

Prayer Course: Week 8

Contemplative prayer:

Practising the presence of God

Introduction:

Contemplative prayer is probably the simplest of the prayer form and for many one of the hardest. There is very little method to it, if indeed there is any. It is simply being with God.

Background:

Contemplative prayer has been a bedrock of Christian spirituality since the very beginning with the Early Church and then the practice became formalised in the monastic traditions. Its proponents run a varied line through Christian practice and thought, with St Paul clearly experiencing contemplative moments, and those who practised contemplation include Augustine of Hippo, Julian of Norwich, Br Lawrence, George Fox, Meister Eckhart, the Wesleys and many more. The clearest explanations and descriptions are 'The Cloud of Unknowing' by an anonymous medieval monk and 'Practising the presence of God' by Br Lawrence. But they all boil down to noticing that God is with you, truly deeply with you, as St Augustine says: "Closer to me than I am to myself". To really recognise that truth during daily life is contemplation. Easy to say but hard for us to do, as our desire to focus on ourselves or distract ourselves comes crashing back in the whole time. In the process of practising the presence of God you simply notice that you are no longer focused on God's presence and return your focus to God, again and again.

Purpose:

Practising the presence of God is all about noticing God's presence with us now, here, in this situation, God is deeply with us. To notice this involves abandoning ourselves and we find that hard. Prayer ultimately is not about you or

me or even us, it is about God. This practice tries to cut straight to that heart of prayer. God is with us all.

Process:

- Decide how long the session will be, I suggest 20-30 minutes. If you wish, set an alarm so you do not need to worry about time.
- Get comfortable.
- Pray for God's help in learning to notice him.
- Notice that God's presence with you, with other people, with the whole of creation.
- You will get distracted, keep returning to God.
- If the distraction gets too much, just pray "Help" with all your heart.
- Then return to noticing God's presence.
- At the end of the session say the Lord's Prayer.
- Try this in your daily life as well.

Further reading and resources:

'The Cloud of Unknowing' Anon
'Practising the Presence of God' Br Lawrence
'New Seeds of Contemplation' Thomas Merton
'Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation' Thomas Keating