

Topic

- I PRAYER IS TALKING TO GOD
 - A There is a truth to remember in all prayer and meditation:
 - 1 All conversation depends upon the parties involved
 - 2 It depends upon each of the parties involved
 - 3 Remembering this simple rule can eliminate strain, guilt, and artificiality in prayer
 - B This truth means I speak differently with different people; and differently than you would with these same people
 - 1 When I speak
 - a I'll speak differently
 - (1) To you
 - (2) To my sister
 - (3) To the Archbishop
 - (4) To a drinking alcoholic
 - (5) To my closest friend
 - b I'm not being phony when I shift conversation gears; usually I do it instinctively.
 - (1) I remain the same
 - (2) But I adjust what I say to the person with whom I want to communicate
 - c I vary "how" [I speak] by "to whom" [I speak]
 - (1) All genuine conversation does the same
 - (2) Switching gears, I avoid strain and failure
 - (3) Another person's technique in talking with the Archbishop will not fit me
 - 2 When you speak
 - a You'll address each of the people mentioned above differently than I would
 - b You'll do this simply because you're not me
 - 3 How differently the following would talk to you
 - a A society deb if you were another deb
 - b A teen if you were another teen
 - c A marine if you were another marine
 - C This rule remains important when I apply it to prayer and meditation
 - 1 I offered spiritual direction to Sister Ermalinda
 - a But I couldn't use my ideas for imaginative meditation of a Biblical scene as an introduction to helping her face opportunities and challenges in her life
 - (1) It's always been a technique useful for me
 - (2) Imaginative answers instinctively occur to me
 - b Early in our Spiritual direction she cautioned me that using her imagination was not effective for her
 - c She'd come to me seeking spiritual guidance
 - (1) I'd immediately think of a way to use imagination to allow God to guide her to an answer
 - (2) And I'd have to shut my mouth before I suggested it
 - d If I had suggested some imaginative tool to find God's will for her, I'd have added frustration to her life
 - (1) She would try what I told her
 - (2) My suggestion wouldn't yield positive results
 - (3) And she would take the blame for the failure
 - 2 I've always felt free to express my anger at God

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- a Sometimes I even used expletives
 - (1) I shared this freedom in a talk to a charismatic group
 - (2) A minister walked out of my talk in protest
 - (3) To pray this way was obviously wrong for him
- b Yet this way of praying remains right for me
 - (1) First, it allows me to express my anger
 - (2) And, then, it allows me to listen to God's love
- D So remember this guideline both in talking to God and in listening to him
 - 1 Everything depends upon who you are
 - 2 Remember **you'll consistently change**
 - a How you speak to others as a teen is different from how you speak with them as a mature person
 - b How you speak to God as a teen should be different from how you speak with Him as a mature person
 - 3 And your conversation will change as **your experience of God changes and develops**
 - 4 You'd speak differently to a **"Judge" than to a "Friend" or to a "Lover"**
 - 5 **People in prayer want to keep the best religious feelings of their childhood**
 - a They, wrongly, identify being spiritual with "feeling holy"
 - b A spiritual axiom is **we grow spiritually as we do physically**
 - c **Physical growth should reflect a change between the dominance of emotion and intellect (percents are purely guesses on my part)**
 - (1) After birth: 98% emotion; 2% intellect
 - (2) Age 7: 75% emotion; 25% intellect
 - (3) Age 17: 50% emotion; 50% intellect
 - (4) Age 37: 25% emotion; 25% intellect
 - (5) Age 77: 5% emotion; 95% intellect
 - d **Spiritual growth is much the same**
 - (1) At first, sometimes there are wonderful feelings
 - (2) But these feelings start disappearing with the passage of time (as we age spiritually)
 - (3) We usually try to hold on to them, to bring them back
 - (4) But they are replaced by an even more wonderful stillness
 - (5) We can't know the stillness in which God is most present while experiencing strong feelings
 - (a) **Psalm 46:10**
 - [1] **"Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."**
 - (6) And real serenity is in the stillness
 - E There are different kinds of prayer
 - 1 I'm not offering an exhaustive list, just a few varieties
 - 2 No prayer needs to fit handily into any one or just one category
 - 3 Most prayers can overlap and roam from category to another
 - F There is a general division
 - 1 Formal: we use the words of others
 - a We use Biblical prayers
 - b We use prayers from some prayer book

