

The Way of Christian Meditation
The Listening Silences of Meditation
Exodus 20:18-21

Exodus 20:18-21~ ¹⁸ Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off ¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” ²⁰ Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”
²¹ The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

I. Introduction

For the past few months, we have been looking at a few disciplines or activities that great men and women of God have cultivated in their life. These sensational saints wanted a meaningful life with their God. They wanted to come face to face with their Savior and their Creator for there is no greater joy than meeting our Savior. And to do this, they searched the Scriptures and noted several activities that must be cultivated and disciplined in order to have a rich, meaningful, well-balance life with God.

All relationships require intentional, meaningful interactions with the one we profess to love. And without these intentional interactions we become distant and destitute in our relationship. But please, please note that this distance and destitution in our relationship is always, always gradual ... it is a slow gradual movement away from our love. It is never a big blow out. It is very gradual. It is so gradual that we sometimes do not even notice the distancing until the love relationship becomes destitute and even dissolved if we are not careful. We must never take our relationship for granted. All relationships require intentional, meaningful interactions ... plural ... "interactions".

Think about the beach. You come to the beach with your love. You stake out a nice spot where you and your love one may recline and enjoy the day together. You then walk into the ocean just to cool down but stay close enough to your love one. But then the tide comes, gradually pushing away at you. There is a constant, gradual push. Now in your mind, you feel like you have been standing in one place, right. You feel like you haven't moved. You are just standing there, being pushed back and forth ... gradually pushed by the tide. Next thing you notice as you look back over to the shore, you are far away from where you have staked out your place. There is a great distance for where you are to the one that you love.

Our relationship with God is in the same fashion. Everything in the world gradually pushes us away from this wonderful, intimate relationship with God. Push ... push. We feel like we are standing our ground, still having that intimate relationship with God. Push ... push. And if we do not purposefully and intentionally check our bearing every single day, push ... push, we become distant and destitute in our relationship with God. In that time, it is harder to come back.

II. Three Fundamental Disciplines of Godly People

Now the great saints, the men and women of God (that is what we are ... saints), were given revelations through the Sacred Text. There are three fundamental elements to help them harness a rich and vibrant relationship with God. We have been given revelation on how we can come face to face with our Savior ... to know Him ... to love Him ... to be with Him ... and to enjoy Him forever.

Three fundamental elements ... three fundamental disciplines that stand against the gradual pushing tide.

1. In Worship, we Give to God.

The first discipline is worship. And in worship, we give to God.

If you want to refresh yourselves on how to worship God, you can logon to our YouTube Channel, Forgiven Life Community Church, and listen to series titled "Glory to God: Proclaiming God's Goodness."

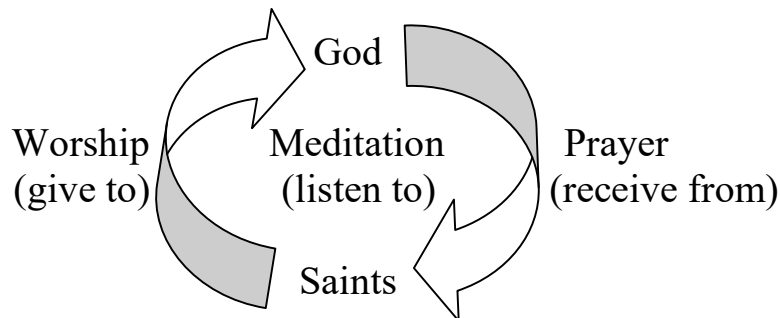
2. In Prayer, we Receive from God

The second discipline is prayer. And in prayer, we receive from God. Praying is asking and then receiving.

If you want to refresh yourselves on prayer, you can listen to the series "Prayer: Walking With God" on our YouTube Channel.

3. In Meditation, we Listen to God

And there is a third discipline that all great men and women of God practice. That is meditation. And in meditation, we listen to God.



We have been looking at meditation for the past three weeks now. Meditation is just that. You see, in meditation, we contemplate on God's word. We reflect on God's word. We then personalize it and internalize God's word *in our own life* ... as it applies to us.

