

## **Meditation**

### Recreating Silence

**Open:** When you hear the word “meditation,” what images come to mind? Are these negative or positive images to you?

#### **Some Preliminaries:**

1. “In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in “muchness” and “manyness,” he will rest satisfied. Psychiatrist Carl Jung once remarked, ‘Hurry is not *of* the Devil; it *is* the Devil.’
2. “If we hope to move beyond the superficialities of our culture, including our religious culture, we must be willing to go down into the recreating silences, into the inner world of contemplation” (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Disciplines*, p. 2).
  - a. Have you ever considered noise, hurry, and crowds to be tools of Satan? How can these things be used by him to our detriment?
  - b. Do you agree with Foster’s observation: “If he (Satan) can keep us engaged in ‘muchness’ and ‘manyness,’ he will rest satisfied?” Why? Why not?

#### **Basic Meaning of Christian Meditation:**

1. “Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey His word...” It involves no hidden mysteries, no secret mantras, no mental gymnastics, no esoteric flights into the cosmic consciousness” (Foster, p. 17).
  - a. The Creator desires our fellowship and intimate communion in which He walks and talks with us (cf. Genesis 2:8-9).
  - b. After the Fall, the content of the Biblical witness is God’s continuing to reach out to His rebellious children, speaking and acting, teaching and guiding them.
  - c. While Moses spoke “face to face” with God “as a man speaks to his friend,” (Exodus 33:11), the people were not prepared for such intimacy (Exodus 20:19). Why do you suppose the people of Israel requested a mediator, rather than hear the voice of God personally? Do we have this same tendency?
  - d. By means of the incarnation, God reestablished an intimate presence among His people (cf. John 1:14,18; 1 John 1:1-4). With the continued presence of the Holy Spirit, we are invited to experience this intimacy.

## **The Purpose of Meditation**

1. In meditation, the “perpetual presence of the Lord (omnipresence, as we say) moves from a theological dogma into a radiant reality. ‘He walks with me and talks with me’ ceases to be pious jargon and instead becomes a straightforward description of daily life” (Foster, p. 19).
2. Rather than a “mushy, giddy, buddy-buddy relationship,” this reality is more akin to what the disciples felt in the upper room when they experienced both intense intimacy and awful reverence” (Foster, p. 20).
3. The effect of meditation is the creation of the “emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart” into which He enters and communes with us (Foster, p. 20).
4. “Inward fellowship of this kind transforms the inner personality. We cannot burn the eternal flame of the inner sanctuary and remain the same, for the Divine Fire will consume everything that is impure....Everything that is foreign to his way we will have to—no, want to—let go” (Foster, p. 20).

## **Some Misconceptions**

1. “Whenever the Christian idea of meditation is taken seriously, there are those who assume it is synonymous with the concept of meditation centered in Eastern religions. In reality, the two ideas stand worlds apart. Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind; Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind. The two ideas are quite different” (Foster, p. 20).
2. Foci of Eastern meditation.
  - a. Stresses need to be detached from the world.
  - b. Emphasis on losing personhood and individuality and merging with the Cosmic Mind. As a drop of water is reabsorbed into the ocean or, (for you “Treky’s”) being integrated into the “Borg.”
  - c. Longing to be freed from the burdens and pains of this life and to be released into the impersonality of Nirvana.
  - d. No God to be attached to or to hear from—detachment is the final goal of Eastern religion.
3. Foci of Christian meditation.
  - a. While there is a need for detachment, it goes beyond detachment to attachment.
  - b. Focuses not only on emptying the mind of all that is impure, but filling the mind with the good (cf. Luke 11:24-26).
4. Other misconceptions (from Foster, pp. 20-23).
  - a. It’s too complicated and too difficult, and should be left to professionals. Meditation is not for the privileged few or for “spiritual giants.” There is no need for special gifts or psychic powers, only a heart desirous of God.

- b. It's impractical and wholly out of touch with the twenty first century. Many people believe that its very best meditation leads to an unhealthy otherworldliness that keeps us immune to the suffering of humanity. In fact, meditation is the one thing that can sufficiently redirect our lives so that we can deal with human life successfully.
- c. Meditation is a psychological manipulation technique that might help with hypertension, but the thought of actually communing with God sounds unscientific and faintly unreasonable.

### Preparing to Meditate

1. "It is impossible to learn how to meditate from a book. We learn to meditate by meditating" (Foster, p. 26)
2. Some practical suggestions on meditation.
  - a. ***Is there a proper time?*** It's helpful to allocate a certain part of each day to formal meditation, especially as we begin this discipline. However, simply because we do certain religious acts at particular times doesn't mean we actually are meditating. This work involves all of life. Contemplative prayer is a way of life.
  - b. ***Is there a proper place for meditation?*** "Find a place that is quiet and free from interruption. No telephone should be nearby. If it is possible to find some place that looks out onto a lovely landscape, so much the better. It is best to have one designated place rather than hunting for a different spot each day" (Foster, p. 28).
  - c. ***Is there a proper posture?*** The Bible contains a number of postures for contemplation and worship, e.g., lying down, standing, kneeling, hands lifted, eyes lifted, etc. Find a position is comfortable, for discomfort could be a distraction. At the same time, a position that is too relaxed might result in a refreshing nap, but little meditation.
3. Regardless of how you choose to meditate, the "aim is to center the attention of the body, the emotions, the mind, and the spirit upon 'glory of God in the face of Christ'" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

### Forms of Meditation

1. ***Meditatio Scripturarum*** (the meditation upon Scripture). Rather than exegesis—analyzing a text to determine its contextual meaning—the meditation of Scripture centers on "internalizing and personalizing the passage. The written word becomes a living word addressed to you" (Foster, p. 29). In this process, you accept the Word of God and ponder it in your heart. To do this, it is important not to pass over words superficially, but to reflect on even the most apparently passing phrases (e.g., chosen, dearly loved, holy). When reading a story, imagine the scene, smell the air, envision the people.

2. ***Recollection or Centering Down.*** Foster gives a very good description of this exercise on page 31 of *Celebration of Discipline*.
3. ***Meditation on creation.*** Remember we're allowing Psalm 8 to guide us here. What do you notice in creation that speaks to you of God's excellence? Of your place? Of His astonishing love? This is not about getting in touch with nature from a pantheistic perspective, but of experiencing the Creator through His creation.
4. ***Meditation upon events.*** Think of the news. The economy. Politics. Think of even past events like the holocaust. What about events in your own family, perhaps situations you currently face. Our purpose is to think of our role in our world as salt and light.