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- c It's the most practical form to use when we are in public services and wish to unite with a community in prayer
- 2 Informal: we use our own words
 - a This kind of prayer is best for personal prayer unless we're too upset to use our own words
 - b If we're always formal, we'll not be able to gain an intimacy with God
 - (1) Parents want to hear the true feelings of their children, not the words of others
 - (2) And friends want to hear true feelings
 - (3) And certainly any lover wants to hear true feelings
- G Then there are more specific divisions to both formal and informal prayer
 - 1 Petition
 - a **"Fox hole" prayers: we have some need and cry out for help**
 - (1) This is possibly the one occasion when most people pray
 - (2) And it is the most natural
 - b A hurting child goes to a parent seeking help
 - 2 Thanksgiving
 - a **This form of prayer is very important**
 - (1) It is important, not for God, but us, for our welfare
 - (2) Thanking God allows us to stay grateful, to keep our appreciation of the gift of love as a gift from God
 - b **Sadly, we so rarely thank God for answered prayers**
 - (1) Luke 17:15
 - (a) *And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16* and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.*
 - (b) *17* So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18* "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"*
 - (c) *19* And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."*
 - (2) The best reason to thank Him is in order for us to realize how much more God has to offer us
 - (3) **Thanking Him offers Him another opportunity to bless us**
 - 3 Repentance
 - a Life offers rare moments of deep, internal honesty
 - b We see how we've wasted our talents, hurt others
 - (1) Luke 18:13
 - (a) *"And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'"*
 - (b) *14* "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*
 - (2) Again, this kind of prayer is said for our benefit, not God's
 - c **Seeing, accepting, and admitting our failure can offer us a better appreciation of God's goodness**
 - (1) It's one thing if God blesses St. Francis Assisi or Mother Theresa
 - (2) It's completely different if God blesses me: especially when I see myself at my worst!
 - 4 Lamentation
 - a This describes a prayer spoken from the darkness of despair, pain, hurt
 - b It is like the prayer uttered by **Jesus on the cross**

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- (1) Mark 15:34
 - (a) *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*
- c Or like the one used by Jesus at Gethsemane
 - (1) Mark 14:32
 - (a) *Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed.*
 - (b) 34 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch."
 - (2) Mark 14:36
 - (a) And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."
- d I needed this form of prayer when I was sent to Paul's Valley
 - (1) I even cut God off from prayer: "lamentation" was my form of prayer
 - (2) I pouted; it was my pattern as a child to handle frustration
 - (3) My pout didn't hurt God; but it sure helped me
- 5 Protest
 - a Possibly this is the hardest form for most people to do comfortably
 - b In fact, many feel that doing it is a sin -- like the minister who walked out when I talked about speaking a street word in anger at God
 - c This is a very important form of prayer
 - (1) I can't know peace if anger's still in my gut
 - (2) It was a crucial prayer for friends of mine who lost a baby from cancer
 - (a) The parents
 - [1] They walked through feelings, including their anger with God
 - [2] They briefly quit attending Church
 - [3] But five years later they were teaching RE
 - (b) The grand mother
 - [1] She was a "Good Catholic" who would never think of expressing anger at God
 - [2] A year later she quit attending Church
 - [3] 15 years later, she was still gone
 - d God shows us in the Bible that He wants this type of prayer
 - (1) **The Lazarus story in John offers examples of prayers of protest**
 - (a) Both Martha and Mary greet Jesus with the same complaint
 - (b) John 11:21
 - [1] Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died....."
 - [2] 32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."
 - (c) Jesus inspired John to record this story of two friends each telling Him off
 - (d) The Gospel offers them as examples to us so that we might trust His friendship enough to vent our feelings
 - (2) **The Book of Job serves as a much better example**
 - (a) We must first correct a popular false description of Job as "Patient" which could mislead us
 - (b) Some scholars think the introduction and conclusion to this book were written later by another author or editor; yet these are the only places where Job appears to be patient

