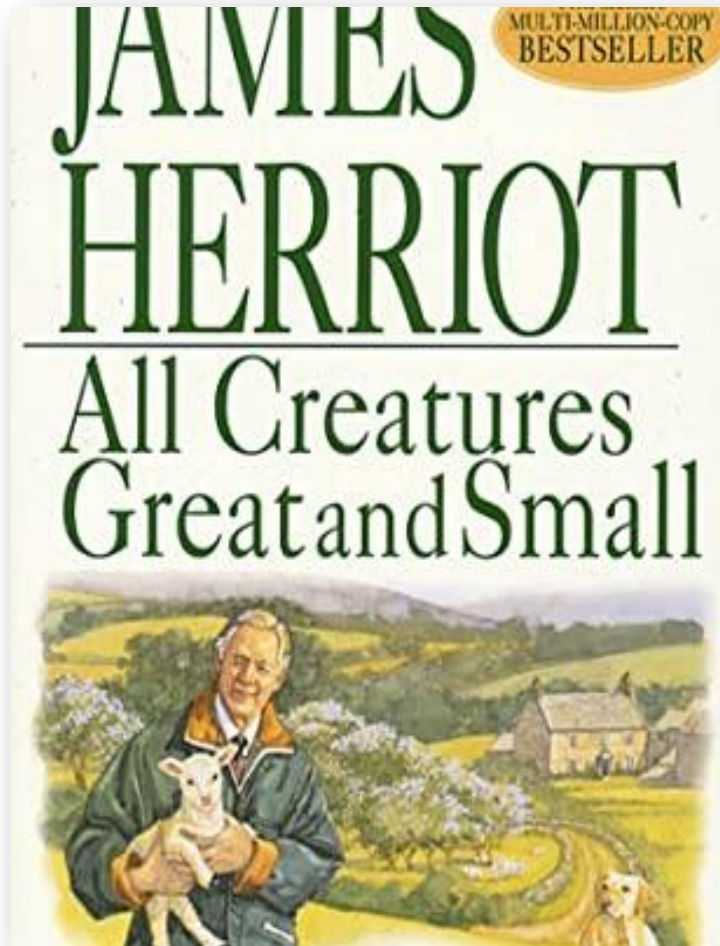
1818-1895

- Sunday School teacher who wrote poems for her students to help them understand the **Apostle's Creed**...and more
- Wrote over 400 poems, the most famous of which are:
 - **All Things Bright and Beautiful** [maker of Heaven & Earth]
 - **There is a Green Hill Far Away** [was crucified, dead and buried]
 - **Once in Royal David's City** [born of the Virgin Mary]
 - **Jesus Call us (O'er the Tumult)**
 - ***Credited by many as the greatest hymn-writer in the English language***



