

### “Prayer and You” (Part 3)

This is the last in this series on prayer. In the first message I said that prayer is not getting God to give us what *we* want, but allowing God to make us what *He* wants. Last week, we looked at being *honest* when we pray, and that the real prayer is not what we *say*, but what *feel*. We also discussed the role of *faith* when we pray.

Today I want to talk about ***the value and importance of meditation***. Dr. Paul Tournier, a Swiss physician and author, for some time had wanted to establish a period of daily meditation, but as a busy physician, he had not found time. One day he heard an important political leader refer to the importance of a devotional time in his life, and this prompted Tournier to try it. He set his alarm an hour earlier the next morning. When the alarm rang, he got up, and went into his study and began to pray. He thought an hour might be up, and looked at his watch. But only a few minutes had passed. The next time he looked at his watch, it was only a few more minutes later. It was one of the most agonizing hours he had ever spent; he thought it would never end!

When the hour was over he started to get up the from chair, but he obeyed a passing impulse to remain at his desk. And in those moments that followed, God met him in a deep way. Those last moments changed his outlook on the entire day. The prayer time set a new tone for his life that day! From then on, a time of meditation became a regular part of his busy schedule. Dr. Tournier admits that nothing has enriched his life so much.

The person relating this story follows it by saying: “When your life becomes centered on God through prayer, you feel a new attitude toward everything.”

How about you and me? Can you say, can I say, that our life is centered on God in prayer in such a way that it colors our whole attitude towards everything? Most of us, probably, pray *some*. But is our prayer experience consistent? Is it so vital that it shapes how we think, how we act, how we live out each day? My suspicion is that few of us who say we’re Christians can honestly claim this.

I started to go to Sunday School when I was perhaps in 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I was confirmed when I was 12 or 13. But my faith in Jesus came alive in my high school years. There was one period of time when I would come home from school, there would be no one else in the house, and I would go into my room and pray. I’d kneel by my bed, place a painting of Jesus (Sallman’s head of Christ) in front of me, and pray. Often I sensed the presence of God. There were times when I would finish praying, and feel so close to God and so filled with love, that I would actually get up from my prayer time, and look for someone to whom I could be nice to or kind.

Since then, I’ve been to college and theological seminary. I spent 4 more years training as a Marriage and Family therapist. I’ve matured (I think!) as a human being. I’ve grown in my faith. I know more about the Bible. I’ve taught and led others as a pastor. But how many times have I wished I could have those prayer times back, when I felt so close to God! I’ve rarely experienced the joy and power of praying as I experienced back then as a simple teenager, in love with the Lord. For much of my life I’ve been longing for more depth in my praying.

I share this with you with some embarrassment, but I'm just being honest. Apparently, I'm not alone. In his book *Bread for the Wilderness, Wine for the Journey*, John Killinger, a Christian leader, author, and professor of theology, shares how in the second half of his life, he is in the process of learning how to pray all over again. In a sense, he is a child again, rediscovering the power of prayer and meditation. As a result, he says, he is now open to life in a new way.

One of the keys, I think, in re-inventing our prayer life is to include ***meditation as a part of our praying, or what we can call "meditative praying."*** At the center of this kind of praying is *praise and thanksgiving*. Asking for things is only *secondary*. It is *meditative* – more relaxed, unhurried, with periods of *silence* and *reflection*. The word "meditation" itself means to reflect, muse, ponder, think deeply.

*Now all of this is hard for us Americans, and those of us in Western cultures.* It is alien to our basic way of living. We are busy, on the go, in a hurry. We have to be doing something; we have to produce. We are a fast food culture. We are slaves to the clock. What possible value can there be in being still, "doing nothing"? Just meditating?

We are surrounded by noise! The blaring of the TV, music piped through the ceiling at the doctor's office or the dentist's office, our headsets playing our favorite music, the noise of traffic on the street. We hate silence! Even in church, we are often uncomfortable with silence! So, when God tries to speak to us, He is up against a lot of competition!

The psalmists knew the power of meditation. Psalm 46:10: "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" Psalm 39:3: "*While I meditated, the fire burned.*" Times of meditation can ignite the fire of faith and love in our soul. The psalm writers also said, "For God alone my soul waits *in silence*, for my hope is from him" (Psalm 62:5). Again, in Psalm 63:5-6 the psalmist wrote, "My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and *meditate on you* in the watches of the night."

But, the good news is that there are people today discovering the value of meditation. Both Christians and non-Christians. In one clergy gathering I attended a guest spoke about transcendental meditation. This person related how it can tap into a vast reservoir of power of *mind and body* that are within us. However, *Christian* meditation goes beyond just finding new mental and physical powers *within us*. Christian meditative praying can open us up in new ways to *God!*

***Jesus often retreated for prayer and meditation.*** That's what energized our Lord to live as He did! In almost all of the gospel accounts of Jesus' healings and mighty works, *there is no mention of Him praying* there on the spot! It was His whole behind-the-scenes life of prayer and meditation that made Him so alive to the powers of God, that He could heal and do mighty works without having to make a special prayer request for a miracle!

