



Prayer

Finding the Heart's True Home

Based on the book

by Richard J. Foster



The ideas and concepts of this presentation are based entirely on the work of Richard J. Foster unless otherwise stated.



Contemplative Prayer

*O my divine Master, teach me this
mute language which says so many things.*

Jean-Nicholas Grou



Open Mind, Open Heart
The Contemplative Dimension of the
Gospel

By

Thomas Keating



What Contemplation is Not

- A relaxation exercise
 - A technique
 - A way to achieve a “high”
 - Self-hypnosis
- A charismatic gift



What Contemplation is Not

- A parapsychological phenomena
 - Precognition
 - Knowledge of events at a distance
 - Control over bodily processes
 - Levitation
- Mystical phenomena
 - Bodily ecstasy
 - Visions
 - *“All the sacraments are greater than any vision.”*
 - Words imagined as spoken or “impressed on one’s spirit”



Dimensions of Contemplative Prayer

- *“Our awakening to the presence and action of the Spirit is the unfolding of Christ’s resurrection in us.”*
- Interior silence
- Detachment from thoughts, not the absence of thoughts
- *“In every kind of prayer the raising of the mind and heart to God can be the work only of the Spirit.”*
- An offering of ourselves to God



Dimensions of Contemplative Prayer

- An dynamic interpersonal process
- Aided by systematic organization



Dimensions of Contemplative Prayer

- Effects
 - Unleashes certain unconscious energies
 - Spiritual consolation, charismatic gifts or psychic powers
 - Humiliating self-knowledge
 - “The release of these two kinds of unconscious energies needs to be safeguarded by well-established habits of dedication to God and concern for others. Otherwise, if one enjoys some form of spiritual consolation or development one may inflate with pride; or if one feels crushed by the realization of one’s spiritual impoverishment, one may collapse into discouragement or even despair.”



Dimensions of Contemplative Prayer

- Requires the discipline of spiritual practice
 - Service to others
- A way for God to heal our self-centeredness
- *“The Spirit speaks to our conscience through scripture and through the events of daily life. Reflection on these two sources of personal encounter and the dismantling of the emotional programming of the past prepare the psyche to listen at more refined levels of attention. The Spirit then begins to address our conscience from that deep source within us which is our true Self. This is contemplation properly so-called.”*



First Steps in Centering Prayer

- As baptized, communing Christians our goal is divine union with God
- Married, active laity usually the most advanced in prayer
- Centering prayer a way to begin contemplative prayer
 - Not merely a method, but *is* prayer



First Steps in Centering Prayer

- Suggests following monastic practice of two prayer periods each day
- *“Centering prayer as a discipline is designed to withdraw our attention from the ordinary flow of our thoughts. We tend to identify ourselves with that flow. But there is a deeper part of ourselves....This level might be compared to a great river on which our memories, images, feelings, inner experiences, and the awareness of outward things are resting.”*



First Steps in Centering Prayer

- The deeper level is what makes us human
- Focus of centering prayer is to release *any* thought that bubbles up as we pray
 - Find a comfortable position so that we won't focus on our body
 - Choose a sacred word – *“expresses your intention of opening and surrendering to God”*



First Steps in Centering Prayer

- Centering prayer not turning to God, but saying, “Here I am”
 - *“It is a way of putting yourself at God’s disposal; it is He who determines the consequences.”*
- Suggests 20-30 minutes is minimum to go beyond superficial thoughts
 - Use end of time for traditional forms of prayer
- A faith relationship
 - *“This relationship is expressed by taking the time to open oneself to God every day, by taking God seriously enough to make a heavy date with Him”*
- Requires patience



First Steps in Centering Prayer

- *“Please don’t try to make your faculties a blank. There should always be a gentle, spiritual activity present, expressed either by thinking the sacred word or by the simple awareness that you are present to God.”*
- Don’t worry about falling asleep
- *“You cannot make a valid judgment about how things are going on the basis of a single period of prayer. Instead, you must look for the fruit in your ordinary daily life, after a month or two. If you are becoming more patient with others, more at ease with yourself, if you shout less often or less loudly at the children, feel less hurt if the family complains about your cooking – all these are signs that another set of values is beginning to operate in you.”*
- Not attention, but intention



End of section using Thomas
Keating's Work on Contemplative
Prayer



Moving Outward

Seeking the Ministry We Need



Praying the Ordinary

Do not forget that the value and interest of life is not so much to do conspicuous things...as to do ordinary things with the perception of their enormous value. Teilhard de Chardin



