

## Prayer Practicum 2 – Meditation and Contemplation

---

Meditation and contemplation are disciplines that are quite similar, but have a very different focus.

Meditation is an exercise primarily of the mind but yet supported by the heart that focuses on God's Word and His revelation and insight to me. It is wrestling with things I don't understand in expectation that God will open my heart and my mind to see things differently and be changed by the experience. Meditation is a way of going deeper into the mind and heart of God and seeing His Truth in different ways or with different applications relevant to me or the people for whom I lead.

Contemplation is an exercise primarily of the heart but yet supported by the mind that focuses upon God Himself. It is holding in your heart and mind the wonder of God with the intent of deliberately pressing into Him and going deeper relationally and experientially.

Both are measured in Grace by God's love for me... and His people... and all of humanity.

### PRACTICUM GOALS:

1. MOST OF US ARE HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH LIFE INCLUDING WORK, FAMILIES, AS WELL AS VARIOUS ASPECTS OF MINISTRY. THE PACE OF LIFE ROBBS US OF OUR ABILITY TO FOCUS ON GOD AND ENTER INTO THE SPIRITUAL REALITY. THERE IS A NEED FOR US TO DELIBERATELY SLOW DOWN AND ENGAGE IN PERIODS OF ATTENTIVE SILENCE BEFORE GOD WHERE WE ACTIVELY LISTEN AND 1) MEDITATE UPON SCRIPTURAL TRUTH [MEDITATION] OR 2) CONTEMPLATE THE WONDERS OF GOD [CONTEMPLATION].
2. BECAUSE GOD DESIRES INTIMACY WITH HIS PEOPLE IN GENERAL AND HIS CHILDREN IN PARTICULAR, HE DESIGNED US WITH A GREAT NEED AND A LONGING FOR PERIODS OF MEDITATIVE AND CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER.
3. PRAYER CENTERS AND NOURISHES OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE... IT KEEPS US IN TOUCH WITH OUR LORD WHOM WE SERVE.
4. THIS IS A DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT TO FACILITATE MOMENTS OF SPIRITUAL CONNECTION TO GOD. AS WE SET TIME ASIDE FOR GOD, WE LEARN TO HEAR FROM HIM WHICH ENCOURAGES US TO LOOK FOR HIM.
5. AS PRAYER ENGAGEMENTS UNFOLD, PEOPLE ARE DELIBERATELY ALLOWED AND IN FACT ENCOURAGED TO GO DEEPER INTO GOD AND ALLOW HIM TO OPERATE IN US. GOD IS GRACIOUS AND WON'T FORCE HIMSELF UPON US, INSTEAD HE WAITS FOR US AND ENCOURAGES US TO COME TO HIM.
6. IT IS NOT ABOUT OUR GETTING OUR WAY WITH GOD, BUT ALLOWING HIM TO HAVE HIS WAY WITH ME.
7. ABIDING IN CHRIST IS THE MOST INTIMATE UNION POSSIBLE, AND IS THE CALLING FOR ALL BELIEVERS TO ENTER INTO AND ENJOY. IT IS USED 112 TIMES IN THE NT... MOSTLY IN JOHN'S WRITINGS. ABIDING HAS 2 MAIN ASPECTS:
  - a. ABIDING AS A QUALITY OF CHARACTER – THE ABIDING CHARACTER OF GOD IS ETERNAL AND UNCHANGING, IN CONTRAST TO THE TRANSITORY AND INCONSISTENT NATURE OF HUMANITY IN OUR FALLEN STATE. THE LAW FAILS TO TRANSFORM HUMANITY, WHILE ABIDING IN GOD DOES.
  - b. ABIDING IN RELATIONSHIP – PRIORITY IS GIVEN TO THE INVITATION JESUS ENCOURAGES IN DWELLING IN OR ABIDING WITH GOD AS FATHER, SON, SPIRIT. TRINITY IS A HOLISTIC UNITY OF ETERNAL RELATIONAL INTERDEPENDENCE INTO WHICH WE ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE.

### PREPARATION & RESOURCES:

1. AS SOON AS YOU DETERMINE THE TIME AND PLACE FOR YOUR PRAYER RETREAT, BEGIN TO PRAY THAT GOD WOULD INTERVENE AND BLESS, THAT YOU WOULD HAVE A FRESH EXPERIENCE OF GOD, AND THAT HE WOULD PREPARE YOU

## Prayer Practicum 2 – Meditation and Contemplation

---

FOR HIS PURPOSE.

