
CONTEMPLATION



WE ARE HASTY PEOPLE BENT ON EXPERIENCING as much of life as we can. The faster we move, the more we can see, do and produce. The more we network, the more options will be ours. The more options, the more living we can do. For many of us the very notion of slowing down or saying no to an option is repugnant. We crowd our schedules and run late, but at least we are getting our money's worth. No wonder contemplation has fallen on hard times. In a world where people anchor their identity on the shifting seas of performance and accomplishments, contemplation seems inefficient and too unproductive for the daily grind.

But it is contemplation, not just having experiences, that truly opens us wide to life. Experiences can be lost to us in the mad rush to simply accumulate more. Contemplation invites us to enter in to the moment with a heart alive to whatever might happen. It is not just thinking about or analyzing an event or person. Contemplation asks us to see with faith, hope and love. It asks us to seek God and the “meanings” threaded through our days and years, so that our experience of being embedded in the triune life of God deepens and grows.

A contemplative person recognizes that every experience offers more than meets the eye. They know that “bidden or unbidden, God is present.” Consequently contemplatives are open to seeing the unseen world. They sift the days for symbols and scan the sunsets for meaning. They enter into the being of life, alert to transcendencies in ordinary things. They believe God may be found and revered if one is prepared to notice how marvelously mysterious and personal life in this world is. So contemplatives invite us into the moment and tell us to *be*.

A. W. Tozer writes in *The Roots of Righteousness*, “Historically the West has tended to throw its chief emphasis upon doing and the East upon being. . . . Were human nature perfect there would be no discrepancy between being and doing. The unfallen man would simply live from within, without giving it a thought. His actions would be the true expression of their inner being.” But being is not rewarded in our society today. Doing is what counts.

Doing is important. But eventually we come to the end of doing. Tasks get done sooner

or later. Experiences end for better or for worse. But we never come to the end of a “being.” Being is a mystery that originated in the God who says, “I AM WHO I AM.” Knowing God or another human being completely will always be beyond what we can know. But through contemplation, intimacy with God and others can grow. Gazing on God, our neighbor or the created order with faith, hope and love can increase our awareness and experience of both. Contemplation can lead us out of ourselves and into realities of which we only skimmed the surface before.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you respond to the word *contemplation*?
2. What sort of things do you contemplate? What happens to you when you contemplate?
3. How do you contemplate your spiritual journey and relationship with God?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Contemplate Jesus. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Become quiet.
 - Express to God your intention to rest in his love. Use your imagination: you may want to picture yourself leaning on Jesus’ breast as John did or sitting at Jesus’ feet as Mary did or kneeling before Jesus as other desperate people before you have. Be with Jesus. (When thoughts and distractions interrupt, gently return to Jesus. Begin again and again.)
 - What is it like to receive God’s gift of new beginnings?
2. Palms down, palms up.
 - Sit comfortably with both feet on the floor and your hands on your lap. Breathe deeply and relax. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of Jesus.
 - Turn your palms down and begin to drop your cares, worries, agendas and expectations into Jesus’ hands. Let go of all that is heavy or burdensome. Relax. Breathe deeply.
 - When you have given your cares to Jesus, turn your palms up on your knees. Open your hands to receive God’s presence, word and love. Listen.
 - When you feel prompted to end, tell the Lord what it is like for you to simply be with him.
3. Take a contemplative walk with Jesus. Express your intention to be alone with God.
 - Enjoy moving your body. Smell the air. Take in the sights. Appreciate God’s good handiwork within and without.
 - Love God for his gifts and goodness to you.
4. Contemplate people. Set aside time to really look into the eyes of those you love. Listen with your heart. See them through the eyes of God.
 - Be with them over a meal.
 - If you like to journal, write down what you think you know as well as what is mysterious to you about them.
5. Contemplate your experience. Commit yourself to remaining present to an experience. Pay attention to any feelings that rise within you. You may feel heat in your body.



You may notice impatience, embarrassment or a need to hide or defend. • Attend to others and what is happening for or in them. • When you leave the experience, spend some unhurried time reflecting on what you noticed. Where did you respond out of past wounds? • What did this experience symbolize for you? What gave it meaning?

Resources on Contemplation

The Cloud of Unknowing edited by William Johnson

The Shattered Lantern by Ronald Rolheiser

Becoming Christ by Brian C. Taylor