Meditation is about me. It is not about you. It is about me and how God's word ... God's revealed word ... lives out in my life.

It is Thomas Merton who notes that "Meditation has no point and no reality unless it is firmly rooted in *life*."¹ The Bible is the written word of God that can change lives. The Word of God has to apply to our life in order for it to change our lives. That is completion of contemplation mediation.

In other words, meditation is listening to God. It is listening to His words.

Richard Foster says that "meditation is the one thing that can sufficiently redirect our lives so that we can deal with human life successfully."²

And in order to redirect our lives, we first must listen. Listen to the "Living Voice" of God through the pages of His Revealed Word. And then think about what was said ... desiring to live that "Living Voice" in our life.

Frederick Faber expresses in his poetry the cry of the heart of those who love God:

Only to sit and think of God,
Oh what a joy it is!
To think the thought, to breathe the Name
Earth has no higher bliss.³

Anything that is "worth its salt" takes time, effort, and energy.

III. Reasons For Refusing Meditation (Listening Silences)

In the Bible, God speaks. Elijah spent many days and many nights in solitude and silence. He was alone in the wilderness learning to listen and discern the small still voice of Yahweh in 1 Kings 19:9-18.

Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up" in Isaiah 6, and then he heard the voice of God speaking and saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8).

You see, God is speaking and is always speaking. And God speaks to these men not because there is something special about them, not because they have some great ability. God speaks to them because they are willing to listen.

Jesus says in John 5 verse 30:

¹ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), p. 85 as quoted by Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, 1998), p. 22.

² Foster, 22.

³ Cited by Foster, 23.

John 5:30~³⁰ “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear [that is, Jesus hears the Father's voice], I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

God is speaking. God is always speaking. Mostly in today's time, He speaks through His written words, the Bible. And for those who want to hear God's voice can ... through meditation ... through listening silences.

But knowing that God wants to speak to us only if we listen, why do we not want to listen? Let me give you some reasons. Turn with me to Exodus 20, starting at verse 18.

God had just delivered Israel from bondage under the cruel hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. As Israel was standing on the foot of the mountain, God formed His new nation, a holy nation ... a Kingdom of Priests who would mediate God's blessing to the world (Exodus 19:5-6).

God descended on the Mount Sinai to talk with His people, a Kingdom of Priests. And as God descended, smoke and fire, thunder and lightning appeared. The earth quake and the mountain rumbled.

Exodus 19:18~¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

And in the sound of thunder, God spoke.

Exodus 19:19~¹⁹ And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

I do not know about you, but I would be ecstatic ... the privilege to hear God speak, to hear His voice. I am sure I would be terrified and fearful mixed with excitement and awe. But I would want to hear God's voice. I would want to listen to what He has to say. But not so with Israel. They did not want to listen to God. Why?

1. First, people want a Mediator. (Exodus 20:19)

Exodus 20:18-19~¹⁸ Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off ¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”

Israel did not want to listen to God themselves. They wanted someone else to listen to God and speak to them. In other words, they wanted to hear God's word second handed.

Foster notes that, "Human beings seem to have a perpetual tendency to have somebody else talk to God for them. We are content to have the message second hand."⁴

⁴ Foster, 24.

But this was not the only time Israel wanted God's message second handed, that is, through a mediator. Centuries later, Israel rejected God as their King and demanded a human king to lead them and to speak to them on God's behalf.

1 Samuel 8:7~⁷ And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

Wow! Amazing and unreal! But is it unreal? One author penned, "The history of religion is the story of an almost desperate scramble to have a king, a mediator, a priest, a pastor, a go-between. In this way we do not need to go to God ourselves."⁵

I find this hard to comprehend. But most people rather have someone else talk with God, someone else listen to God, and then bring the message of God to them. They do not want the wonderful discipline and awesome privilege of listening to God themselves. Instead, they rather "hire" a pastor to speak to God on their behalf.

By the way, not all pastors listen to God. They also want a mediator to tell them what to tell their congregation. So the pastors are getting God's message second hand, and the congregation is getting the message third hand.

