



## Contemplation - March 1, 2020

### OPEN

Have you heard this quip? “Someone’s just thrown a bottle of Omega 3 tablets at me. But I only received super fish oil injuries.” Well, if we are honest, we live in a very a “super-fish-oil” society.

Thankfully, the Lord’s Prayer helps us live in a way that is deep and meaningful as members of God’s Kingdom. **Today we are considering the phrase in Matthew 6:10c** – “on earth as it is in heaven.”

What does it mean for God’s will to be done *here* as it is done *there*? This certainly invites into the aspect of prayer which is *contemplative*. When you hear the term contemplation, it is natural to think of synonyms such as: thoughtful, pensive, reflective, meditative, introspective, rapt, or lost in thought.

But in his book on prayer Robert Foster suggests that contemplative prayer is “loving attentiveness to God.” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, HarperOne, 1992, 158). Foster also argues that contemplation is reserved for the more spiritually mature. Obviously, the further we have walked with Christ the more depth there will be in times of contemplation. But the experience of loving attentiveness is a vital experience for *all* followers of Jesus.

How does contemplation connect to prayer? The Lord’s Prayer prompts us to pray for God’s will to be done here, as it is in heaven. If we are going to enter this reality, we must reflect deeply upon Him and His ways. We must learn to contemplate God – to pray with “loving attentiveness”.

### DIG

#### [A] The criteria for contemplation

First we must consider the criteria for contemplation, which is divinely revealed truth of God.

**Read Psalm 1.** Do you see how central the law of God must be to our lives. Without God’s Word we cannot engage with God in deep ways. And without the Scriptures we may well succumb to dangerous philosophies such as mindfulness theory, and the like.

Psalm 1 describes people who are learning to live in three ways:

- **right-side-up – verse 1.** God’s blessing upon us is not how we feel about our circumstances but how God views us (through grace). “Blessed, fortunate, congratulations” means we are set “right side up” by the power of the Gospel. “Blessed” means that our lives are in alignment or synched with the Kingdom of God.
- **with loving attentiveness – verse 2.** This is a lifestyle of delighting in and meditating upon God’s Word.
- **flourishing, not futile – verses 3-6.** This means a life of fruitfulness rather than failure. There is prosperity (as defined by God) rather than punishment.

“The Gospel tells us that the kingdom of God is within us first of all [see Luke 17:21]....If we cannot meet God within, in the very depth of ourselves, our chances of meeting Him outside ourselves are very remote....So it is inward we must turn....I don’t mean that we must go inward in the way one does in psychoanalysis or psychology. It is not a journey into my *own* inwardness, it is a journey *through* my own self, in order to emerge from the deepest level of my self into the place where He is, the point at which God and I meet.” (*Beginning to Pray*, Anthony Bloom, Paulist Press, 1970, 45-56)

#### [B] The companion for contemplation

What is the companion to contemplation? Isn’t it rather obvious? Silence and stillness! We are surrounded by constant noise and frenzied activity. If we are going to truly contemplate God in prayer, we must be freed from distraction and sound. But this suggests a monastic lifestyle that seems so unattainable to the average Christian.

Theophilus was patriarch of Alexandria and in a letter he wrote in AD 400 he gave this instruction: “Monks – if they wish to be what they are called – will love silence and the Catholic faith, for nothing at all is more important than these two things.”

But how did Jesus instruct us? **Read John 14:15-17, 26-27.**

In the Person of the Holy Spirit we have God, indwelling the believer, confirming His truth and offering us comfort, guidance, and wisdom. We cannot contemplate God in prayer without the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

#### [C] The context for contemplation

Contemplation might sound unattainable, but it is closer than you might think. Remember, we are talking about a life of loving attentiveness, not being lost into spiritual nothingness.

As Dallas Willard wrote, “The *Kingdom Among Us* is simply God Himself and the spiritual realm of beings over which his will perfectly presides – ‘as it is in the heavens’.” (*The Divine Conspiracy*, Harper One, 1997, 90)

Regardless of the context for contemplative prayer, the passion and the pursuit is to be lovingly attentive to God as King. Are we attentive to the “on earth as in heaven” in-breaking of His Kingdom into this world?

Here are some contexts in which we can learn to contemplate – what is effective for each of us may differ.

- **Scriptural truth** - for example, this is what we have provided for your contemplation during Lent
- **Meaningful prayer** - this may be personal or corporate prayer opportunities
- **Authentic community** - C. S. Lewis wrote, “By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets.” (*Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God*, Timothy Keller, Penguin, 2014, 119)
- **Uplifting music** - don’t limit your musical worship to Sunday morning
- **Inspirational authors** - reading God’s truth through the insight or experience of faithful followers
- **Sacred spaces** - these might be natural (Gold Creek) or from the creative gifts of others
- **Unexpected places** - be on the alert for meaningful God-moments in your day

The context may be different but the objective remains the same. We need to grow into a place of prayer were we are in deeper thought and reflection upon God and His ways in this world.

## REFLECT

How are you doing with contemplative prayer? You might think, “What!? Contemplative prayer? I’m just trying to remember to say grace for supper!” Please don’t allow Satan to convince you of the lie that “not yet equals never.”

Allow the Holy Spirit to work in your life. Think about some of the practical steps. As you make yourself available to God and His truth, He will meet you.

This is the promise we find in God’s Word. **Read Jeremiah 29:11-14.**

Frederick William Faber (1814-1863) wrote about the distractions which pull us away from contemplative prayer.

Take a few moments to read reflectively through this testimony about contemplative prayer.

*Lord! I cannot pray, my fancy is not free  
Unmannerly distractions come, and force my thoughts from Thee.  
The world that looks so dull all day glows bright on me at prayer  
And plans that ask no thought but then wake up and meet me there.  
All nature one full fountain seems of dreamy sight and sound  
Which, when I kneel, breaks up its deeps, and makes a deluge round.  
Old voices murmur in my ear, new hopes start to life  
And past and future gaily blend in one bewitching strife.  
My very flesh has restless fits; my changeful limbs conspire  
With all these phantoms of the mind my inner self to tire.  
I cannot pray; yet, Lord! Thou knowst the pain it is to me  
To have my vainly struggling thoughts thus torn away from Thee.  
Sweet Jesus! teach me how to prize these tedious hours when  
Foolish and mute before Thy Face, in helpless worship lie  
Prayer was not meant for luxury, or selfish pastime sweet  
It is the prostrate creature’s place at his Creator’s Feet.  
Had I, dear Lord! no pleasure found but in the thought of Thee  
Prayer would have come unsought, and been a truer liberty  
Yet Thou art oft most present, Lord, in weak distracted prayer  
A sinner out of heart with self most often finds Thee there  
For prayer that humbles sets the soul from all illusions free  
And teaches it how utterly, dear Lord, it hangs on Thee.  
The heart, that on self-sacrifice, is covetously bent  
Will bless Thy chastening hand that makes its prayer its punishment.  
My Saviour, why should I complain and why fear aught but sin?  
Distractions are but outward things; Thy peace dwells far within  
These surface-troubles come and go, like rufflings of the sea  
The deeper depth is out of reach to all, my God, but Thee.*

Here are some additional passages to consider about prayer...

*Psalm 19:14*

*Psalm 46:10*

*Psalm 62:1-2*

You are invited to listen to  
[session six of the Prayer Course](#)