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- (c) **Job protests and confronts God in strong language**
 - [1] **Job 3:2**
 - [a] Job said: 3 "Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man-child is conceived.' 4 Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, or light shine on it.
 - [b] 5 Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds settle upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. 6 That night—let thick darkness seize it! let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months.
 - [c] 7 Yes, let that night be barren; let no joyful cry be heard in it.
 - [2] **Job 3:11**
 - [a] "Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? 12 Why were there knees to receive me, or breasts for me to suck?
 - [b] 13 Now I would be lying down and quiet; I would be asleep; then I would be at rest
 - [3] **Job 3:16**
 - [a] Or why was I not buried like a stillborn child, like an infant that never sees the light? 17 There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.
 - [b] 18 There the prisoners are at ease together; they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster. 19 The small and the great are there, and the slaves are free from their masters.
 - [4] **Job 6:8**
 - [a] "O that I might have my request, and that God would grant my desire; 9 that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!
 - [b] 10 This would be my consolation; I would even exult in unrelenting pain; for I have not denied the words of the Holy One. 11 What is my strength, that I should wait? And what is my end, that I should be patient?
 - [5] **Job 6:17**
 - [a] I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone, for my days are a breath.
 - [b] 17 What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, 18 visit them every morning, test them every moment?
 - [c] 19 Will you not look away from me for a while, let me alone until I swallow my spittle?
 - [6] **Job 9:29**
 - [a] I shall be condemned; why then do I labor in vain? 30 If I wash myself with soap and cleanse my hands with lye, 31 yet you will plunge me into filth, and my own clothes will abhor me.
 - [b] 32 For he is not a mortal, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. 33 There is no umpire between us, who might lay his hand on us both.
 - [c] 34 If he would take his rod away from me, and not let dread of him terrify me, 35 then I would speak without fear of him, for I know I am not what I am thought to be.
 - [7] **Job 10:1**
 - [a] I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. 2 I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me
 - [b] 3 Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the schemes of the wicked?
 - [8] **Job 10:18**
 - [a] "Why did you bring me forth from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me, 19 and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave.
 - [b] 20 Are not the days of my life few? Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort 21 before I go, never to return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness, 22 the land of gloom and chaos, where light is like darkness."
- (d) **Only after these protests are voiced can he have an experience of God**

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- [1] This experience is his answer
- [2] He could not have experienced the God of peace if inside he was silently churning with anger
- [3] Job 38:1
 - [a] Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said:
 - [b] 2 "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? 3 Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.
 - [c] 4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. 5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?
 - [d] 6 On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone-- 7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?
 - [e] 8 "Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, 9 when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness,
 - [f] 10 when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, 11 when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'?
- 6 Praise
 - a This is one of the rarest and most spontaneous of all the forms of prayer
 - b But it is a very important form
 - (1) It opens the door for so much more communicating
 - (2) We must remember that in the OT
 - (a) "Fear" means "awe"
 - (b) Awareness of God's greatness has a magnetic attraction for our spirits
- 7 Don't worry about into which category your prayer fits
 - a Just pray
 - b Just talk as you talk
 - c Talk to God as you experience God
- II INTRODUCTION
 - A Religion is a relationship with a God, with a Loving God
 - 1 It is not the rules, beliefs, and/or services
 - 2 It is a relationship with God, our Father, through Jesus in the Spirit
 - B Since this relationship is with a personal God
 - 1 We need to stay in the relationship
 - 2 We need to grow in the relationship
 - C Prayer is one means to accomplish both staying and growing in the relationship
 - 1 Most human relationships are as vibrant as is their communication
 - a Marriage problems and marriage enrichment often depend upon the depth of communicating between the couple
 - b There are requirements for healthy communicating between any two (or more) persons:
 - (1) The ability to be aware of our feelings
 - (2) The ability to express our feelings
 - (3) The ability to listen to the response
 - 2 Communication is also crucial for our relationship with God
 - a "Prayer" is the term we use to describe this mutual communicating
 - b The requirements on our part are the same as our needs for healthy communicating with another person
 - (1) The ability to be aware of these feelings

