

## **Six Streams of Christian Life and Prayer**

### **Study Two: A Prayer Filled Life – The Contemplative Tradition**

Based on 'Streams of Living Water' by Richard Foster

#### Aim

To learn from the practice of Jesus and the nature of God, how we might create in our lives the 'space' to spend time and intimacy with God

#### You will need...

A Bible, pen and paper, the letter you wrote to God as part of last week's study.

#### Starter

Read through the brief letter to God you wrote last week.

- What did you learn about God and yourself by doing this exercise?

#### Prayer

Let us pray that God will enable us to find times of solitude, silence, contemplation, reflection, prayer and meditation when we can gain strength, wisdom and compassion.

#### Jesus and the prayer-filled life

Read Mark 14:32-36 • What impresses you most about this passage?

Jesus was very busy, yet in this passage we see he took time to talk with God. The central focus of his life was his relationship with God, his Father and his mission in life was to do God's will (John 5:19) We see that Jesus had a deeply intimate relationship with God through prayer – look at his moments of greatest need, the garden of Gethsemane for example (Matthew 26:36ff). Jesus' prayer was honest "take this cup from me" but seeks to do God's will "yet not what I want but, but what you want"

Jesus prayed regularly and often; the busier he got, the more he prayed. Jesus turned to God to find the strength he needed to complete his task. By his actions Jesus became a model for us to imitate.

- Jesus asked God to "remove the cup" from him — the cup symbolises his destiny to die on the Cross. Why do you think he prayed that way?

#### God and the Contemplative Tradition

The centre of each tradition of the church is God. Jesus, 'God with us' is a physical presence who shows us what God is like through actions and words. Through a prayer-filled life we discover the compassionate, long-suffering, tender love of God who desires to bless us with wisdom, courage and inner healing. The best picture of that love is in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) where the wayward son is received with a loving welcome and warm embrace. This is God's nature.

- The father in the story of the Prodigal Son gives us a snapshot of the nature of God. How does this picture match your own understanding of God?

#### Practicing the Contemplative Tradition

As a response to God's longing that we spend time with him, we can use the disciplines of the Contemplative Tradition to create the 'space' God longs for and the intimacy we need. While it is difficult to make space for God in our day and culture, the following disciplined exercises will help, but remember three precautions: Don't be afraid to fail; keep your emphasis on God; modify to suit your needs.

- Set aside 5-10 minutes each day for prayer – the idea is to simply set aside activities, or not start them, and turn attention to God.
- Spend 5-10 minutes each day in silence – enjoy God's presence without interruptions.
- Pray the same prayer for 10 minutes each day, for example "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me" or a verse from a Psalm such as 51:10 – repeating a simple prayer over and over is a tradition from the Eastern Church to help focus our thoughts on God, so that he can enter our hearts.
- Write an original prayer – It could be as a letter, beginning "Dear God" or just a list, but it must open the lines of communication between yourself and God. Keep it confidential so you have the freedom to be honest. Once written, pray it every day.
- Read selections from a devotional book – whether spiritual or devotional classic, read not simply to understand but read to discover God, know he is in the room with you.