

Centering Prayer and Meditation

The Emerging Church Movement and New Ecclesiology
United Theological Seminary, New Brighton, MN
By David Tillman – December 13, 2012

Who Leads The Church?

“At my first council meeting I was asked, ‘what do you want us to do?’ I came back and asked, ‘What does God want us to do and how are we going to do it?’”¹

Daniel Harrell

How Do We Know God?

- * Through our breath
- * Through our consciousness (mind, thinking)
- * Through our heart
- * Through our senses
- * Through our interactions and experiences
- * Through God's creation
- * Through being a loved child of God

We No Longer Know How To Be With God

- * “In the church we love to debate God, defend God, protect or promote God. We talk to God, praise God, and even serve God. The one thing for which we have little time or patience is actually spending time with God. If you are a pastor in a church, one sure way to get fired is to set aside 10 minutes of silence during a worship service for people to just ‘be’ with God”² Mark Yaconelli

Prayer and Silence

- * “We know there is some connection between prayer and silence, but if we think of silence in our life it seems that it isn’t always peaceful; silence can also be frightening.”³ Henri J.M Nouwen

Prayer in Scripture

- * For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. (Isaiah 30:15 NRSV)
- * And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7 NRSV)

Contemplative Prayer

Henri J.M. Nouwen

- * “Through contemplative prayer we can keep ourselves from being pulled from one urgent issue to another and from becoming strangers to our own heart and God’s heart.” ⁴
- * “The original meaning of the word “theology” was “union with God in prayer.” ⁵

Contemplation

Thomas Merton

- * “Contemplation reaches out to the knowledge and even to the experience of the transcendent and inexpressible God.....a sudden gift of awareness, an awakening to the Real within all that is real.”⁶

Theology of Centering Prayer

Cynthia Bourgeault ⁷

- * Dying to self, letting go, mini-death
- * Whoever would save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will find it. (Mt 16:25 NRSV)
- * Kenosis: self-emptying, self disclosure
 - * Jesus emptied and humbled himself to God
 - * In prayer, on his journey to Jerusalem and on the cross

Prayer of Quiet

Phyllis Zagano

- * “The prayer of quiet.....is a gradual letting go of even the least ounce of self-will. It is the absolute peace of giving up all control to a wordless trusting in God.”⁸

Doing Centering Prayer 9

- * Get comfortable in your chair with feet on the floor
- * You may use a word [i.e. love, peace, I am loved, grace, or other positive word/short phrase] or notice your breathing
- * Let go and let God, do not force anything
- * It does not matter what your experience is
- * Close your eyes, relax and quietly think of your word or breath, allow it to change.
- * When you are aware you have been thinking thoughts, gently bring your attention back to your word or breath. Having other thoughts is natural and expected.
- * After five or ten minutes, stop thinking your word and/or focusing on your breath. Take a few minutes to slowly bring you attention back to the room.

Footnotes

- * ¹ Daniel Harrell, *The Emerging Church Movement and New Ecclesiology*, Class Guest Speaker, Instructor Tony Jones, (New Brighton, MN: United Theological Seminary, December 6, 2012)
- * ² Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan - Youth Specialties, 2006). 21.
- * ³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1972), 28.
- * ⁴ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 42-43.
- * ⁵ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 44.
- * ⁶ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (New York: New Directions Books, 1961), 2-3.
- * ⁷ Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2004), 80- 88
- * ⁸Phyllis Zagano, *On Prayer*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 46.
- * ⁹ Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, 88-89.