2. FIND A PLACE WHERE YOU FEEL CLOSE TO GOD – IT COULD BE AT THE BEACH, OR IN THE FOREST, OR IN A CHAPEL, ETC. IT SHOULD BE A PLACE WHERE YOU FEEL SAFE AND SECURE, AND YET WON'T HAVE TOO MANY DISTRACTIONS. SUCH A PLACE IS KEY FOR ENTERING INTO MEDITATIVE OR CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER.
3. BRING ALONG YOUR BIBLE AND A JOURNAL OR NOTE PAD TO KEEP TRACK OF WHAT YOU EXPERIENCE. BRING ALSO SOME BOTTLED WATER AND IT WOULD BE WISE TO KNOW THERE IS A REST-ROOM NEARBY SHOULD YOU NEED IT.
4. DON'T ALLOW YOUR NOTE TAKING TO DISTRACT YOU... BUT DO MAKE TIME TO NOTE YOUR EXPERIENCE SO YOU REMEMBER WHAT GOD SAID AND IS DOING. AS AN EXAMPLE IN THIS EXERCISE, AFTER EACH STAGE IS DESCRIBED I HAVE INCLUDED MY OWN EXPERIENCE – THESE ARE MY NOTES OF WHAT I CAME AWAY WITH IN PRAYERFUL DELIBERATION.
5. MAKE SURE YOU ARE COMFORTABLY DRESSED AND WARM ENOUGH SO YOUR PHYSICAL CONDITION IS NOT A DISTRACTION FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. IT IS USEFUL TO HAVE YOUR PHYSICAL CONDITION SORT OF A NEUTRAL COMPONENT AS YOU ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTER.
6. WHEN PONDERING SCRIPTURE BEFORE GOD IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE PREPARED BY STUDYING THE TEXT PROPERLY. PROPER STUDY INCLUDES:
  - a. PRAYERFUL READING OF THE TEXT – WE SEEK TO UNDERSTAND WHAT GOD IS SAYING THROUGH THE TEXT. READ AND RE-READ THE TEXT. PRAY THAT GOD WOULD OPEN YOUR EYES AND YOUR HEART.
  - b. REVELATION IS SEEING WHAT GOD HAS PLACED IN THE TEXT; ILLUMINATION IS A FRESH UNDERSTANDING OR INSIGHT OF WHAT I ALREADY THOUGHT I KNEW. REVELATION IS FINDING SOMETHING HIDDEN OR OBSCURE, WHILE ILLUMINATION IS SEEING IN FRESH LIGHT WHAT IS IN PLAIN VIEW.
  - c. STUDY THE TEXT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ENTIRE PASSAGE. FOR EXAMPLE... “JESUS WEPT” – JOHN 11:35 MAKES NO SENSE OUTSIDE OF THE ENTIRE PASSAGE SPEAKING OF LAZARUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION [JOHN 11:1-44]. IT IS DISINGENUOUS TO STUDY A VERSE OUTSIDE OF THE ENTIRE PASSAGE IN WHICH IT OCCURS.
  - d. ALWAYS SEEK GOD AND HIS TRUTH. DON'T READ INTO THE TEXT THAT WHICH GOD HAS NOT PLACED THERE. TOO MANY PEOPLE MAKE SPURIOUS CONCLUSIONS MAKING UP IN THEIR OWN MIND SOME NEW DISCOVERY OF TRUTH – ALWAYS BE SUSPICIOUS OF NEW DISCOVERIES, INSTEAD SEEK FRESH RELEVANCE OF WHAT YOU KNOW GOD SAID.
  - e. PERSONAL STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE EXPLORING ACCREDITED RESOURCES SUCH AS COMMENTARIES LIKE ZONDERVAN'S EXPOSITORY BIBLE COMMENTARY, AND ONLINE RESOURCES SUCH AS [HTTP://NET.BIBLE.ORG/HOME.PHP](http://net.bible.org/home.php).
7. TRUTH AND THEOLOGY IS NOT SOMETHING YOU READ OUT OF A BOOK, THEOLOGY DEVELOPS AS YOU SEE SOMETHING THAT MAKES NO SENSE TO YOU AND YOU PLEAD WITH GOD TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND IT.

