

Prayer - Week 5

Meditative and Contemplative Prayer

Meditative Prayer



Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

(Psalm 19:14)

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. (Psalm 1: 1-3)

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD.

(Psalm 104: 33-34)

After the death of Moses, when God called Joshua to lead the Israelite nation into the Promised Land, God said to Joshua, “be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it”.

(Joshua 1:7-8)

We might all benefit from this advice.

The word *meditation* has roots in the Latin word *meditārī*. This can be interpreted in several ways including, ‘to reflect on’, ‘to study’ and ‘to practice’. The prayer of meditation is a prayer that involves studying and reflecting on the meaning of a specific thought, concept, command, teaching, or Biblical passage.

To do this we need to:

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- Read the passage carefully, possibly several times. Reading from different translations of the Bible may give clearer insights into its meaning. You can access a number of translations at <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.
- Understand the context by reading what comes before and after.
- Ask ourselves whether the passage is to be taken literally or metaphorically, allegorically or symbolically.
- Ask ourselves how the passage relates to everything else we know about what the scriptures teach us.
- Spend some time thinking and reflecting on the passage.
- Ask ourselves, “what is God saying to me through this passage?”.

It is also helpful to explore what theological commentators have said on the passage.

Two good places to begin are the following series of commentaries on the Bible: *Everyone* series by Tom Wright (New Testament) and John Goldingay (Old Testament) published by SPCK and *The Message of ...* series by various authors, published by SPCK.

We have been practicing meditative prayer over these past few weeks as we by using the suggestions “*For reflection*” in this short series on prayer.

Contemplative Prayer



Be still and know that I am God.

(Psalm 46: 10)

We like to keep busy and our minds are often racing. We think all the time. The idea of contemplative prayer is to stop, get away from the buzz and distractions of the world, and encounter God in silence. Contemplative prayer usually involves the silent repetition of sacred words or sentences, with focus and devotion. We try to empty our minds of all thought and find union with God in silence.

C S Lewis wrote; “I still think prayer without words is the best – if one can really achieve it. But now I see that trying to make it my daily bread I was counting on a greater mental and spiritual strength than I really have. To pray successfully without words one needs to be at the top of one’s form”. (C S Lewis Letters to Malcolm p11)

Praying without words needs practice. Perhaps one way to develop this discipline might be to look at a picture. This is not technically contemplative prayer since your mind will be thinking about the image. However, it may enable you to begin to pray without words and have God speak to you through the image.

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For doing

Choose a short Bible passage and use the guidance above to spend some time in meditative prayer.

An interesting passage to use is, John 8:12, "Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.".

Spend some time in silence looking at this image by [Holman Hunt](#) (click on the link). It was painted as a response to Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me".

Prayer - a habit



Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people. ¹⁹ Pray that I will be given the message to speak and that I may fearlessly explain the mystery about the good news. ²⁰ I was sent to do this work, and that's the reason I am in jail. So pray that I will be brave and will speak as I should.

²³ I pray that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will give peace, love, and faith to every follower! ²⁴ May God be kind to everyone who keeps on loving our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Ephesians 6: 19-20 & 23-24)

Prayer is about developing our relationship with God and so, as the letter to the Ephesians encourages us, we should never stop praying. Prayer is one important way in which we share our lives with God and open ourselves to his speaking to us. Listening to what God has to say is so important. Only by listening can we respond. That helps us to develop a deeper more meaningful relationship with him.

So we should make prayer a habit, something we do often and naturally. Then the whole of life becomes a prayer offered to God.

Make time for God, as you would a meal or to watch your favourite TV programme, picking-up the children from school. Make your prayer time as regular as you would taking medication.

Remember ACTS.

Remember to listen.