

# Contemplative Prayer

**2 Corinthians 3:18** *But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (NAS)*

The heart of contemplative prayer is desiring God for his own sake, not for his gifts.

## DESCRIPTION OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

1. Contemplative prayer is an exercise in letting go of the centrality of the false self.
2. It is a non-reflective exercise intended to increase our intimacy with God and awareness of God's presence.
3. It is an attempt to place ourselves at God's disposal requesting that he take our purification in hand.
4. It is opening to God at the level of the unconscious.
5. It is a means to facilitating an abiding state of union with God.
6. It is a method of reducing the ordinary obstacles to our awareness of God's presence with us.
7. It is an exercise in learning self-surrender.
8. It is an exercise that enables us to bring back into the daily routines of life not just the thought of God, but the spontaneous awareness of his abiding presence in and through everything. **Eph 4:6** *One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (NIV)*
9. It is being still in order to know God (Psalm 46:10).
10. It is a method designed to deepen our relationship with Christ.
11. It is our consent to God's presence and action within.
12. It is an exercise of faith, hope, and love.
13. It is a movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion.
14. It is a discipline which habituates us to the language of God--silence.
15. This is not an attempt to make the mind a blank, but to move beyond discursive thinking and affective prayer to the level of communing with God in a more intimate exchange of love and being present to one another.
16. The goal of this prayer is not the emptiness of thoughts or conversation as it is the emptiness of self. Its only desire is to give itself away.
17. Contemplative prayer is not an attempt at focused concentration or an exercise of attention. It is an exercise of intention. It is cultivating of the will in an attitude or disposition of ongoing self-surrender.
18. It is an activity aimed at fostering the conviction and realization that God is living in us.
19. It is an act of love.
20. Contemplative prayer is an exercise in surrendering our humanness to become a vehicle for divine expression in the world, which is why we were created. (Genesis 1:26-27; Galatians 2:20)

## CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER IS NOT

1. A technique
2. A relaxation exercise
3. A form of self-hypnosis
4. A parapsychological phenomenon

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER AND EASTERN MEDITATION

1. Eastern methods are primarily concerned with awareness. Contemplative prayer is concerned with divine love between God and a person.
2. Eastern traditions put the greater emphasis on what the self can do and hence contain the innate hazard of identifying the true self with God. Christian tradition recognizes God present but distinct from the true self. Our unique individuality was created by God and for God as a vehicle for his expression in the world.
3. Eastern methods seek to get in touch with man's spiritual nature by concentrating on a mantra or some other method of forced concentration. Contemplative prayer presupposes a personal relationship. There is a movement of self-surrender to a personal God, not merely concentration to get in touch with our spiritual nature.
4. Eastern methods focus on what a person can do through focused concentration. Contemplative prayer focuses on surrendering to what only God can do.
5. Contemplative prayer is not a relaxation exercise such as breathing techniques or yoga. It is a faith relationship where we open ourselves to the living, personal God.

## DIFFICULTY IN DESCRIBING THIS TO OTHERS

1. It is one thing to experience the grace of God's imminent nearness; it is another to be able to communicate it.
2. Mystical language is not theological language.
3. As your inner experience of God deepens, it becomes more difficult to speak about it because it doesn't enter into the ordinary arenas of life as such. It is touching God who is in all and through all (Ephesians 4:6).

## DANGERS TO BE AWARE OF

1. Don't overdo it. Balance of the active and interior life are important. This prayer is meant to integrate the prayer and silence into the active life.

2. Spiritual consolation can be so satisfying that it becomes a trap. It can become an act of selfish withdrawal rather than self-surrender.
3. It's beauty is so incomparable, its effects so affirming, its power so transforming that it can lead to spiritual gluttony. Beware of seeking consolations instead of God.
4. Use common sense, do not overdo it, and guard the purity of your intentions.

## BENEFITS OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

1. It develops detachment: it strikes at the heart of the false self system.
2. By means of Contemplative prayer the Spirit heals the roots of self-centeredness and becomes the Source of our conscious activity.
3. Contemplative prayer fosters a whole different attitude toward one's feelings; it puts them in a different frame of reference. When you are constantly being reaffirmed by the presence of God in the deep silence of your heart, you are no longer afraid to be contradicted or imposed upon. Humility will grow to the point of being able to learn something from insults and humiliations without being overwhelmed by feelings of self-depreciation or revenge. God gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:6).
4. This prayer helps us to become aware of the presence of God.
5. This prayer leads us below the conversational level into the development of the communion level.
6. Contemplative prayer is a process of liberation from everything that keeps us from being totally honest with ourselves. The more confidence you have in God's presence with you and his love for you, the more you can face the truth about yourself. In the light, we finally are free to begin healing.
7. Although great interior peace is experienced in Contemplative prayer, that is not the goal. Also, the purpose is not the union with God in prayer, but union with God in life.