The Modern Heresy

- Indulge in spiritual apartheid
 - Pious activities
 - Rest of our lives
- Antidote is to Praying the Ordinary
 - Turn the ordinary experiences into prayer
 - See God in the ordinary experiences of our lives
 - Pray through the ordinary experiences of our lives



The Holiness of Created Things

- God evaluates his creation as good (Gen. 1:31)
- The features of Jesus' birth are the ordinary stuff of life in ancient Judea – a stable, swaddling clothes, a manger
- *“In the creation and the incarnation the great God of the universe intertwined the spiritual and the material, wedded the sacred and the secular, sanctified the common and the ordinary. How astonishing! How wonderful!”*



Prayer in Action

- *“Our vocation is an asset to prayer because our work becomes prayer. It is prayer in action.”*
- *Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. I Cor. 10:31*
- Praying our vocations is not dependent on the loftiness of our tasks
- Not a glorified Protestant work ethic
- We mirror the Creator when we work
- Value of our labor not dependent on our salary or lack of payment



Prayer of Action

- *“Every action performed in the sight of God because it is the will of God, and in the manner that God wills, is a prayer and indeed a better prayer than could be made in words at such times.”*
- Each action that requires us to stretch ourselves on someone else’s behalf is prayer in action



Prayer of Action

- Seeing God's presence in the ordinary experiences of life
 - Waiting
 - Rhythms of the day
- Praying in response to the ordinary experiences of our lives
 - Reading the paper
 - Meeting a friend
 - Walking through our neighborhoods



Holiness is Homemade

- Place of prayer in family life
 - Edward Hays' "Blessing Prayer for an Automobile"
 - Establish a "hermitage" in the home – a place of silence and solitude
- Don't feel guilty about the lack of a "family altar" time
 - Pray blessing prayers on children as they leave and prayers of thanksgiving when they return home
 - Pray prayers of release during the teen years



Common Ventures of Life

- Birth, marriage, work, and death
 - Jesus' incarnation has sanctified all the ordinary activities of our lives
 - *"All work is holy work and all places are sacred places. Therefore we lift our voices in joyful song, declaring, 'This is holy ground, We're standing on holy ground; For the Lord is present, And where he is holy. These are holy hands, He's given us holy hands; He works through these hands, And so these hands are holy.'"*



Petitionary Prayer

*Whether we like it or not,
asking is the rule of the Kingdom.*

C. H. Spurgeon



Our Staple Diet

“Some have suggested...that while the less discerning will continue to appeal to God for aid, the real masters of the spiritual life go beyond petition to adoring God’s essence with no needs or requests whatever. In this view our asking represents a more crude and naïve form of prayer, while adoration and contemplation are a more enlightened and high-minded approach, since they are free from any egocentric demands. This...is a false spirituality. Petitionary Prayer remains primary throughout our lives because we are forever dependent upon God. It is something that we never really ‘get beyond,’ nor should we even want to.”



Our Staple Diet

- The Lord's Prayer is primarily petitionary
- *Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Matt. 7:7-8*
- As children we bring our requests to God, our Father



Two Problems

- Why ask God when God already knows what we need?
 - Keeping communication open deepens the relationship
 - *“Love loves to be told what it knows already...It wants to be asked for what it longs to give.”* P. T. Forsyth
- Why bother God with petty details?
 - Things that matter to us matter to God because we are God’s children



Perplexity of Unanswered Prayer

- Too easy to answer this with “God says, ‘Yes, No, or Wait’”
- Compare the number of unanswered prayers with Mark 11:24 — *I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*
- One of the mysterious ways of God
- *“We shall come one day to a heaven where we shall gratefully know that God’s great refusals were sometimes the true answers to our truest prayer.” P. T. Forsyth*



Perplexity of Unanswered Prayer

- God may withhold an answer for our own good
 - Visible only in retrospect
- We may be blind to the answer that God has given us
- Sin may cloud our spiritual insight so that we ask for the wrong thing
- Remember that our Savior prayed an unanswered prayer in the Garden



The Paternoster

- The prayer for Jesus' disciples of all times and places
- An all-inclusive prayer
- Prayed by people in all walks of life in all circumstances
- A prayer of petition framed by adoration



Paternoster--Give

- First petition is for *our daily bread*
- Places us right in the middle of material reality, not in some spiritual nirvana



Paternoster--Give

- Jesus, during his ministry, cared for the everyday concerns of people
 - Wine for a wedding
 - Food for the hungry
 - Rest for the weary
- *“Jesus has transfigured the trivialities of everyday life...We pray for daily bread by taking to God those trifles that make up the bulk of our days.”*



