

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER: Shut up and Listen

At the very center of our being, we are hushed. The experience is more profound than mere silence or lack of words. There is stillness, to be sure, but it is a listening stillness. Richard Foster

(In order to talk about contemplative prayer, let us begin our study in 5 minutes of silent prayer.)

1. What was that experience like for you? How do you feel about silence in general? When do you experience silence?

Contemplative Prayer is the one discipline that can free us from our addiction to words. Richard Foster

2. What does an addiction to words produce in our daily lives? In our spirituality? In our art?

The discipline of prayer makes us stop and listen, wait and look, taste and see, pay attention and be aware. The ordinary response to our world is to look impatiently for new attractions and distractions. To listen patiently is a radical displacement that creates unusual discomfort. Henri Nouwen

3. Why do we find it more difficult to listen rather than talk in relationships? How does that carry over into our dialogue with God?

Believers throughout the Bible were used to putting pauses in their lives days, Sabbaths, feasts and holy days. This habit of structured pauses made it easier for them to take spontaneous pauses during the day. Today, we are taught to pause over words in the Scripture, but we are often illiterate to the many other words that call to us. Ken Gire

4. Psalm 46:10 states “Be still and know that I am God.” This is a very small verse with a rather large command. What does stillness look like practically? What does it mean to “know that [He] is God?”

This kind of prayer is more an experience of the heart than of the head. But this stress upon feelings disturbs us. We have been trained throughout our lives to distrust our feelings. Thomas Merton

5. “Listening to” and “hearing from” God is a process of opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit. “And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us” (I Jn 3:24). It involves knowing truth about God and about ourselves. When you are silent and listening to God, how then do you know it is God who talks to you? What must we know of God? Of scripture?

Our greatest dignity as creatures is not in initiative but in response. God speaks, we hear. He knocks, we open. C.S. Lewis

6. As Christians, we often want to use prayer as a means to SAY something to God. Similarly, as artists we often want to SAY something with our art. In what ways does contemplative prayer free us to RESPOND to life rather than narrate it?

We do not expect much from the moment. Every attempt to “live it through” is so contrary to our usual habits that our impulses rise up in protest. But listening prayer is patient prayer, involving the constant choice not to run from the present moment. But when discipline keeps us faithful, we are drawn towards prayer – not by our impulses but by the Holy Spirit. In our inner displacement we experience the compassionate God.
Henri Nouwen

The Haven mission statement is:

To empower artists to influence the culture for Christ.

Discussion Guidelines:

1. Allow everyone a chance to speak. If you are bursting with ideas and tend to share a lot – great – but occasionally pause a bit before you go, sometimes the quieter ones are just waiting for their chance and they need a little space before they go.
2. Respect the opinions of others, and refrain from giving advice.
3. Keep discussion focused on the material being studied.
4. Maintain the confidentiality of personal things shared within the group.