

DARING TO DO THE DISCIPLINES (Part Two) "Meditation"

Adapted from Richard Foster in *Celebration Of Discipline* New York: HarperCollins 1978 / 98., p.p. 15 to 32.

Text: Psalm 119.97 – 104, 148 (in pew Bible p. 610 / in large print Bible p. 949).

Intro:

-Richard Foster laments the spiritual bankruptcy of the North American church.

- Christianity is 10 kms. wide and 2.5 cms. deep.
- problem = massive disconnect between our belief & behavior.

-the 40 days of Lent offer us an opportunity to be liberated from the suffocating pressure of our culture.

- various disciplines practiced during Lent to help prepare us to observe the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- for centuries, Christians have practiced Spiritual Disciplines in order to encounter God and find spiritual enrichment.
- during this season of Lent we will explore the disciplines of meditation, prayer, study, service, confession, and worship.

-part 2 of series "Daring To Do The Discipline."

- Spiritual Disciplines = transforming liberation of these helpful tools.

-God dares us to discipline ourselves for the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4.8),
the crown of life (James 1.12; Revelation 2.10), and the crown of glory (1 Peter 5.4).

-today's text pictures a student extolling the benefits and blessings of meditation.

- meditation all the **DAY** on God's LAW / TORAH = guidance (v. 97).
 - makes wiser than enemies (v. 98).
 - provided commandments are retained – "ever with me" (v. 98).
 - offers more understanding than human teachers can impart (v. 99).
 - offers more understanding than elderly role models (v. 100).
 - restrains us from committing evil (v. 101).
- do not depart from / stop reading & meditating on / God's word (v. 102).
 - allow God himself to teach you (v. 102)!
 - pleasant & sweet + hate every false way (v. 104).
- kept awake at **NIGHT**, in order to meditate on God's word (v. 148).
 - **illust.** Yeshiva in Old City of Jerusalem @ midnight.
 - what occupies you all the **day** and keeps you awake at **night**?

Take Home Point:

-meditation causes the tables to be turned so that instead of us controlling Truth in terms of what we notice and decide, Truth controls us in terms of shaping and propelling us through life.

1. BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

-Psychiatrist Carl Jung: Hurry is not of the Devil – it is the Devil.

- our Enemy majors in muchness & manyness / *noise, hurry, and crowds*.
- great barrier to knowing God.

-Spiritual Discipline of mediation is an effective antidote to muchness and manyness.

- listen to & for God / reflect on God's works / *rehearse & ruminate on God's law*.
- results in transformed lives *because we encounter God*.
 - true meditation brings repentance & obedience.
- Christian meditation – connection to God & *fills us with good*.
- my feet from every evil way, in order to keep Thy word. I do not turn aside from Thy ordinances, for Thou hast taught me (Psalm 119.97, 101, 102).

-Jesus' habit in busy ministry *was to withdraw "to a lonely place"* (Matthew 14.13):

- not just to have a break from *the pressures of people*.
- mainly to be alone with God – *to commune & listen*.
- we should do likewise – goal = *to hear & obey God*.
 - meditation embeds us in God will / *Lordship*.

-saints throughout the ages *witness to this reality*.

- so sad that contemporary Church is ignorant of the vast sea of literature on Christian meditation.
 - when Dietrich Bonhoeffer was asked why he practiced meditation he replied, *"Because I am a Christian."*
 - Christian testimony of the ages is to live in God's presence in uninterrupted fellowship.
- inward fellowship has the power to transform us.

2. PATHWAYS TO MEDIATION

-not Eastern Mysticism (Peter of Celles – 12th century Benedictine monk):

- detachment & void – opens one to dangerous spiritual influence.
- Christian meditation – connection to God & *filled with good*.

-not Secret Mysticism (Thomas Merton – 20th century Trappist monk):

- looking for secret light / complex spiritual snobbery / *must be spiritual expert*.
- Christian meditation – very simple technique / *all believers can meditate*.

-not impractical use of time (William Penn – 18th century American Colonist):

- making us immune to suffering of humanity & unhealthy otherworldliness.
- Christian meditation turns into the world and inspires us to mend / fix the world.
- in God's presence we hear: *"who will go and tell the world?"* (cf. Isaiah chap. 6).

-illust. Tramping @ Fox Glacier.

-begin pathway to meditation by casting ourselves in utter dependence upon God:

- seek to **think** God's thoughts after him, to delight in his presence, to desire his truth and his way.
- seek to **escape** from frantic activity and vigorously fight for balance in life.
- establish one regular **place** that is free from interruptions.
- use **posture** that facilitates peace & relaxation – body, mind, & spirit are inseparable.