**2 Pet 1:4** *...he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (NIV)*

8. Contemplative prayer brings about changes in our nervous system and psyche. You come to realize that you no longer have the problems you had before. The restructuring of consciousness is the fruit of regular practice. That is why it makes no sense to aim at particular experiences. The Christian life is lived, not by trying, but by training.
9. Interior freedom is the goal of this prayer. Not freedom to do what you like, but freedom to do what God likes--freedom to be your true self and to become "conformed to the image of Christ" (Romans 8:29).
10. Interior silence gained through the prayer will become more and more available throughout your daily life. Reality will become more "transparent." Its divine Source will begin to shine through and you will have eyes to see your heavenly Father "over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6).

## CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER AND DYING TO SELF

**Luke 9:23-24** *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*(NIV)

**Rom 6:11** *Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* (NAS)

**Eph 4:22-24** *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.* (NIV)

**Col 3:9-10** *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* (NIV)

1. The light of God is always shining in us (John 1:4-5). But under the influence of the false self and its ego trips, we have the shades drawn. Contemplative prayer aids us in self-surrender in order for Christ to be formed in us.
2. Contemplative prayer assists us in giving everything back to God.
3. Contemplative prayer releases our emotional blocks and insights into the dark side of our personality emerge and multiply. We believe we do many things out of good intentions, often it's not true. Before, we did not realize the truth of how "deceitfully wicked" the heart could really be. Contemplative prayer finds Jesus' truth: *"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"* (**Matthew 5:8**).
4. As humility and trust deepen, you can fully acknowledge the dark side of your personality more easily. Eventually you will reach the center of your human poverty and powerlessness and feel happy to be there. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven"* (**Matthew 5:3**).
5. The awareness of God now becomes more continuous because there are not unconscious obstacles to interfere with it. There is nothing wrong with reality. Jesus lived in this very same reality and always did that which pleased the Father (John 8:29).
6. As God brings the true self, the "new man" to life in interior silence, we begin to share the world view of Jesus. His things become more important than our things. His honor becomes more important than our honor. His pleasure becomes more important than our pleasure. Our lives are laid down for the One who laid down his life for us.

## METHODOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

1. Jesus, nor the other biblical writers teach a specific method of accomplishing the biblical commands for spiritual growth. We are told to "lose our lives," "die to ourselves," "put off the old man," "put on the new man," etc...but we are not told how.
2. God knows that any one formula is not right for all individuals. Disciples are hand-crafted by God, not mass produced by a method.
3. The real issue is results.
4. Spiritual disciplines that are most effective in producing the results mentioned above are those that are designed to reduce the monumental illusion that God is absent. Since the way we feel is usually the way we act, we live as if God were absent. Whatever we can do to put an end to that illusion is a great benefit in our spiritual journey.
5. **Since Jesus does not teach specific methods then any method is valid as long as it does not violate scripture.** The Holy Spirit is above every method and discipline. We should always make it our aim to keep in step with him (Gal. 5:25). He alone is the source of true transformation.

**2 Cor 3:18** *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* (ESV)

## THE METHODOLOGY OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

1. Choose a word to use as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you. Using this word during prayer will help you to narrow your attention to one desire and bring you ever closer to the non-cognitive experience of God. (i.e. "One" / "Jesus" / "Abba" / "Ma-ra-na-tha")

This approach to prayer seeks to go below the level of communication to the level of communion. For it to provide the most benefit of intimacy it must be a non-cognitive experience. Like holding hands or kissing, you don't analyze the touch or the kiss, the other person's feelings, nor even your own feelings. To do so would be to lessen the depth of intimacy and union.

So in this approach to God we want to avoid analyzing the experience, God's feelings, and even our own. We just want to present ourselves in simple intention before the Lord.

Once you choose a word, do not change it during a prayer period. The word is not chosen for its *content* but for its *intent*. Some people find a simple *inward gaze* toward God to be more suitable than using a word. In this case, one consents to God's presence and activity by turning inwardly toward God

as if gazing upon him. Of course, since he is invisible, there is nothing to see! The same guidelines concerning the word apply to the gaze.

2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and then silently introduce your word as a symbol of your intention to surrender to God's presence and activity. Let the word simply arise and be present within you.
3. Whenever you become aware of thoughts, ever-so-gently return to the word.

Thoughts is an umbrella term for every perception including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, reflections, or commentaries. Thoughts are a normal part of contemplative prayer. We are not trying to empty our minds of thoughts. We are only seeking to be detached from them, while maintaining our one intention--surrender to God.

*Returning ever-so-gently to your word is the only activity we initiate during this prayer.* Do it with minimum effort. Return to it when you become aware of any thoughts.

The word may become vague, remain only as an impulse of your will, or disappear. That's okay. The point is stillness in God's presence, not the word. You do this kind of prayer only because you are in love and want to be with your God and Friend.

This may seem like you are doing nothing. But practicing this prayer is not doing nothing. It is a very gentle but powerful activity. The will just keeps consenting to God by returning to the word (or inward gaze).

4. At the close of your prayer, remain in silence with your eyes closed for a couple of minutes. You may then want to pray quietly within your heart the Lord's Prayer.

You should work toward practicing the prayer for a minimum of twenty minutes. Two periods a day are recommended, one first thing in the morning, and one in the afternoon or early evening. Praying this way after a meal will encourage drowsiness. Wait for at least an hour after any meal. Praying in this way just before bed may disturb one's sleep pattern.