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- (2) The ability to express these feelings to God
- (3) The ability to listen to God's response
- c Each and all of these are essential if our relationship with God is to deepen
- D But "prayer" is an ambiguous term
 - 1 It can be used in a **broad sense to cover both speaking to and listening to God**
 - 2 And it can be used in a **strict sense to refer only to our speaking to God**
 - 3 **"Meditation" is the term normally used in this strict sense for our listening to God's speaking and responding**
- III MEDITATION IS LISTENING TO GOD
 - A Introduction to Meditation
 - 1 For a variety of reasons meditating is a very challenging, often difficult practice for most Americans
 - a Most were never introduced to it through sermons or religious classes in their past
 - b And many were unaware it existed as a traditional form of prayer
 - 2 Therefore, these Christians have no concept on how to meditate, to listen to God
 - a They need guidance
 - (1) If they decide that they want to learn to meditate, they use some guide and they then think the way that the guide suggests is the only way to meditate
 - (2) Many **confuse thinking about with listening to**
 - b Many **try, get nothing that they understand as a response from God and quit**
 - c Others try, get no dramatic results like others they've heard describe to them, feel like failures, and quit
 - (1) We hear others share a moment of harvest, a moment that culminates much prior effort
 - (2) We forget farmers plant winter wheat in October
 - (a) They work these fields all fall, winter, and spring
 - (b) They don't harvest any wheat until June
 - 3 Americans are so practical
 - a They see no need for meditation
 - b And/or they are unable to find time in their crowded schedules to meditate
 - 4 Americans are also impatient: we are doers without free time
 - a Meditating requires that we stop and be still
 - b It requires that we do nothing
 - c Some people can't stand the silence; can't stand being alone at peace and at ease
 - 5 We must act our way into meditation
 - a First into **tolerating meditation**
 - b Then into **experiencing meditation**
 - c Then into **needing meditation**
 - d And often into **enjoying meditation**
 - B Importance
 - 1 Creation starts with the universe listening:
 - a **Genesis 1:1**
 - (1) *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2* The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*
 - (2) **3* Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.**
 - 2 The new creation begins with Mary listening

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- a God sends an "angel:" the word means "messenger"
- b Luke 1:26
 - (1) In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin... Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."
 - (2) 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.
 - (3) 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.
 - (4) 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
 - (5) 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.
 - (6) 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God."
 - (7) 38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.
- 3 Discipleship starts with each person listening: listening to Jesus inviting them to "Follow me"
 - a In following, they listen and observe
 - b They experience Jesus feeding
 - c They experience Jesus forgiving
 - d They experience Jesus healing
 - e They experience Jesus loving, serving, saving
- 4 God doesn't need to hear what we say
 - a God's perfect
 - (1) So He's aware of our wants and our needs
 - (2) He knows what we need infinitely more than we do
 - b And He wants what we need infinitely more than we do
- 5 We need to hear what God speaks
 - a We were made to hear love
 - (1) We were made in the image of the Son
 - (2) And the Son is offered and accepts the love of the Father
 - b We were recreated to hear His love
 - (1) It is impossible for us on our own to become the Church
 - (2) We might be lovable
 - (3) We can never be infinitely lovable
 - (4) We only become aware of how deeply God is loving us as we experience this Love
 - (a) And each experience is a new healing
 - (b) All throughout eternity we'll continue to be surprised at how much God loves us
- C Experiences and divisions of meditation
 - 1 There are two basic divisions
 - a Which of the two is better for a person depends upon how that individual experiences God
 - b One is not objectively better than the other
 - 2 Great spiritual writers describe God in two different ways
 - a They describe Him

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- (1) As Light or as Warmth
- (2) As Truth or as Love
- b Jesus validated both
- 3 It is important to note
 - a Jesus always put love before truth
 - (1) He gave His love to those who were in error and in ignorance
 - (2) He never rejected anyone for thinking wrong
 - (a) None of the disciples believed His passion announcements, yet He gave Himself to them from the cross
 - (b) The Jewish leaders specifically rejected His witnessing, yet He died on their behalf
 - [1] Luke 23:34
 - [a] Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
 - b Starting almost on Easter Sunday, the Church put truth before love
 - (1) People were excluded from the community of love if the Church found or felt there was error in their thinking
 - (2) We must remember that the NT was addressed to those in the Church, not in the world
 - (a) Those in the Church have already discovered love
 - (b) Now they were offered truth to save them from errors that might impede further love
- 4 Our distinctions regarding the basic way we experience God will influence our basic approach to all meditating
 - a If God is experienced primarily as Truth, we must meditate by concentrating on thinking
 - b If God is experienced primarily as Love, we must be open to experience love in our hearts, not minds
- D Practical advice
 - 1 Remember: all suggestions must be adapted to your circumstances
 - 2 Get as relaxed as possible
 - a Sit in a chair
 - b Or lie down
 - (1) Unless you always fall asleep trying this
 - (2) But occasionally falling asleep while praying might be good
 - (3) It's better to sleep and later meditate than to fight sleep when needed
 - c Breathe slowly
 - d Close your eyes
 - 3 Get as quiet as possible according to the practical conditions of your life
 - a One mom found the best possible location was in her bathroom -- the only place she could escape her kids interfering with her prayer time
 - b We should use relaxing music if it helps
 - (1) Not loud music
 - (2) Not rock music
 - 4 Set a timer
 - a Select a time that is not too long for your schedule
 - b Nor pick one which is too short for your needs
 - 5 Use what works
 - a Religious or worldly music: Example "You Needed Me"
 - (1) Parishioners suggested it to me when I was in Sterling