When I was in seminary, we had a group project where our group was to discuss and develop at project concerning the End Times. My group was made of several students who were already pastoring a church. The object was to expand our thinking. As we were doing the project together, I disagreed with my fellow student/pastor about the End Times. I proceeded to give a defense of what the Bible teaches about the End Times in my perspective which I thought was convincing. But my fellow student/pastor said, "Those are some interesting points that you made, but I just teach what I was taught."

That is disheartening and sad. Here was a pastor who did not want to do the work himself. He just wanted someone to tell him so he could tell others.

For me, I want to hear God for myself. And I want my congregation to hear God for themselves. I do not need a mediator, saved Jesus Christ. And you do not need a mediator. Jesus is the only Mediator that we need.

We need to prepare our own food. Thank God for teachers and preachers and pastors. But I must always constantly check what they say against the Revealed Word of God. I must get my teaching and training directly from what God has revealed in His word.

⁵ Ibid, 24.

2. Second, people are Afraid. (Exodus 20:18)

Exodus 20:18~ ¹⁸Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off ...

They were afraid. What were they afraid of? Let me give you two things that they were afraid of.

a. One: they were afraid of Judgment. (Exodus 20:20-21).

They were fearful that they could not face God without incurring the judgment of God for the way they live.

Exodus 20:20-21~ ²⁰Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” ²¹The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

They were not ready to meet God because of what was in their heart. They were not fully dedicated to God. A few days after this event, while Moses went up the mountain to listen to God, the children of Israel were playing the harlot at the foot of the mountain in God's presence.

Brothers and Sisters, to enter into the presence of God and listen to Him is a fearful thing. Meditation is very threatening. To listen to God is fearful matter for those whose heart is not sold out to Him. That was why Israel wanted a mediator, so that they may not incur judgment and die.

But for those who love God, we all can listen to God personally through meditation. We all can listen to God in our silence and solitude.

Israel wanted someone to listen to God on their behalf because they were afraid of judgment. Note the second reason why Israel was afraid.

b. Two: they were afraid of His Word. (Hebrews 12:18-21)

The author of Hebrews, recounting this story at the foot of Mount Sinai gives us a different insight to why Israel was fearful.

Hebrews 12:18-21~ ¹⁸For you have not come to *a mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, ¹⁹and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. ²⁰For they could not bear the command, “IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT

WILL BE STONED.”²¹ And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, “I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling.”

They could not bear to hear the words spoken by God. They did not want to hear the commands of God. Once they heard the words of God, they realized that being in the presence of God was a risky business. Being in the presence of God is not for the casual observers.

Hearing God's word is not for the Curious but for the Committed. It is a fearful thing. Why? Well, that is the third reason I believe Israel was afraid.

3. Third, people do not want to Obeying. (Exodus 20:19)

Exodus 20:19~¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”

To be in the presence of God is to invite change. To encounter God's word is to invites a response to His word. Israel heard God's command, and they did not want to hear any more. They did not want to obey as would be seen a few days later.

But that is what mediation is. Meditation is simply to contemplate on God's word for the result of hearing His voice and obey His words. That is it. Remember the command of God to Joshua?

Joshua 1:8~⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

IV. Conclusion

So there are at least three things that keep us from entering into meditation.

1. We want a Mediator because we rather have someone else talk and listen to God than us. It takes time, effort, and energy to listen to God and some rather not be bothered by it.
2. We are afraid. We are afraid of His judgment and we are afraid of His word. To enter into His presence involves changes, one way or another. We are held accountable by God for what we hear.
3. We don't like to obey. We don't like to change. We are comfortable with where we are. We just don't want to change.

But for those of us who desire to hear and listen to God, it is a reward in and of itself. It requires us to mediate. It requires us to listen in silence. I will conclude with these words from Richard Foster:

In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in "muchness" and "manyness," he will rest satisfied. Psychiatrist Carl Jung once remarked, "Hurry is not *of* the Devil; it *is* the Devil."⁶

V. The Blessing

Presider: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May the love of our Lord Jesus Christ be unto you.

Congregation: And also to you.

⁶ Ibid., 15.