### STAGES:

1. THIS EXERCISE CAN BE SET UP AS LONG AS YOU DESIRE. I HAVE LISTED A 2 HOUR OR 4 HOUR EXPERIENCE DEPENDING ON HOW MUCH TIME YOU HAVE AND ALLOW YOURSELF. WITH PRACTICE THIS CAN BECOME MUCH LONGER, BUT 2-4 HOURS IS PROBABLY A GOOD STARTING PLACE. ALLOW 5 MINUTES TO READ THE DIRECTIONS AND MENTALLY PREPARE, AND ANOTHER 10 MINUTES AT THE END TO DEBRIEF.
2. DON'T FORCE THE STAGE SCHEDULE, BUT BE MINDFUL AND ALLOW THE SCHEDULE TO MOVE YOU ALONG. OTHERWISE IT IS TOO EASY TO GET LOST WITHOUT FOCUS.
3. THE EXERCISE HERE HAS 3 STAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE.
4. ENTER INTO EACH STAGE DELIBERATELY HAVING READ THE DIRECTIONS AND PREPARED YOUR HEART.

## Prayer Practicum 2 – Meditation and Contemplation

---

5. YOU ARE ENCOURAGED TO BE SPIRITUALLY ACTIVE AND REACTIVE.
6. THE STAGE DIRECTIONS WILL HELP KEEP YOUR HEART AND MIND CENTERED... WHEN THERE... LET GOD WORK.
7. DON'T FORCE THE EXPERIENCE, ALLOW GOD TO WORK ON YOU AND MOVE YOU AT HIS PACE AND DIRECTION. IF YOU SENSE NOTHING IS HAPPENING ASK GOD WHY. EXPECT HIM TO BE PRESENT, BUT DON'T FORCE HIM TO SPEAK. SOMETIMES THE SILENCE HE PROVIDES IS PREPARATION FOR A FUTURE BREAKTHROUGH.

### The Stages:

1. Stage 1 – Centering Down [Quaker practice] – taking time to relax in God's Presence, allowing His Spirit to deal with my burdens, becoming aware of His Presence, and entering into a receptive silence and active listening before God. 30 min
2. Stage 2 – Silent worship [celebration & praise] – actively focusing of God, contemplating His Majesty and wonder, reflecting on His greatness, what He has done for me and continues to do, allowing His Spirit to minister to mine. 30 min
3. Stage 3 – Contemplative meditation – reflectively read Luke 17:20-18:8 – emphasis on "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth." Allow the message to take hold in my heart, and allow God to speak to me. 45 min
  - a. TAKE TURNS READING THE TEXT REVERENTLY AND SOLEMNLY, THEN PAUSE DRINKING IN THE THOUGHTS. THIS WORKS BETTER IF YOU READ FROM DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS.
  - b. HEAR THE STORY THE TEXT REVEALS, AND TRY TO PLACE YOURSELF IN THE STORY. WHAT DO YOU SEE? WHAT DO YOU FEEL? ATTEMPT TO WALK WITH THOSE IN THE STORY AND SEE WHAT THEY WOULD HAVE SEEN AND HEARD.
  - c. AS YOU RUN THE STORY THROUGH YOUR MIND LISTEN FOR GOD. REMEMBER THAT THE SPIRIT WANTS TO REVEAL TRUTH TO YOU. PRAYERFULLY PAY ATTENTION IN A REVERENT MEDITATIVE/CONTEMPLATIVE STATE.
  - d. BE AWARE OF SUBTLITIES AND NUANCES. DO NOT FORCE THE EXPERIENCE... ALLOW GOD TO DRAW YOU ALONG AT HIS PACE.
4. Stage 4 – Contemplative reflection – ponder what is God saying to me and to His people? What is God's high expectation of His church, how should faith be expressed, what am I required to do. 45 min
  - a. After you have cycled through the reading and paused silence, speak to each other what you heard or saw.
  - b. Contemplate the relevance of what is being revealed in light of the disciplined study you have engaged in preparation for the retreat.
  - c. It is likely that you will each find similarities along with your differences in what you discover. Ponder both.
  - d. Repeat the entire process again.

### My experience:

## Prayer Practicum 2 – Meditation and Contemplation

---

My friend and I arrived at Fasting Prayer Mountain at 1:30 PM and planned on spending the rest of the afternoon in prayer. For the first stage, I chose a place in the sun in a quite courtyard desiring quiet and solitude – my friend and I had agreed we would be together in silence and solitude through each stage. We each found a comfortable spot and began stage 1 – Centering Down. I do really well in nature for prayer and reflection, and the spot I chose was wonderful. As I opened my heart and quieted my mind, I was aware of my surroundings – the sounds of the wind in the trees, insects in flight, birds singing and calling... it was perfect! After about ten minutes an old woman in a nearby car began reading Scripture. I could not really understand much of what she was saying, but I recognized it as Scripture. I tried to ignore it... unsuccessfully, and I began to become a little frustrated as I wanted complete silence. Another five or ten minutes later, another woman in a nearby prayer closet began praying in Korean – very loudly and passionately. My discontent began to rise as I found myself asking God if this was some cruel joke or an attack to keep me from the prayer time I expected. I found myself asking God for help... and I sensed He was in the distraction.