-centre the attention of your body, emotions, and mind upon the “glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4.6).

-Stepping Stone Of Meditating On Scripture:

- internalize & personalize passage.
- written Word becomes a living word for you.
- accept & ponder the word of Scripture in your heart as Mary did (Luke 2.19).
 - **illust.** Bonhoeffer's Seminary @ Finkenwalde – ½ hour silent meditation.
 - **illust.** Ignatius of Loyola.

-Stepping Stone Of “Centering Down”:

- Quaker practice of becoming still until the fragmentation of our minds becomes centred on God.
- simple exercise of “palms down, palms up.”
 - start by placing palms down as a symbolic indication of your desire to turn over any concerns you have to God.
 - I turn over my **anger** toward John, **fear** over dentist appointment, **frustration** anxiety about unpaid bills, **anxiety** over failures.
 - I release it.
 - after surrender, turn palms up symbolizing desire to receive from the Lord.
 - Lord I receive your divine love, peace, patience.
 - whatever you need, say, “palms up.”
 - in this divine balance, spend the remaining moment in complete silence.
 - ask for nothing – allow God to commune with you / to love you.
 - if impressions come, fine; if not fine.

-Stepping Stone Of Meditating On Creation:

- the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows forth his handiwork (Psalm 19.1).
- Evelyn Underhill: discover God in his creatures.
 - snow flakes, mountains, rivers, people, plants, animals, insects.
 - God can reach us profoundly in these simple ways if we wait / listen.

-Stepping Stone Of Meditating On Current Events:

- seek to understand significance for humanity.
- **illust.** Current Events
- haunting Jewish question – where is God?

Conclusion:

1. Know what God wants.

-there is a desperate need today, not for Christians to be more intelligent or gifted *but for Christians to be deeper and more genuine.*

-Richard Foster prays: May God give you and me the courage, the wisdom, the strength always us to hold the kingdom of God as the number one priority in our lives.

- to do this is to practice the Spiritual Disciplines.
- Spiritual Disciplines are tools which help us to reach above the physical world to enter deep spiritual life.

-say “yes” to God’s dare to the Spiritual Disciplines!

-meditation causes the tables to be turned so that instead of us controlling Truth in terms of what we notice and decide, *Truth controls us in terms of shaping and propelling us through life.*

2. Know how to do what God wants.

- meditate on God’s LAW / TORAH = guidance.

- makes wiser than enemies (v. 98).
 - provided commandments are retained – “*ever with me*” (v. 98).
- do not depart from / stop reading & meditating on / God’s word (v. 102).
 - allow God himself to teach you (v. 102)!
 - pleasant & sweet + hate every false way (v. 104).

-don’t be discouraged if meditation means little to you at the beginning.

- be patient with yourself in the process of climbing smaller peaks first before you tackle Mt. Everest.
- practice meditating on the events in the story of Jesus making his way to the Cross to die for you.

3. Know that you will do it.

-Closing Hymn: O For A Closer Walk With God (all verses).

Ignatius of Loyola

Resist the temptation to pass over many passages superficially [*remember our Enemy majors in muchness & manyness - great barrier to knowing God*]. Our rushing reflects our internal state and our internal state is what needs to be transformed.

Bonhoeffer recommended spending a whole week on a single text! In a similar way, Richard Foster recommends that you take a single event, or a parable, or a few verses, or even a single word and allow it to take root in you. Seek to live the experience, remembering the encouragement of Ignatius of Loyola to apply all our senses to our task.

Smell the sea. Hear the lap of water along the shore. See the crowd. Feel the sun on your head and the hunger in your stomach. Taste the salt in the air. Touch the hem of Jesus' garment ... the moment you open your Bible you are one of Christ's disciples on the spot, and are at his feet. Enter the story not as passive observers but as active participants. Strive to make the whole Bible autobiographical for you (p.p. 29, 30).

Current Events

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Thomas Merton writes that the person "... who has meditated on the Passion of Christ but has not meditated on the extermination camps of Dachua and Auschwitz has not yet fully entered into the experience of Christianity in our time.

This form of meditation is best accomplished with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other! ... Hold the events of our time before God and ask for prophetic insight to discern where these things lead. Further, we should ask for guidance for anything we personally should be doing to be salt and light in our decaying and dark world (p. 32).