



ROOTED IN THE WORD

The Discipline of Meditation

A summary of ideas from Richard Foster's Celebration of Discipline. The full book is available in the KMC library.

In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry and crowds. Although it is strange to our modern ears, we need to learn and apply the old spiritual disciplines in order to move beyond the superficial nature of our culture—even the culture of our church.

A simple definition of Christian meditation is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word. It seems our minds want to jump to the meditation of Eastern religions whenever we hear the word meditation. In reality, Christian meditation and that of Eastern religions cannot be more different: The Eastern concept is to empty the mind, whereas in Christianity we focus on filling our mind with the voice of God.

Throughout the Bible and Christian history, meditation has been a vital part of having a relationship with God. The idea of meditating on, reflecting on and listening to God's word is mentioned some fifty-eight times in the Bible. The Psalms are full of meditation and reflection. We see Isaac meditating in Gen 24:63, Elijah listening to the "still small voice" in 1 Kings 19:9-18, and Jesus frequently escaping the crowds to find a place of seclusion (Matt 14:13).

There are many different ways to meditate and many different examples to follow but be careful not to make it harder than it needs to be. Remember what Christian meditation is: listening to and obeying God's voice. With that in mind, let's look more into some of the ways to practice meditation. Thomas a Kempis called this practice developing "a familiar friendship with Jesus." Focus on the perpetual presence of the Lord, making "he walks with me and talks with me" a basis for daily life. By meditating we create the emotional and spiritual space which allows for Christ to dwell in our hearts.

A central part of Christian meditation is repentance. As we spend time in God's word, as we enter into our quiet place, as we hear the voice of God we will invariably be humbled by our inadequacy, our unworthiness and the offensiveness of our sin. It is impossible to obey God without first repenting of who we are, what we have done and what we have not done. Do not fear repentance, rather humbly confess and allow God to forgive you. As we continually do this we move towards the inner wholeness necessary to give ourselves to God freely.

A deep desire to know God is essential for meditation. Human beings seem to have a perpetual tendency to have somebody else talk to God for them. Such a practice saves us from the need to change, for to be in the presence of God is to change. We must desire to change, to draw near to God

ourselves. Thomas Merton said, “This desire to turn is a gift of grace. Anyone who imagines he can simply begin meditating without praying for the desire and the grace to do so, will soon give up.” Begin by praying for this desire.

We learn to meditate by meditating—we just need to start and learn as we go. The *Rooted in The Word* program is designed to be a helpful tool in practicing meditation. To conclude, we will look at some helpful ideas for meditation. It is helpful to set aside a specific time and protect that time. Listening to and obeying God encompasses all of our lives, but we need to start by protecting a specific time every day to focus on this. Along with this, finding a place that you can find peace and quiet is helpful. Experiment with different postures: sitting, kneeling, prostrate, etc. Keep in mind that our outward posture reflects our inward state.

While meditating on Scripture, which is the focus of *Rooted in the Word*, focus on internalizing and personalizing the passage. Let the written Word become a living word addressed to you. This is not a time for technical studies, or analysis, or even the gathering of material to share with others. Set aside all tendencies toward arrogance and with a humble heart receive the word addressed to you. Use your imagination (which is a gift from God) to place yourself in the text, imagining that it was written for you—because it was! Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “...just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart as Mary did. That is all. That is meditation.” Bonhoeffer encouraged a full half hour of silent meditation upon Scripture every day.

Resist the temptation to pass over passages quickly and superficially. Our rushing reflects our internal state and our internal state is what needs to be transformed. Seek to live the

experience of the Scripture text, apply all your senses: Smell the sea. Hear the lap of the water along the shore. See the crowd. Feel the sun on your head and the hunger in your stomach. Taste the salt in the air. Touch the hem of his garment. As Alexander Whyte declares, “...Open your New Testament. At one time, you are the publican: at another time, you are the prodigal...at another time, you are Mary Magdalene: at another time, Peter in the porch...Till your whole New Testament is all over autobiographic of you.”

Always remember that we enter the story not as passive observers, but as active participants. Also remember that Christ is truly with us to teach us, heal us, to forgive us.

Meditating on the Word is a big shift from reading the whole Bible through in a year. Both disciplines are equally important and can be used by God to draw us closer to him. As you meditate on the *Rooted in Word* texts, remember that Christian meditation is simply hearing and obeying God’s voice. Pray that God will bless you with the desire and the ability to hear his voice and the strength to obey what you hear.