As I forced myself to relax and listen, I sensed God saying that this is a little of what Heaven will be like. What would initially seem like a cacophony of sound emerging from countless beings, will develop and coalesce into a symphony of praise. I began to relax and enjoy the moment, and I smiled about how interesting this was turning out. At the end of our allotted time for this stage my friend and I walked to another location, this time of my friend's choosing. I related what I had experienced and my friend exclaimed, "I thought the same thing!" This was a very cool beginning, and I was glad that my friend was there with me as God was using him to help me better understand His Kingdom. The takeaway for me in this initial stage was not to presume I understand how God will show up. To make room for distractions and pay attention to see what God is up to. The notes I had made to myself stated, "Thank you Lord... for my friend attending with me, and the freedom to be alone together with You. Silence broken by a blessed distraction... an old woman softly reciting Scripture as a form of active prayer – simple speech, and a rich faith. Thank You for the contrast of another woman calling out strongly – emotionally charged – venting her heart, an emotion I can feel in a language I do not comprehend. An almighty chorus with birds, insects, the breeze – creation and creature sending fragrance to God. Silence resumed... with voices stilled, nature pours forth a robust praise on its own."

The next stage was to enter into a time of silent praise and worship. My friend had chosen a spot in a clearing several hundred yards from our first spot where we had a wonderful view of the treetops past a clearing in front of us. My friend remarked that this reminded him of the places he would see with his mother when he was young. As we looked about and contemplated God's greatness I saw an eagle fly overhead... I had never before seen an eagle in flight, it was pretty cool! At this point an SUV drove up and was looking for a place to park. They drove onto the lawn area before settling into a paved parking space some way away from us. The doors opened up and out poured two families speaking a language that sounded to me like a Filipino dialect. I returned to my contemplation, and then they decided to pass by us in the center of the clearing.

The women and children ran on to the restrooms while the men slowly walked behind them.

## Prayer Practicum 2 – Meditation and Contemplation

---

We exchanged a glance and a “hello” and then they came over to greet us. My first thought was, “great, another distraction.” As we talked we spoke of the natural beauty of the area, and they expressed their joy about how great God is. We learned they were Fijian pastors who came up for the afternoon to pray with their families. The more we talked, the more we rejoiced. We were doing the praise and worship stage in a way I had not planned or expected... and again it was wonderful! We spent at least an hour and a half with Pastor John and Pastor Isaac, and had a great time that encouraged all of us, and God was well praised and worshipped. My friend and I looked at each other and laughed at how God had again showed up in an unexpected way and blessed us... in a manner different that we were looking for. My notes stated, “Recounting parents now gone... My friend’s Mom and my Dad. The smallness of my complaint against the richness of joy and love... thank You Lord! An eagle flies overhead... ‘You will mount upon wings as an eagle.’ Thank You Lord for Your faithfulness. Two men we didn’t expect... sharing about our common experience and view of God’s goodness. Not the celebration I planned, but God did.”

Stage three was next and I decided to walk up to the top of the mountain for our time of Scripture reading and contemplation – a time of active prayer. The passage I had selected was Luke 17:20-18:8. I found the enigmatic conclusion of “When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith” troubling and disturbing, and wanted to wait before God to hear what He might reveal on it. We settled on the hilltop under a canopy of tree branches some thirty feet above us. My friend first read the passage in his version of the English Standard Bible, and we pondered it for a short while. Then I read it in my NASB version and we contemplatively prayed out loud for about fifteen minutes, and in silence for about thirty minutes – asking God to reveal His heart to us. We discussed our impressions at the conclusion of this time. God spoke to us that this passage revealed that moral and faith degradation would continue until Jesus returns. That the two specific references to the time of Noah and the time of Sodom revealed two lands under judgment that were being destroyed for their wickedness and faithlessness. So it would be before Jesus returns. It seemed to both of us a blessing not to be alive at that time. It also spoke to us of what we could do now to strengthen faith and discipleship. It made me all the more focused on the need to strengthen communities of faith to withstand the coming onslaught, and of the discipleship ministry God has challenged me with as a means to strengthen believers in the church. Though I continue to be discouraged by the failures I observe in the church, the community of faith sealed in the Spirit of God is the true remnant Jesus is preparing as His Bride, and we have a part to play.