<https://youtu.be/PtiCLlvePw?si=Ol2Z3b18u7hS2TF4>

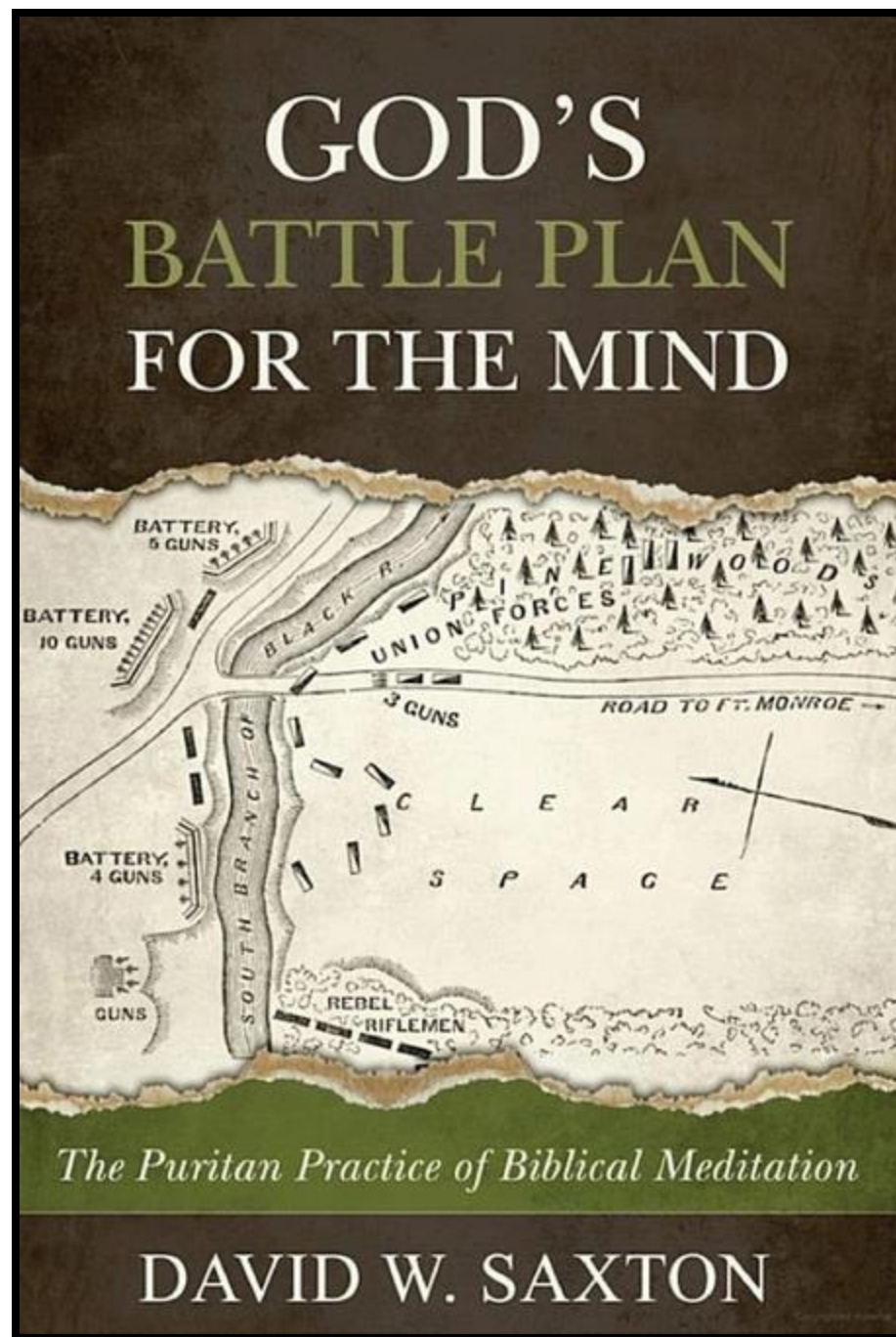
James Alfred “Alf” Wight (1916–1995), pen-name **James Herriot**, the Yorkshire veterinarian and author of *All Creatures Great and Small*.



\$80 Million Hyphen



- On July 22, 1962, NASA launched and destroyed its ambitious rocket, **Mariner I**.
- Less than five minutes into flight, the rocket exploded, setting back the US government by **\$80 million**.
- Root cause? A **lone omitted hyphen**, somewhere deep in hand-transcribed mathematical code.
- Reports suggested that a programmer at NASA had left out the symbol while entering a “mass of coded information.”
- In his 1968 book ***The Promise of Space***, author Arthur C Clarke memorialized the typo as **“the most expensive hyphen in history”**.



God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation

David W. Saxton

- Modern church has become thoughtless, superficial and self-absorbed.
- We construct churches to be user-friendly in their worship. Shallow in their preaching and casual in their view of Christian commitment.
- **Jeremiah 6:16**: *Thus says the Lord: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’*
- Biblical meditation can also be called the **doctrine of Christian thinking**. This is God’s battle plan for the believer’s mind.

Edward Calamy



“...dwelling upon the mercies we receive, the chewing upon the promises.”

What does it mean to meditate?

- It means to think personally, practically, seriously and earnestly on how the truth of God's Word should look in life.
- The Reformers and Puritans regularly wrote, taught and exhorted God's people to a life of meditation.

Meditation heals a believer's heart and settles his mind.

Why have so few undertaken meditation?

- “a **lack of confidence in God's Word** to sufficiently deal with the issues, problems and temptations that believers face.”
- Is God pleased that His people use the **world's escape mechanisms**: entertainment, alcohol, hobbies, worldly amusements, mind-numbing pop music, constant shopping and sports?



“There is great inconsistency in the thoughts of men; but meditation doth chain and fasten them to a spiritual object.” ~ William Bates



“A Christian enters into meditation as a man enters into the hospital, that he may be healed. Meditation heals the soul of its deadness and earthliness.” ~ Thomas Watson



Richard Sibbes: Meditation is “...a kindling in us of the love of God, a zeal toward His truth, a healing of our benumbed hearts.”

Thomas Hooker: Meditation is “...a serious intention of the mind whereby we come to search out the truth and settle it effectually upon the heart.”

Just as there would be no true healing from a surgery without a serious commitment to physical rest, so there is no spiritual healing without a commitment to meditation.