Paternoster--Forgive

- Forgive petition follows give petition so that we can first encounter how indebted we are to God, leading us to yearn for God's forgiveness
- A conditional petition: *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*
 - Only petition that Jesus explains: *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* Matt. 6:14-15
 - Not due to a stingy God who withholds his forgiveness
 - Not because God has to see some sort of proof of our reform
 - *"It is simply that by the very nature of the created order we must give in order to receive."*



Paternoster--Forgive

- What is not part of forgiveness
 - No more pain, instantly
 - All will be forgotten
 - The incident didn't really matter
 - Things do not return to how they were before the incident
- Forgiveness *"is a miracle of grace whereby the offense no longer separates... In forgiveness we are releasing our offenders so that they are no longer bound to us. In a very real sense we are freeing them to receive God's grace."*



Paternoster--Deliver

- Composed of a positive and negative petition
 - *Lead us not into temptation*
 - *Deliver us from evil*
- Times of testing may be used by God to reveal to us areas of sin
- We pray not so much for deliverance from generic evil, but from the evil one, Satan
- *“If prayer is the heart of religion, then petition is the heart of prayer.”* Herbert Farmer



Intercessory Prayer

Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the fellowship must enter every day.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer



- A means of loving others
- *“Intercessory Prayer is priestly ministry, and one of the most challenging teachings in the New Testament is the universal priesthood of all Christians. As priests, appointed and anointed by God, we have the honor of going before the Most High on behalf of others. This is not optional; it is a sacred obligation – and a precious privilege – of all who take up the yoke of Christ.”*



The Interceding One

- *Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us” Rom. 8:34*
- *Fulfills the promise Jesus made to his disciples in John 13-17*



The Interceding One

- Jesus' intercession for us gives us the authority to pray on behalf of others
- *“Our ministry of intercession is made possible only because of Christ's continuing ministry of intercession. It is a wonderful truth to know that we are saved by faith alone, that there is nothing we can do to make ourselves acceptable to God. Likewise, we pray by faith alone – Jesus Christ our eternal Intercessor is responsible for our prayer life.”*



In the Name of Jesus

- Jesus admonishes the disciples to pray in his name (John 16:24)
- Can't God be more broad-minded?
 - God is far more broad-minded than we are



In the Name of Jesus

- What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?
 - *"To pray in the name of Christ means to pray in the awareness that our prayers have no worthiness or efficacy apart from his atoning sacrifice and redemptive mediation. It means to appeal to the blood of Christ as the source of power for the life of prayer. It means to acknowledge our complete helplessness apart from his mediation and intercession. To pray in his name means that we recognize that our prayers cannot penetrate the tribunal of God unless they are presented to the Father by the Son, our one Savior and Redeemer."* Donald Bloesch
 - *"To pray in the name of Jesus means that we are praying in accord with the way and nature of Christ. It means that we are making the kinds of intercessions he would make if he were among us in the flesh. We are his ambassadors, commissioned by him. We have been given his name to use with his full authority. Therefore, the content and the character of our praying must be, of necessity, in unity with his nature."*



Persistence That Wins

- Intercessory prayer requires patience persistence
 - *“God never compels, and so the divine influence always allows a way of escape. No one is ever forced into a robot style of obedience. This aspect of God’s character – this respect, this courtesy, this patience – is hard for us to accept because we operate so differently.”*
 - Biblical basis
 - Isaiah 55:8-11
 - Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge – *About their need to pray always and not to lose heart.* Luke 18:1



Organized, Corporate, Intercessory Prayer

- *For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. Matt. 18:20*
- We have the promise of Christ that the power of intercessory prayer by a group is intensified
- *Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you. I Sam. 12:23*



Organized, Corporate, Intercessory Prayer

- Ways to practice
 - One woman uses pictures of missionaries to pray for them through the week
 - George Buttrick suggests beginning with prayer for our enemies, then proceeding to world leaders, the needy of the world, our friends and loved ones
 - *“The first intercession is, ‘Bless So-and-so whom I foolishly regard as an enemy. Bless So-and-so whom I have wronged. Keep them in Thy favor. Banish my bitterness.’”*



Organized, Corporate, Intercessory Prayer

- *“Remember, prayer is a way of loving others, and so courtesy, grace, and respect are always in order.”*
- If we feel no interest in this type of prayer, it is suggested we pray that God increase our love for others



Types of Intercessory Prayer

- Healing Prayer
- The Prayer of Suffering
- Authoritative Prayer
- Radical Prayer
- To be covered in next week's session