

# Meditating on the WORD

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## **Meditating on the WORD**

### I. Why Meditate?

#### A. Because I am a Christian.

Therefore, every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God's Word in Holy Scripture is a lost day for me. I can only move forward with certainty upon the firm ground of the Word of God. And, as a Christian, I learn to know the Holy Scripture in no other way than by hearing the Word preached and by prayerful meditation. (Meditating on the Word – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 22)

#### B. Because I need a firm discipline to be formed in the image of Christ.

1. We all have deeply ingrained perceptual frameworks that shape our lives in the world. Our perceptual framework consists of a complex structure of habit, attitude, perspective, relational dynamics, and response mechanisms. Our perceptual framework shapes our understanding of God, our understanding ourselves, and our understanding of others. In the midst of living, our perceptual framework shapes our interaction in all three of these primal relationships of life. It conditions the way we respond and react to the situations of life. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 33)
2. Because I need help against the ungodly haste and unrest that threaten my work as a pastor/Christian. Only from the peace of God's Word can there flow the proper, devoted service of each day. (Meditating on the Word – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

## II. What Does It Mean To Meditate?

- A. You may feel that meditation is something only monks and mystics can do. So let me ask, do you know how to worry? If you can worry, you can meditate. To meditate merely means to think about something over and over. Let it simmer in your mind. Reflect on it from different angles until it becomes part of you. (If you want to walk on Water, You've got to get out of the Boat – John Ortberg – p. 166)
- B. Some would call it Christian spiritual formation. Christian spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 27)
- C. A person holds his attention by uttering words of Scripture or prayers to focus his thoughts. The Israelites meditated on God's Word by reciting it. The believer explores God's Word, since there is always something left over to understand and to do. Therefore you must never be proud, as if you were already full. (TLSB p. 842)
- D. Paul speaks of this in Romans 12:1-2, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices – that is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" (italics mine)

Two comments on "transforming" are:

The inner transformation of the Christian does generate the power and the impulse to accomplish changes that are externally visible: changes in the posture of the pilgrim and his way of journeying which are noticeably different from the way of this aeon. (Concordia Commentary p. 628)

This transformation therefore involves a perpetual renewal of the mind, making-new of the religious intellect for the life in the new age. In every case, as each case may arise, the child of God is called upon to "prove" the will of God, that is, to weigh and ponder and decide what the revealed will of his Father God is asking of him now. The child knows that will. It asks of him that what he says and does be "good," that is be a kindly, gracious furthering of the welfare of the man whom God has set beside him as his neighbor. (Romans – A Commentary – Martin Franzmann p. 218)

The Greek word for "transformation" is "metamorphoo," from which becomes the English word "metamorphosis." A creeping caterpillar is transformed into a soaring butterfly – yet as the children of God we are to undergo a change that makes that one barely noticeable. When morphing happens I don't just do the things Jesus would have done; I find myself

wanting to do them. They appeal to me. They make sense. I don't just go around trying to do right things; I become the right sort of person. (The Life You've Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 23)

- E. Spiritual formation is also a vital part of the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus tells His disciples, “and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” The word “obey” in Greek means To guard from loss or injury by keeping the eye on it. (Strong's Concordance)

Several commentaries explain this further:

To go back and reread this Gospel! No one can exhaust this book the first time through. Now that we have made it to the end, we can go back and see new things in the opening chapters that did not dawn on us the first time. (People Bible Commentary – Matthew – G.J Albrecht and M.J. Albrecht p. 444)

This teaching is not to be a mere intellectual process. Jesus says “teaching to guard,” which means to obey and preserve, and also to preserve and to keep inviolate. A living reception in the heart is had in mind, an assimilation by means of faith, one that will henceforth control and mold the entire character and life. (The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel – R.C.H. Lenski, Page 1179)

- F. “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossian 3:16). Several commentary notes follow below.