Meditation provides enormous spiritual value

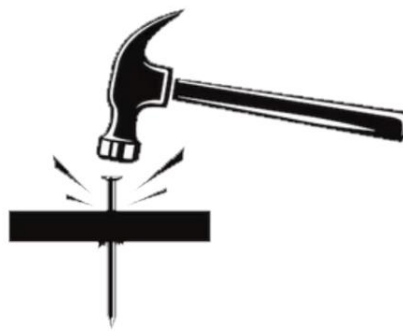
- Meditation awakens the lethargic, energizes the weary, and encourages the depressed.
- Watson saw “meditation as the most important aspect of private Christian devotion.”



Meditation is a necessity for an ever-growing, healthy believer.

The Lord designed meditation to **unite biblical knowledge to actual living.**

Watson: “Without meditation the truth of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost; **meditation imprints and fastens a truth in the mind....**As a hammer drives a nail to the head, so meditation drives a truth to the heart. Without meditation the word preached may increase notion, not affection.”





Richard Baxter considered a Christian without meditation as a house that had no light because its windows remained shut.

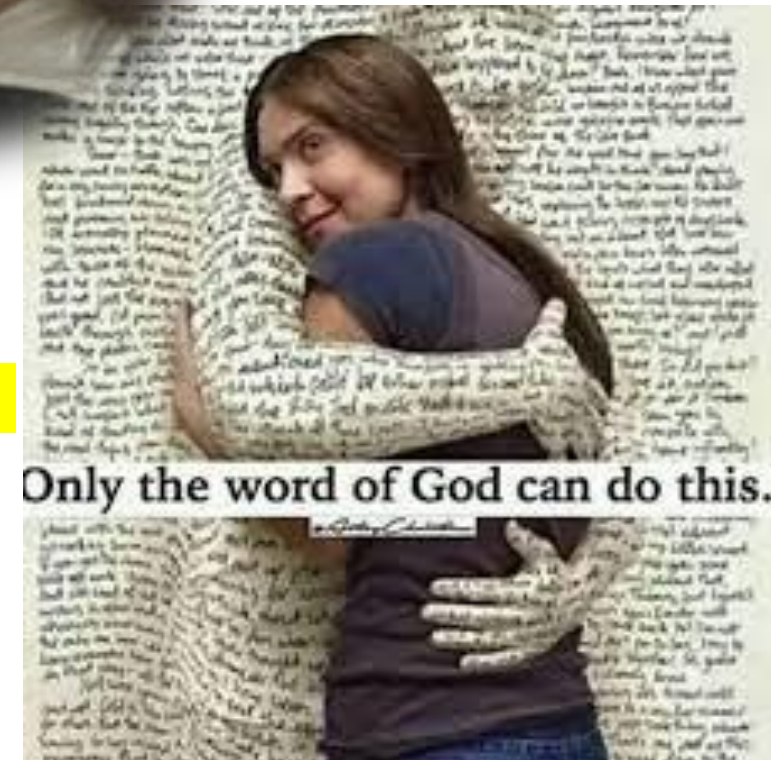
The Puritans set forth Joshua, Moses's successor, to demonstrate the necessity of meditation. The Lord told Joshua that his greatest need was to live by meditating upon God's word. (Joshua 1:6-8)



Thomas Manton stated that meditation was a “necessary duty, without which all graces would languish and wither.

Faith is lean and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation on the promises.”

(Ps. 119:92) “...If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.” _____



Meditation stresses what is practical, not the contemplative or speculative.

- Meditation always results in changed actions, resolves and practices. Paul connects right thinking and right practice in Philippians 4:8-9:

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things**. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—**practice these things**, and the God of peace will be with you.*

- The END of meditation is action. When you have been meditating on a promise, live out the promise!
- If meditation did not end in the practice of godly obedience, then it would be similar to chewing and swallowing food and never growing and getting healthier.

Meditation digests God's word into one's own life and experience.

A contemporary, Donald Whitney (SBTS), says...



- Whitney uses the “**tea bag**” illustration to describe biblical meditation:
- Reading the Bible is like **briefly dipping a tea bag into hot water** — the flavor is there, but not very strong.
- Meditation, however, is like **letting the tea bag steep in the hot water** — **the water is gradually permeated, until it takes on the color and flavor of the tea.**
- In the same way, **meditation lets Scripture soak into our hearts and minds**, changing us **more deeply than a quick reading does.**

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life

Meditation, though delightful and joyful, remains a rare and difficult work.



