

WEEK THREE | CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

OK! We've been talking about prayer for 3 weeks. Maybe this is more focus on prayer at one time than you've experienced before.

How is it going?

Have the prayer templates been helpful? What have you tried? (rhythm, schedule, practice wise)

What has been hard?

What has been rewarding?

Turning our focus to contemplative prayer: How easy is it to go 12, 24 or more hours without really thinking about God, or communing with HIm at all? Be honest ...

What are some of the reasons you get disconnected from life with God?

START WITH SCRIPTURE

READ PSALM 139 OBSERVATIONS

1) What aspect of the *Psalm of Examen* stood out most to you?

2) What sources of hope are found in the Psalm?

3) Which parts of the Psalm are a bit overwhelming? (Both in a terrifying or comforting way)

PRACTICING THE PRACTICES

Read this description of contemplative prayer: *(From Practicing the Way)*

More than anything else, prayer is about being in active relationship with a Person. If one understands this, then he or she will quickly recognize how being in active relationship with a person includes the practice of all kinds of habits of communication by which the relationship is experienced, grown, deepened, and challenged.

Sometimes this means talking; sometimes it means not saying a word, but sharing times of easy silence together; sometimes one shares a special landscape (a forest or an ocean beach, etc.) with the friend, walking with him or her in it; sometimes one shares music; sometimes it means acting for the other – being of help; sometimes it means listening to the friend, letting the other give or show or teach or guide as the friend wishes.

In short, prayer is not as much about “saying prayers” or as much about learning new “techniques” of prayer, as it is about doing whatever is necessary to deepen our friendship with God and making sure to set aside time daily to do that. However, learning from others how to do friendship skillfully, – and, in particular, friendship with God – and learning “techniques” or “habits” or “traditions” given us from the greatest of the friends of God, is still of great value.

Practice the Prayer of Examen as a group. (Consider breaking up into groups of 3 or 4)

- Before you begin, divest yourselves of anything you have that will intrude on this focused time of practicing – mobile phones, for example. Have great respect for how challenging it can be to be fully present only here, only now, and for the sake of this prayerful practice you all will do together. Whoever is leading this should not proceed until everyone in the room has quit fidgeting, has found his or her alertness. Be patient! Let people have the time they need to get settled.
- Then have someone offer a prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to help guide this practice. Something like this: “Holy Spirit, we seek to make ourselves completely available to you – Father and Son and Holy Spirit. We want this designated amount of time to be governed completely by what You want for us as a group, and more hiddenly, to each of us in particular. Give us the Light we need to see, and in seeing, to understand.”
- Then have the leader patiently walk through each of the following steps.

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

1) Recognize

Recognize that you are in God's presence. He has been with you and he is with you. In the words of Psalm 139, verses 7 and 8: "Where could I go to get away from your spirit? Where could I go to escape your presence? If I went up to heaven, you would be there. If I went down to the grave, you would be there too!" Now, you BE PRESENT WITH HIM. Turn the noise off. Take a deep breath and Abide in His Presence.

Pause for 90 seconds

2) Reflect

Reflect on your day. Go through the ups and downs of your day with the Lord. Who you were with, where you were, what you did—no matter how ordinary. What encouraged you? What made you happy? What discouraged you? Where did you feel pain or disappointment?

Pause for 90 seconds

3) Rejoice

Now, pick out one of those moments or feelings that was a blessing. And rejoice in it. Thank God for the grace of that moment. That gift. That interaction. Celebrate it. Enjoy it.

Pause for 90 seconds

4) Repent

Come face to face with your shortcomings. Be honest with yourself. God already knows, so just agree with him about it. What hurtful thing did you say or do? What do you wish you could go back and do differently? What pain or sadness did you experience? Now, turn those things over to God. Repent of your shortcomings.

Pause for 90 seconds

5) Resolve

Finally, think about tomorrow briefly. What are you looking forward to? What are you anxious about? Ask God for wisdom, guidance, and strength. Resolve, to give him today and trust him with tomorrow. In the words of Psalm 121, "I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Pause for 90 seconds

Now, either go on with God. Go to sleep tonight, with gratitude and a light heart.