

Meditation

The Day Alone: Part 2

Discussion Question:

1. Is there a difference between praying with others and praying by yourself?
 - a. If yes, what is difficult when praying by yourself? What is easier when praying by yourself?
2. Have you ever prayed for someone who you really did not like? If yes, please share that experience.
3. How would you classify a “good” time of prayer?

What is mediation?

For the Christian, meditation is more than a mystic emptying of the mind, but rather is it a filling of it. We will reflect on what this looks like and how one can implement this practice into everyday life.

1. *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.” (Psalms 1:1–2 ESV)*
2. *“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,” (Colossians 1:9 ESV)*
3. *“The period of personal meditation is to be devoted to the Scriptures, private prayer, and intercession, and it has no other purpose... it lets us be alone with the Word.” (Bonhoeffer p. 81)*

Meditation and Scripture

1. The best way to pray is with Scripture
 - a. *“The most promising method of prayer is to allow oneself to be guided by the word of the Scriptures, to pray on the basis of a word of Scripture. In this way we shall not become the victims of our own emptiness. Prayer means nothing else but the readiness and willingness to receive and appropriate the Word, and, what is more, to accept it in one’s personal situation, particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations.” (p. 84-85)*
 - b. *“According to a word of Scripture we pray for the clarification of our day, for preservation from sin, for growth in sanctification, for faithfulness and strength in our work. And we may be certain that our prayer will be heard, because it is a response to God’s Word and promise. Because God’s Word has found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, all prayers that we pray conforming to this Word are certainly heard and answered in Jesus Christ.” (p. 85)*

Meditation and our response

1. Newer isn't always better
 - a. *"It is not necessary that we should discover new ideas in our meditation. Often this only diverts us and feeds our vanity. It is sufficient if the Word penetrates and dwells within us. ... In meditation God's Word seeks to enter in and remain with us. It strives to stir us, to work and operate in us, so that we shall not get away from it the whole day long. Then it will do its work in us, often without our being conscious of it."* (p. 83)
2. Words can be overrated
 - a. *"It is not necessary that we should be concerned in our meditation to express our thought and prayer in words. Unphrased thought and prayer, which issues only from our hearing, may often be more beneficial."* (p. 83)
3. Distractions can be helpful
 - a. *"It is one of the particular difficulties of meditation that our thoughts are likely to wander and go their own way, toward other persons or to some events in our life. Much as this may distress and shame us again and again, we must not lose heart and become anxious, or even conclude that meditation is really not something for us. When this happens it is often a help not to snatch back our thoughts convulsively, but quite calmly to incorporate into our prayer the people and the events to which our thoughts keep straying and thus in all patience return to the starting point of meditation."* (p. 85)
4. Feelings can be overrated
 - a. *"Above all, it is not necessary that we should have any unexpected, extraordinary experiences in meditation. ... There will be times when we feel a great spiritual dryness and apathy, an aversion, even an inability to meditate. We dare not be balked by such experiences. Above all we must not allow them to keep us from adhering to our meditation period with great patience and fidelity."* (p. 83-84)
 - b. *"It is not good for us to take too seriously the many untoward experiences we have with ourselves in meditation... We must center our attention on the Word alone and leave consequences to its action."* (p. 84)
5. We will know we have had a good time of meditation when we have sought God and deeper roots in the Scriptures
 - a. *"'Seek God, not happiness' – this is the fundamental rule of all meditation. If you seek God alone, you will gain happiness: that is its promise."* (p. 84)
 - b. *Has [meditation] lodged the Word of God so securely and deeply in his heart that it holds and fortifies him, impelling him to active love, to obedience, to good works?* (p. 88)

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think meditation is an important aspect of the Christian life?

2. Have you ever struggled with these types of responses in quiet time?

Intercession is a major part of meditation

Intercession is praying for others. It's easy to pray for our friends and those people we like, but the call of a Christian is to love even those who we hate or hate us, including those who are our spiritual brothers and sisters.

"A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, of it collapses." (p. 86)

Intercession reminds us of being equal with those who frustrate us.

1. *"I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner... There is no dislike, no personal tension, no estrangement that cannot be overcome by intercession as far as our side of it is concerned. Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the fellowship must enter every day." (p. 86)*
2. *"Intercession means no more than to bring our brother into the presence of God, to see him under the Cross of Jesus as a poor human being and sinner in need of grace. Then everything in him that repels us falls away; we see him in all his destitution and need. His need and his sin become so heavy and oppressive that we feel them as our own, and we can do nothing else but pray." (p. 86)*
3. *"To make intercession means to grant our brother the same right that we have received, namely, to stand before Christ and share in his mercy. This makes it clear that intercession is also a daily service we owe to God and our brother. He who denies his neighbor the service of praying for him denies him the service of a Christian." (p.86-87)*

The more specific the intercession the better

1. *"Intercession is not general and vague but very concrete: a matter of definite persons and definite difficulties and therefore of definite petitions. The more definite my intercession becomes, the more promising it is." (p. 87)*

Meditation and the Body

Meditation helps us focus on God and His Word, which speaks to us.

1. *"In our meditation we ponder the chosen text on the strength of the promise that it has something utterly personal to say to us for this day and for our Christian life, that it is not only God's Word for the Church, but also God's Word for us individually. We expose ourselves to the specific word until it addresses us personally. And when we do this, we are doing no more than the simplest untutored Christian does every day; we read God's Word as God's Word for us." (p.82)*
2. *"[Meditation] lets us be alone with the Word. And in so doing it gives us solid ground on which to stand and clear directions as to the steps we must take." (p. 81)*

When we know how God is speaking to us, it will help us love our community and not work towards its destruction

1. *“The individual must realize that his hours of aloneness react upon the community. In his solitude he can sunder and besmirch the fellowship, or he can strengthen and hallow it. Every act of self-control of the Christian is also a service to the fellowship.” (p. 88-89)*
2. *“On the other hand, there is no sin in thought, word or deed, no matter how personal or secret, that does not inflict injury upon the whole fellowship. We are members of a body, not only when we choose to be, but in our whole existence. Every member serves the whole body, either to its health or to its destruction. This is no mere theory; it is a spiritual reality.” (p. 89)*

So for the betterment of the entire Body, meditate.

1. *“Since meditation on the Scriptures, prayer, and intercession are a service we owe and because the grace of God is found in this service, we should train ourselves to set apart a regular hour for it, as we do for every other service we perform.” (p. 87)*
2. *“Even if initially meditation means nothing, [except] that we are performing a service that we owe to God, it would still be sufficient.” (p. 81)*