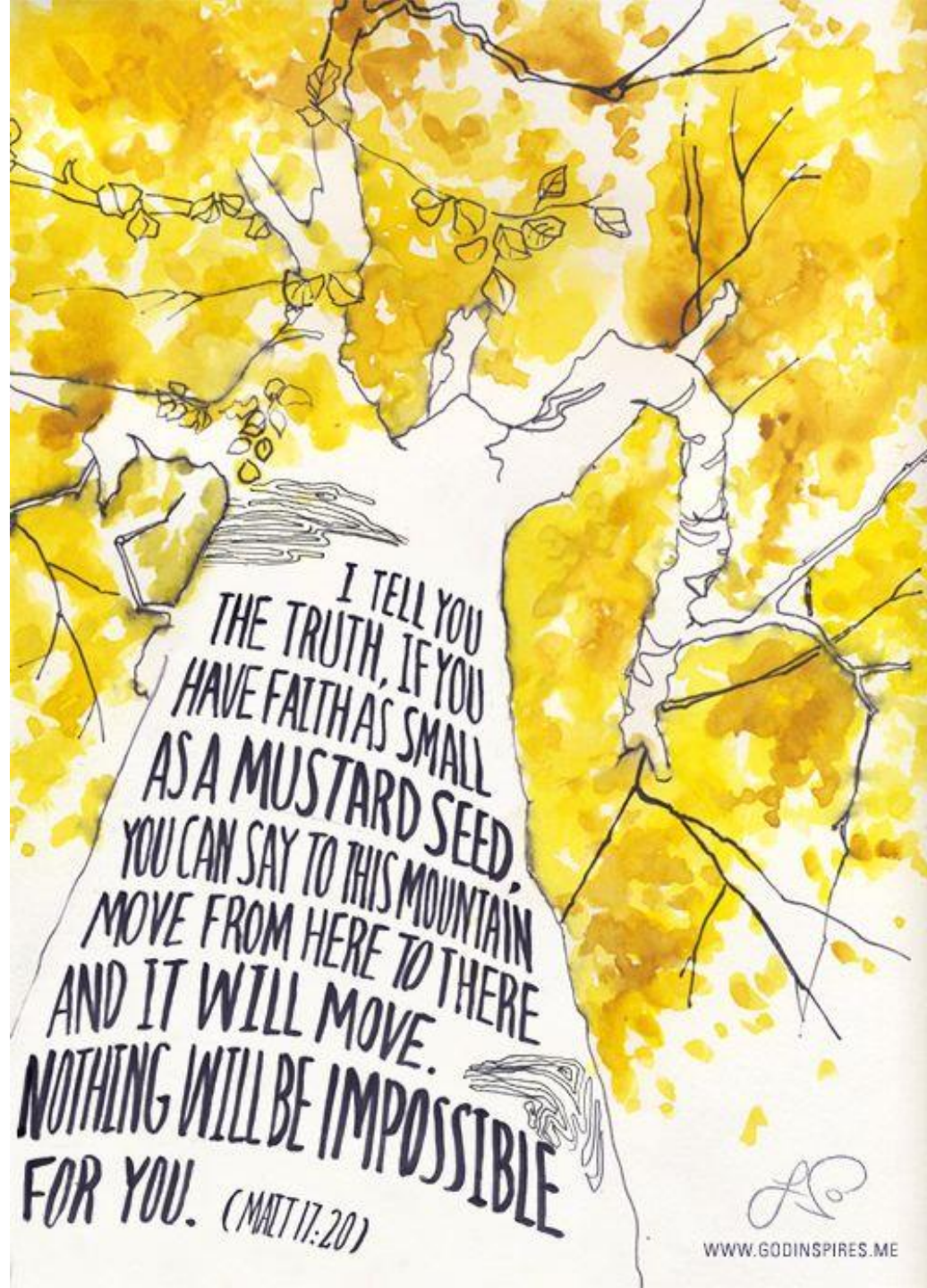
“Simply put, meditation is **difficult work**--work that is opposed by the distracting spirit of our age, our adversary the devil, and the carnal raging of our hearts.”

- By nature, **we shun holy meditation.**
- The **specialness of that quiet, private time with Him has to outweigh the difficulty of it.**”
- “God grant that we may be as willing to use the means, as we are ready to enjoy the end.” [James Ussher]

Group Activity: What do you find in Scripture that is seemingly insignificant, but God makes significant?

Starting from the syllabus: Mustard Seed, Broken Reed, Smoking Flax, Bethlehem....

And...



Preparation for next week....

Parable of the Mustard Seed

Questions?

