

# Sermon Notes



**Speaker: Patrick Mead**

**5/18/25**

The Disciplines of Meditation and Prayer (Luke 11:5-13)

I thought it best to start with one of the most difficult of the disciplines for many of us in our modern age. Richard Foster wrote this in his classic book, *The Celebration of Discipline*. "If we are constantly being swept off our feet with frantic activity, we will be unable to be attentive at the moment of inward silence."

He wrote that in 1978, 40 years before the advent of smartphones and 15 years before the internet became something available to the public. How hard it is, now, to find a time of intentional quiet and peace?

As we said last week, meditation, when mentioned in the Bible, is 180 degrees from what is considered meditation in Eastern religions. Instead of emptying your mind, you are to fill your mind with one thought, image, story, or verse. If you have small children, are the owner-operator of a business, or are involved in sales or ministry it can be very difficult to find time for meditation.

I'm not here to make you feel guilty or ashamed or inadequate. Let's just do what we can. We gave some tips and starters last week. This week let's start with this one: don't rush. Give it time. Do not be in a hurry. There are two aspects of this one simple tip that will really help you.

Do not rush past a verse or idea. Think of John 14:27, "My peace I give to you." Spend enough time there and you will see that he doesn't promise us peace in the future or peace if we get better and do better. He is giving us peace right now, where we are physically, spiritually, emotionally. Once you see that, take more time – minutes or days – to be aware of the peace of God that is already flowing through you. If you can't find it, it is fine to ask for help from your friends and faith community. Tell them not to rush their answers!

Do not rush to get good at meditation or any of the spiritual disciplines. If we are not aware of the value of the process, we can become like those people who are constantly changing lanes and speeding up only to arrive a few minutes before those who drove lawfully, with frayed nerves and less petrol in the tank. You do not have to master any spiritual discipline to receive God's love and approval. You aren't cramming for a final. Breathe.

Another way to meditate is to pay attention to creation. If you are old enough, you had grandparents who knew the names of the types of trees alongside the road. They knew the names of the flowers and the weeds. They knew which ones were edible and which would poison you. How did they know that? They did not speed past them in a vehicle but walked by them, seeing them come into view, looking at them (not phones, not listening to music or podcasts), and getting to know them.

Pay attention to trees, birds, wind, clouds, and the flow of water. If you live in a big, congested city with just a slot view of the sky, this can be difficult. You can meditate by watching one of the many amazing nature programs available to any of us. You can watch a movie like "March of the Penguins" or look up nature documentaries online. As you watch, allow yourself to fall into wonder and amazement. Think about the God who did all of this. Remember that He didn't have to do it. Remember that He cares for you.

Meditation naturally leads us to prayer. It is easy to slip out of one into another and then back again. Some would caution against that, but I think, for some people, it works just fine. Find what works for you.

My struggles with prayer are not secret. I have been very open about them. I was disappointed with unanswered prayer as early as eight years old. I have been intensely frustrated with God and how ineffective my prayers have been. I often teach law enforcement officers, first responders, and healthcare workers how to respond to stress and sudden danger. We look at the "F's" and work our way through them: fight, flight, flow, fawn, freeze.

My prayer life has often swung from fight to freeze and back again. What I will share with you about the discipline of prayer comes from two places: my experience and struggles and the mediations and wisdom of those blessed with rich and full prayer lives.

One thing I've learned is that prayer works far more often than it does not, but we tend to notice the times it doesn't. How often are our prayers for safe travels for ourselves or others, recovery from an illness or injury, and day-to-day blessings answered affirmatively and in full? I find myself in the group of nine lepers who did not thank Jesus far more often than I should.

Another thing I've learned is that prayer changes things, yes, but it is designed to change me first of all. James warns us against asking God for things we would then use selfishly in James 4:3. Jesus told his disciples that if they prayed in his name, those prayers would be heard in heaven. It is worth taking a moment and asking if our requests can truly be made "in his name."

I have found that, sometimes, it is worth asking God what He wants to talk about. "What should I say to you today? What are my needs and what are the desires of Your heart?"

I have found that prayer is better when paired with meditation, silence, or solitude. Jesus may have found the same for Mark 1:35 says "And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed."

It is easy to become intimidated by the amount of praying that spiritual giants did on a daily basis. Martin Luther said he had too much to do and was too busy not to spend three hours a day in prayer. I mentioned in an early lesson that some put aside 7 or 8 times of prayer a day. All through the medieval age and into the modern age in many places, churches rang bells to mark the times of prayer.

Should you leap into a prayer schedule like that? I would suggest not. If you walk a lot and maybe do a 5K "fun run" every so often, I would suggest that signing up for a marathon is not the wisest move you could make. Give yourself time to pray and to learn to pray.

As you pray, remember that you are working with God. We are co-laborers with God (1 Cor. 3:9). You are able to change the course of history with your prayers. Three times in the Bible, God changed His mind after people prayed. (Exodus 32:14; Jonah 3:10; Amos 7<sup>1-6</sup>). There is a cottage industry of people trying to say that God didn't "really" change His mind, but let's take the scriptures at their word and God at His. He told us to ask for what we want, to boldly come before the throne of grace. If He wasn't willing to listen to us, why tell us to come and talk to Him? It would seem dishonest at some level. I believe He meant it when He said to come and ask. I keep in mind that others are praying, that I don't know the whole story, and that God will do what is right...but I still take Him at His word.

As you pray, start by searching. "What would please you? What do You want to talk about? What would advance your kingdom, your mission on this earth and in my own heart?"

Then, relinquish your hold on things. Let go of your will when you find that it conflicts with the will of God. That is when we pray "Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done."

Remember meditation. It will help you hear God. All of the signals of the internet, cell communications, and over-the-air radio and television available in your area are going through you right now, but you don't notice them. Millions of atoms fired from the sun are passing through you right now, but you don't notice them. You only pick up the signals when you are tuned to them. Tune your heart to God to hear Him better. And don't rush it.

Be persistent. Remember Jesus's story about the poor widow who harassed a judge and the neighbor who kept knocking at his neighbor's door (Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8). And remember that God changed His mind three times, at least, in scripture. As Paul said, pray without ceasing.

One more thing: those giants of the faith who set aside hours and hours a day for prayer had a different life and culture from us. They also had people available to care for the things of this life so that they could pray. I do not believe that any of their servants or wives or family members could indulge in as many hours of prayer a day as did those giants of prayer.

Work your prayers into your day. Wed them to work to active acts of love and charity. Work them into your routines and daily activities such as shopping, paying bills, caring for our homes, etc.