

Christian Meditation

Your Daily Practice

Sample

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Laurence Freeman, OSB

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Introduction

This little book originated in the need to express the essentials of meditation in the Christian tradition for people leading weekly meditation groups in our world-wide community of Christian meditation. But because these essentials are so simple – simplicity itself – the book can serve equally well as an introduction to meditation for anyone wishing to deepen his spiritual life.

These essentials are practical. I hope they can help you to open up a richer dimension of consciousness in your ordinary life by undertaking the simple daily practice of silence and stillness.

Meditation is simple. That is why it so easily becomes complicated. This book suggests a way of understanding and of undertaking such a simple path for people who are likely to have basic questions and who may even have been led to think that meditation is complex and difficult.

If we can be encouraged actually to meditate, rather than just think about it, the questions begin to be answered, and simplified, by the experience itself. Any book, talk, or course on meditation is valuable only if it leads directly to the threshold of the experience of silence. These six chapters can be read as a whole and also used as part

of a series of introductory talks for meditation groups or adapted to a single introductory talk. Personal witness and the authenticity of personal conviction are essential elements in any spiritual communication. But above all, we teach meditation primarily by meditating with people.

The further reading list at the end of the book provides a resource to broaden your introduction to meditation in the Christian tradition. Practice will show how meditation, within any tradition, becomes a bridge of peace and unity, and how it overcomes all barriers and every kind of resistance to the “abundant life” promised by Jesus.

Laurence Freeman, OSB
The World Community
for Christian Meditation

What Is Prayer?

A very old definition of prayer described it as “the raising of the heart *and* mind to God.” What is the “mind,” what is the “heart”? The mind is what thinks – it questions, plans, worries, fantasizes. The heart is what knows – it loves. The mind is the organ of knowledge, the heart, the organ of love. Mental consciousness must eventually give way and open up to the fuller way of knowing which is heart consciousness. Love is complete knowledge.

Most of our training in prayer, however, is limited to the mind. We were taught as children to say our prayers, to ask God for what we or others need. But this is only half of the mystery of prayer.

The other half is the prayer of the heart where we are not thinking of God or talking to him or asking for anything. We are simply being with God who is in us in the Holy Spirit whom Jesus has given us. The Holy Spirit is the love, the relationship of love that flows between Father and Son. It is this Spirit Jesus has breathed into every

human heart. Meditation, then, is the prayer of the heart uniting us with the human consciousness of Jesus in the Spirit.

We do not even know how to pray but the Spirit himself prays *within us*.

Romans 8:26

For mental prayer – praying in words or using thoughts about God – we can make rules. There are many “methods of mental prayer,” but for the prayer of the heart there is no technique, no rules: “Where the Spirit is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

The Holy Spirit in the modern Church, especially since the Vatican Council in the early 1960’s, has been teaching us to recover this other dimension of our prayer. The Council documents on the Church and the liturgy both emphasized the need to develop “a contemplative orientation” in the spiritual life of Christians today. All are called to the fullness of the experience of Christ, whatever their way of life.

This means that we must move beyond the level of mental prayer: talking to God, thinking about God, asking God for our needs. We must go to the depths, to where the spirit of Jesus himself is praying in our hearts, in the deep silence of his union with our Father in the Holy Spirit.

Contemplative prayer is not the privilege of monks and nuns or special mystical types. It is a dimension of prayer to which we are called. It is not about extraordinary experiences or altered states of consciousness. It is what Thomas Aquinas called the “simple enjoyment of the truth.” William Blake spoke of the need to “cleanse the doors of perception” so that we can see everything as it truly is: infinite.

This is all about the contemplative consciousness as lived in ordinary life. Meditation leads us to this and it is part of the whole mystery of prayer in the life of any person who is seeking fullness of being.

Think of prayer as a great wheel: The wheel turns our whole life towards God. Prayer is an essential part of a fully human life. If we do not pray, we are only half-alive and our faith is only half-developed.

The spokes of the wheel represent the different types of prayer. We pray in different ways,



at different times, and according to how we feel. Different people have preferred ways of prayer. The spokes represent, for example, the Eucharist, the other sacraments, spiritual prayer, petitionary and intercessory prayer, charismatic prayer, devotions, the rosary, etc.

But what makes all these different forms of prayer Christian is that they are centred in Christ. The spokes are the forms or expressions of prayer which fit into the hub of the wheel which is the prayer of Jesus himself.

His prayer is the essential meaning and source of a Christian's prayer. We could paraphrase St. Paul: I pray no longer but Christ prays in me. So, in this model of the wheel, all forms of prayer flow into and out of the spirit of Jesus worshipping God in and on behalf of creation. All forms of prayer are valid. All are effective. They are informed by the prayer of the human consciousness of Jesus which is in us by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

This is a faith understanding of the wheel of prayer. We are not thinking about all this at the time of meditation itself. Experientially, the wheel teaches us something of great importance as well. At the hub of the wheel, at the centre of prayer, you find stillness. Without stillness at the centre, there could be no movement or growth at the circumference. Meditation is the work of finding

and becoming one with this stillness, which is the hallmark of the Spirit. "Be still and know that I am God!"

Contemplative prayer is total openness to and oneness with the prayer of Jesus. Contemplation is being silent, still and simple. And the heart of the prayer of Jesus is his communion of love with the Father, his turning his attention to the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

Christian prayer, therefore, means entering the life of the Holy Trinity in, through and with the human mind and heart of Jesus.

For many people, prayer is basically an appeal to God for special help in particular times of distress. It is natural to express our faith and trust in God in this way and at such times. But what is our faith in God? Is it not that, as Jesus says, God knows our needs before we ask?

We do not express our needs to God either to inform God of what he does not know or to persuade God to change his mind. If we do pray for our needs, it is above all because doing so deepens our trust that God knows and God cares.

Unless this faith is clear and deep, our prayer can easily be bogged down in an arrested stage of development, stuck at the level of the ego. For many Christians this is the crisis of their faith today, and it reflects the often shallow level of

Christian spirituality.

The prayer of the heart, contemplative prayer, meditation, is essentially the prayer of faith. In silence we accept that God knows our needs and that this knowledge is the love which creates and will eventually complete us.

If this helps to answer the question “What is prayer?” the next question is “How do we pray?” Only by praying can we actually discover what prayer means and that prayer must occupy the heart of any really meaningful life.