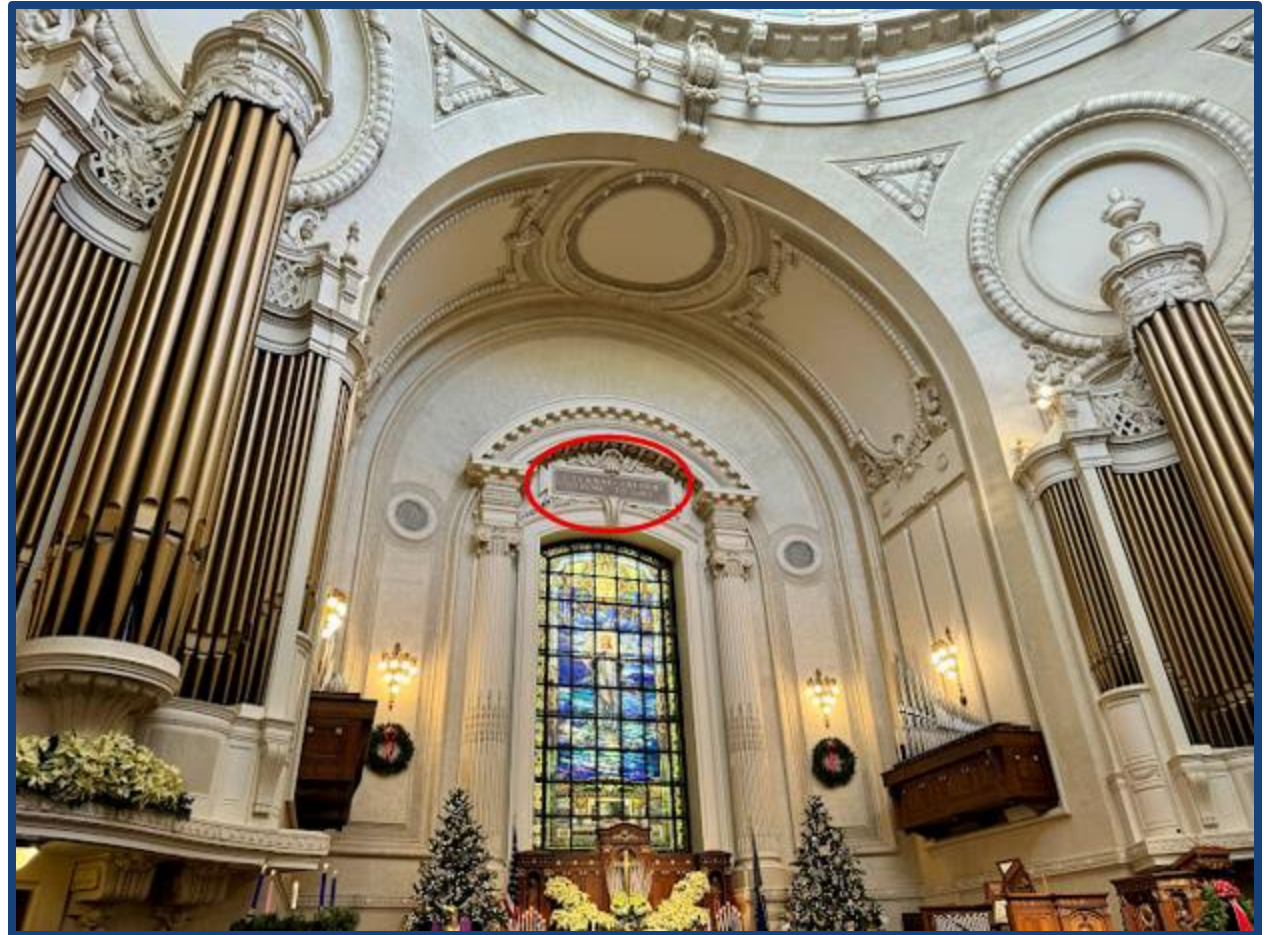
What is a parable?

What is the origin of the word?

What do you know about the mustard plant?

“Eternal Father, Strong to Save”

The Navy Hymn



- Written in 1860 by **William Whiting** (1825–1878), English poet and Anglican churchman who served as master of the Winchester College choristers.
- Wrote the text **“Eternal Father, Strong to Save”**—inspired by sea-passages like Psalm 107 to encourage a student facing an ocean voyage.
- **John Bacchus Dykes** composed the tune **“Melita”** (1861).
- Named the tune **“Melita”** after the ancient name for **Malta**—the island where the apostle Paul was shipwrecked (Acts 27–28).
- Sung at the close of Sunday services **since 1879**), and widely across the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy. **USNA graduates since 1879: about 90,000.**



The Navy Hymn