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- (2) I was touched by "You even called me friend!"
- b **Nature: For me**
 - (1) Mountains: communicate the majesty, grandeur of God
 - (2) Oceans with their tides: communicate the restless love of God
 - (3) Plains: communicate the vastness, the immensity of our God
- c **Imagining God as a person in your past**
 - (1) Be careful about using your father or mother if you still carry hang-ups, emotional baggage
 - (2) Use a loving authority figure
 - (3) Or use a true friend or teacher or therapist
- d **A Biblical scene**
 - (1) Read the story: if it rubs you wrong, don't use it
 - (2) Don't use it if you are upset by references to "Satan" in the story
- 6 **When God is experienced**
 - a **Don't move on to a new scene**
 - b **Stay with the experience**
 - c You'll know when you've exhausted this experience
 - (1) It could enrich you for days, weeks, months
 - (2) As long as the experience is still working, stay with it!
- IV **EXAMPLES OF MEDITATION SCENES**
 - A Picture a loving authority figure
 - 1 And picture yourself as a scared young kid
 - a There's a bad storm:
 - b Sense your fear or anxiety at the lightning, thunder, and wind
 - 2 Run to and jump on the authority figure's lap
 - 3 Feel his/her arms around you
 - a The storm still rages,
 - b Yet you feel secure
 - 4 Just stay there surrounded by supportive, loving arms
 - 5 This scene expressed my reality with alcoholism
 - a I had the emotional growth of a 3 year old when I stopped drinking
 - b I was scared of life, filled with anxiety
 - c I jumped into the arms of a group of sober alcoholics
 - d I felt secure even though the storms of life still raged
 - B Or picture a disadvantaged 3 1/2 year old child
 - 1 The child has a leg deformity
 - a Couldn't run or play with the other kids
 - b Sometimes suffered from being mocked and called names by them
 - 2 You're putting the child to sleep
 - 3 What would you
 - a Rub with greatest warmth?
 - b Cry over?
 - 4 This meditation taught me something significant about my God
 - a I knew He loved me

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- b But I felt He hated my defects
- c Through the meditation, I realized that for 41 years. (70 now)
 - (1) God was embracing my faults with His greatest warmth
 - (2) And He was crying over them
 - (a) God saw how others would mock me
 - (b) And God saw how these defects would keep me from running freely through life
- C Or picture a room full of people
 - 1 Fill an imaginary room with the people who most care about you
 - 2 Sit in a chair in the middle of the gathering
 - a Feel what is in their hearts for you: warmth and light [love and truth]
 - b This is God in them reaching out to you
 - 3 Again this meditation taught me about my God
 - a I was mad at the bishop
 - (1) So I wanted to move to Colorado and leave the priesthood to become a lawyer
 - (2) But I feared God would strike me drunk
 - b This meditation showed God wants only the best for me
 - (1) It's unimportant to God where I live or what I do
 - (2) It's all the same to God, as long as I'm the best me
 - c Free to move, I stayed in Oklahoma with peace in my heart
- D Or picture Jesus and you in a restaurant sitting across from each other
 - 1 **I did and experienced the love in His eyes**
 - 2 Then I experienced His **faith in me!**
 - a He knew I would be me!
 - b This upset me -- with a sense of awe, not fear
 - 3 Then I experienced His **hope in me**
 - a **A flower can only become a flower -- and will!**
 - b I can only become me -- and will!
 - c I experienced Him laughing at my fears
 - 4 Then He touched me: **He liked me!**
 - a There was a mischievous smile in His eyes
 - b This experience was disturbing at first
 - c But it became wonderful with time
- E Or picture a dandelion
 - 1 God is filling out a perfectly planned garden patch
 - a Each flower is beautiful in itself and more beautiful as part of the whole garden -- as the parts of a jigsaw puzzle are less beautiful than the assembled puzzle
 - b He needs one final flower
 - (1) Colored between yellow and gold
 - (2) Short -- three to four inches tall
 - c He creates the dandelion and is thrilled with it
 - d It's the perfect flower in itself and for its place in God's plan
 - e The world labels it a weed and rejects it -- God's values are not those of the world