***Prayer, linked with meditation, has great benefits.*** *It can simply open us up to life.* To beauty, joy, truth – world becomes more alive!

*It can free us from being overly anxious about our needs.* It can change our priorities, reduce our want for things, and enable us to trust our heavenly Father to provide what we need! John Killinger writes, “How wonderful everything seems to us when our priorities have been reordered this way. How special the world becomes when we relax and enjoy what is already at hand for us, instead of looking to see what our neighbors have, worrying about whether we will have enough for tomorrow, and being concerned about how to get more.”

*Meditative praying can take us deeper in our experience of God.* Morton Kelsey wrote a book called *The Other Side of Silence*. It is a profound book that stretched my thinking about God. I realized that there are levels of experiencing God that I had not begun to explore. I talked about the book in a sermon, and a lady in the congregation was intrigued by that. She read the book, and she and I had some interesting discussions about this.

Could it be that many of us – with our “hurry up” prayer style (or “not at all” prayer life) – are only skimming the surface, when we could slow down and go much deeper into the mystery and wonder of God? I believe so!

*Meditative praying leads to meditative, prayerful living!* A woman who was the wife of a dairy farmer attended a prayer seminar, and decided she needed more time each day to not only pray, but to focus on meditation. So, she began rising at 4 a.m., half an hour before milking time. She wrote in her journal, “Just made a startling discovery! The time on my knees each morning is the *preparation* for prayer – the rest of the day then *becomes* the prayer.” She what she means? The time alone for meditation and prayer spills over into a more reflective, meaningful lifestyle. Praying carries over into the day’s activities.

I hope God will use this sermon and these three messages to motivate us to want to deepen our prayer experience - or maybe even to *begin* to pray – and especially to slow down and take time to practice daily *meditation*.

How can we develop and strengthen the habit of meditative praying? ***We will have to take the time!*** (You knew I was going to say that, didn’t you)! Get up half an hour earlier, stay up later, or take time through the day. Wherever you can clear some time, do it! Turn off the TV, get off the computer! If every Christian spent half the time we spend with the TV or computer or cell phone and used that time to pray, the world could be changed! You say, “I just don’t have the time.” Really? If that is absolutely true, then you are too busy! ***Make the time.*** What a pity if we spend a lifetime rushing through life, and just skimming the surface of the realm of the spirit.

***Try leaving the baggage behind!*** What’s that mean? Again, John Killinger, instructs us here. In his book he says, “We are too prone, in the Western world, to bring all our problems to God. We regard prayer as a time for untangling the messes we have made. We think of it as a Ouija board for reaching difficult decisions.” If we can get our mind on God, and make contact with The Presence, our feverish need to ask for things can be minimized. We won’t have to focus so much on our problems or needs because we will have a new sense of God’s sufficiency.

***Then too, it is good in our meditative praying to learn to relax.*** Relax your *body*: your face, muscles, neck and shoulders, your back and entire body. This will help your *mind* to relax. Imagine all your accumulated tensions and worries draining out of you. If music helps you relax and get into a meditative mood, use music sometimes. Maybe a picture will help your mind and spirit to get calm: a picture of an ocean, or country setting, or snowy scene. In one church office I put up by my desk a country scene from a calendar. Or, envision yourself as a piece of driftwood on the ocean, or a piece of grain waving in the wind. (*Don't laugh – this is not silly, or a waste!*)

Another hint in our meditating is to ***turn our thoughts to God.*** Don't be afraid or embarrassed to use "helps" to get yourself focused on God: quiet music, reading the words of a hymn or song or poem. Perhaps quietly whisper the "Jesus prayer" – simply repeating the words "Jesus...Jesus... Jesus..." over and over. If you feel like it, quietly praise Him...thank Him. But mostly just *be quiet, be still.* Talk less, listen more.

Meditate on brief passages of Scripture: the Psalms, Proverbs, one of the 4 gospels. Mull over tiny chunks of God's Word – maybe even a single word, or phrase. Recount with thankfulness all the blessings God has given you. Think of ways in which God's hand has been evident in your life, and others. The psalm writer said, "I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; I will remember your wonders of old. I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds" (Psalm 77:11-12). We can do that too! After we've taken the time to just be quiet, to kind of soak up the presence of God, then we can let our mind drift to others – to the world – and as concerns come to mind, quietly commit these people and concerns to God.

Now I'm not suggesting that *every time we pray*, we do this kind of meditation. But doing this *once a day*, preferably each day at the same part of the day if possible, and sticking with it, can change us and affect our whole attitude about everything in a deep and profound way!

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