

EXCERPT

IVP Academic

***Embracing Contemplation***  
*Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*

Available February 26, 2019 | \$32, 304 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5230-7

What does a Christian life lived “by the Spirit” look like? Bringing together Protestant scholars and practitioners of spiritual formation, this volume offers a distinctly evangelical consideration of the benefits of contemplation. Drawing on historical examples from the church, including John Calvin, Richard Baxter, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley, this book considers how contemplative prayer can shape Christian living today.

## What Is a Distinctively Evangelical Understanding of Contemplation?

There has been a growing interest in spiritual formation over the past several decades. The spiritual formation discussion has never become a unified movement, nor does it entail a singular set of beliefs, regardless of what some critics might claim. Rather, it would be more accurate to claim that a conversation has arisen concerning what a distinctively evangelical view of the Christian life might entail. This has led to many different focal points, from spiritual disciplines to the spiritual tradition, from sanctification to piety, to an explicit excavation of evangelicalism’s own spiritual history. At its best, the spiritual formation conversation seeks to attend deeply to Scripture, the spiritual and theological traditions broadly, and the Protestant tradition more narrowly, to provide a robustly spiritual theology for the sake of faithfulness in the church today. At its worst, the spiritual formation conversation has often failed to take theology seriously, focusing simply on disciplines or spiritual practices that it fails to understand or that don’t make sense according to the theological imperatives of Protestantism.

This volume seeks to play to the best of the spiritual formation conversation, not by providing the final word on the topic of contemplation, but by helping to generate the right sort of conversation. Contemplation has always been a central topic of Christian spirituality broadly and Protestant spirituality more specifically. Furthermore, contemplation has often been assumed as a key aspect of spiritual formation, but it hasn’t really been assessed to the degree necessary in our own contemporary discussions. Instead of providing a single view, arguing for a theoretical and practical approach to contemplation and/or contemplative prayer (more on this term later), the goal of this volume is to bring together authors across the Protestant spectrum whose essays will prod and guide the reader to think and attend more deeply to the contemplative dimension of the Christian faith. While the contributors of this volume may differ on various matters, such as the nature and validity of contemplative prayer, and forms of it like centering prayer, as well as what it entails to read the spiritual tradition in a distinctively *evangelical* sort of way, we believe it is important to pull from various voices to foster a broader conversation. The differing viewpoints of the authors, therefore, are meant to encourage a deeper and more theologically robust conversation about contemplation and prayer for spiritual formation in the evangelical church today. But this immediately raises a question: What is a distinctively evangelical understanding of contemplation?

—Taken from the introduction

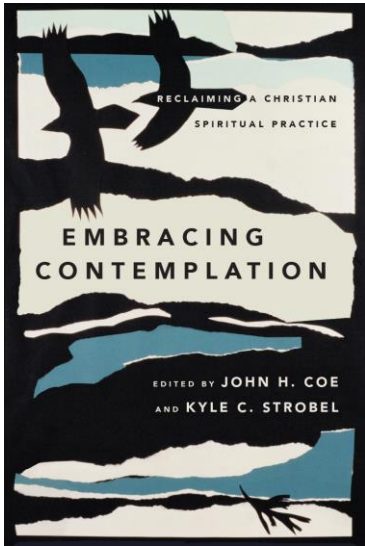


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## ENDORSEMENTS

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### **Embracing Contemplation** *Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*

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*"In popular Christian culture where contemplation often is dismissed as Buddhist or New Age, this collection of essays convincingly argues, biblically and historically, that Spirit initiated abiding in and communing with the divine presence powerfully enriches love for God. Here is an apologia for a core Christian habit that is crucial for the good of the soul and the church."*

**Bruce Demarest**, senior professor of Christian formation, Denver Seminary

## Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice

*"What a great gift from John and Kyle. These are rich ores of spiritual life that all too often are left unmined. May they teach us again what and how to read."*

—**John Ortberg**, senior pastor, Menlo Church, author of *I'd Like You More If You Were More Like Me*

*"This book is an important contribution in a time when there is growing evangelical interest in contemplative spirituality. For the skeptical, this work addresses many of the common concerns. For the curious, this is an excellent introduction to the major themes and unique voices of contemplative spirituality. For all, this is a deep dive into a broad and rich Christian tradition in which you'll discover hidden treasures you didn't know were available to you—right here in your very own theological home. I'm grateful to Strobel and Coe."*

—**Chuck DeGroat**, professor of pastoral care and Christian spirituality, senior fellow, Newbigin House of Studies

*"I often get fairly nervous about the trendiness in contemporary spirituality. Therefore, I am pleased by this new volume which provides some needed context for the historic and contemporary discussion about contemplation in the Christian life. Evangelicals sometimes have strong opinions about contemplation—whether positive or negative. But sadly, those opinions are too often ignorant of historic Christian practices and relevant theological debates. Thankfully, this volume is aware of the promises and perils of contemplation and contemplative prayer; consequently, these authors can help inform our discussion and even our practices. You likely won't agree with everything here, but you will learn and be challenged."*

—**Kelly M. Kapic**, professor of theological studies, Covenant College, author, *Embodied Hope*

*"A collection of essays is tricky business, often some are good and others are poor. Things get even trickier when the topic is somewhat controversial, as contemplation tends to be among evangelicals. Happily, John Coe and Kyle Strobel have done excellent work in Embracing Contemplation. The essays are uniformly excellent and present a cogent argument for understanding and practicing a spiritual discipline that has helped believers for hundreds of years. Thanks for a job well done."*

—**Chris Hall**, president of Renovaré



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