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- 2 Aware of the world's opinion, the bud about to flower out into a dandelion tries to be something other than what it is
 - a Colored like a rose
 - b Shaped like a tulip
 - c Smelling like a lilac
- 3 The status of the dandelion is both sad and funny
 - a It was not intended to be any of these
 - b Rather, it was created to be itself
 - c And it will be itself
- F Or pray the rosary
 - 1 **Meditate not pray**
 - 2 Use the Marian Rosary mysteries
 - 3 Experience the depth of other Biblical mysteries
- G Or use Bible stories
 - 1 I used a story about a paralyzed man
 - a **Mark 2:3**
 - (1) *Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. 4* And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.*
 - (2) *5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."*
 - (3) *6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7* "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*
 - (4) *8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? 9 "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?"*
 - (5) *10 "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" --He said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."*
 - (6) *12* Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"*
 - b I saw myself as each character or group in the story
 - (1) Do I bring people to Jesus or to the world for wholeness?
 - (2) Am I a Pharisee not wanting "those kind" forgiven?
 - (3) Am I the paralyzed man; what is my reaction?
 - (a) Do I throw a fit when I'm only forgiven:
 - [1] "What do you mean forgiven?"
 - [2] "Don't you see I'm still paralyzed?"
 - (b) Then, do I feel joy at his being able to walk?
 - (c) And finally, do I have the realization that being healed proves that I am forgiven?
- 2 And I used the parable of the Prodigal Son
 - a **Luke 15:11**
 - (1) *Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12* "And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood.*
 - (2) *13* "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.*

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- (3) 14* "But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15* "Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.
- (4) 16* "And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.
- (5) 17* "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
- (6) 18* 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 "and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."
- (7) 20* "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21* "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'
- (8) 22* "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23* 'And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24* 'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.
- (9) 25* "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 "So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.
- (10) 27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'
- (11) 28* "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.
- (12) 29* "So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 30* 'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'
- (13) 31* "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 32* 'It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'"
- b **Picture yourself as**
 - (1) The dad running and embracing
 - (2) The prodigal being hugged, kissed, covered with dignity, celebrated
 - (3) The older brother: not forgiving, feeling superior, his pride hurt
- 3 **Find your favorite image or Biblical passage**
 - a Find the one that most reflects your experience of God
 - b Find a text that just touches you more than any other
 - c Examples
 - (1) **Bill**
 - (a) A friend, was in church when I spoke in a sermon about people finding their own personal passages
 - (b) Immediately a Gospel story came to him
 - [1] Luke 5:12
 - [a] Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."
 - [b] 13 Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do will it. Be made clean." Immediately the leprosy left him.
 - [2] He experienced the desire of Jesus to cleanse him
 - (2) **Mine**
 - (a) John 13:2

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- [1] And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.
 - [2] 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him
- (b) **The story of my sobriety**
 - [1] God came to me through sober alcoholics
 - [2] They stripped themselves of their dignity
 - [a] In my early sobriety, I felt "dirty"
 - [b] They didn't ask me anything
 - [c] Rather they told me all the lousy things they had done
 - [d] Their sharing, allowed me to feel accepted
 - [3] I experienced my dignity
 - [4] And eventually I experienced God
- (c) **Importance:**
 - [1] I have a God who gives Himself to me to wash me clean
 - [2] I cannot find, know, this God in honoring Him
 - [3] I can know this God only in allowing Him to serve me
 - [4] And that's how I must treat others
- V **CONCLUSION: NECESSITY OF PRAYER AND MEDITATION**
 - A Is missing prayer a "sin?"
 - 1 So many older Catholics confess missing morning and evening prayers
 - 2 **They are wrong and they are right**
 - a **They are wrong**
 - (1) They believe they are breaking some law of God
 - (2) And, they believe, God will punish them for this offense
 - (3) Their beliefs are actually silly; they think
 - (a) "God loves me so much"
 - (b) "Because of this love, God will punish me for not listening to Him telling me that He loves me"
 - b **They are right**
 - (1) I miss the mark when I fail to pray
 - (a) I was made to hear that I am loved:
 - (b) I was made in the image of God's Son who became (and eternally continues to become) Son by listening to and accepting the Father's love,
 - (c) I am part of the listening universe
 - (2) I am only myself when I allow myself to be loved
 - (3) Failing to pray and meditate impedes my ability
 - (a) To be loved
 - [1] I suppress the anger, fear, suicidal feelings that block love
 - [2] I don't listen: don't experience the mystery of my own experience!
 - (b) And to love; I can't give to others what I don't have within myself
 - B Psalm 46:10
 - 1 10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!
 - 2 Be still

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- **3** *And know that you are Godly!*