DWELL – He is the center and chief content of the Word, which is to be preached and taught. The present tense of the imperative “let dwell” points to a continual presence of the Word. It is not merely to be read, commented on, and the like, but it is to be internalized so that it is continually present. Believers are to live, think, and exist in relation to the Word of Christ. It is to empower and norm everything about their existence. (Concordia Commentary p. 146)

RICHLY – This is a term used by Paul almost exclusively to describe the splendor of the way of salvation. Richly here not only means a great deal but also a great benefit, for the riches of salvation will come through the employment of Christ's Word. (Concordia Commentary p. 146)

- G. “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

The word for marrow, in its essential meaning is that which is at the heart or essence of something. What the writer of Hebrews is saying then it that

the Word of God goes to the very center of what we are. It cuts through to that which bonds us together as a being, it touches upon that which forms the essence of what we are. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 39)

- H. I have never known someone leading a spiritually transformed life who had not been deeply saturated in Scripture. (The Life You've Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 177)
- I. In the same way that the word of a person who is dear to me follows me throughout the day, so the Word of Scripture should resonate and work within me ceaselessly. Just as you would not dissect and analyze the word spoken by someone dear to you, but would accept it just as it was said, so you should accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart as Mary did. That is all. That is meditation. Do not look for new thoughts and interconnections in the text as you would in a sermon! Do not as how you should tell it to others, but ask what it tells you! Then ponder this word in your heart at length, until it is entirely within you and has taken possession of you. (Meditating on the Word – Dietrich Bonhoeffer pp. 24-25)
- J. Years ago I owned a dog who had a fondness for large bones. Fortunately for him we lived in the forested foothills of Montana. In his forest rambles he often came across a carcass of a white-tailed deer that had been brought down by the coyotes. Later he would show up on our stone, lakeside patio carrying or dragging his trophy, usually a shank or a rib; he was a small dog and the bone was often nearly as large as he was. Anyone who has owned a dog knows the routine: he would prance and gambol playfully before us with his prize, wagging his tail, proud of his find, courting our approval. And of course, we approved: we lavished praise, telling him what a good dog he was. But after awhile, sated with our applause, he would drag the bone off twenty yards or so to a more private place, usually the shade of a large moss-covered boulder, and go to work on the bone. The social aspects of the bone were behind him; now the pleasure became solitary. He gnawed the bone, turned it over and around, licked it, worried it. Sometimes we could hear a low rumble or growl, what in a cat would be a purr. He was obviously enjoying himself and in no hurry. After a leisurely couple of hours he would bury it and return the next day to take it up again. An average bone lasted about a week. (Eat this Book – Eugene H. Peterson p. 1)

I always took delight in my dog's delight, his playful seriousness, his childlike spontaneities now totally absorbed in "the one thing needful." But imagine my further delight in coming upon a phrase one day while reading Isaiah in which I found the poet-prophet observing something similar to what I enjoyed so much in my dog, except his animal was a lion instead of

a dog: “as a lion or a young lion growls over his prey...”(Is 31:4). “Growls” is the word that caught my attention and brought me that little “pop” of delight. What my dog did over his precious bone, making those low throaty rumbles of pleasure as he gnawed, enjoyed, and savored his prize, Isaiah’s lion did to his prey. The nugget of my delight was noticing the Hebrew word here translated as “growl” (hagah) but usually translated as “meditate,” as in the Psalm 1 phrase describing the blessed man or woman whose “delight is in the law (Law and Gospel) of the Lord,” on which “he meditates day and night” (v. 2). Or in Psalm 63: “when I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night” (v. 6). But Isaiah uses this word to refer to a lion growling over his prey the way a dog worried a bone. (Eat this Book – Eugene H. Peterson pp. 1-2)

“Hagah” is a word that our Hebrew ancestors used frequently for reading the kind of writing that deals with our souls. But “meditate” is far too tame a word for what is being signified. “Meditate” seems more suited to what I do in a quiet chapel on my knees with a candle burning on the altar. Or to what my wife does while sitting in a rose garden with the Bible open in her lap. But when Isaiah’s lion and my dog meditated they chewed and swallowed, using teeth and tongue, stomach and intestines: Isaiah’s lion meditating his goat (if that’s what it was); my dog meditating his bone. There is a kind of writing that invites reading, soft purrs and low growls as we taste and savor, anticipate and take in the sweet and spicy, mouth-watering and soul-energizing morsel words – “O taste and see that the Lord is good!” (Ps. 34:8). Isaiah uses the same word (hagah) a few pages later for the cooing of a dove (38:14). One careful reader of this text caught the spirit of the word when he said that “hagah” means that a person “is lost in his religion,” which is exactly what my dog was in his bone. (Eat this Book – Eugene H. Peterson pp. 2-3.)

- K. When spirituality is viewed as a journey the way to spiritual wholeness is seen to lie in an increasingly faithful response to the One whose purpose shapes our path, whose grace redeems our detours, whose power liberates us from crippling bondages of the prior journey and whose transforming presence meets us at each turn in the road. In other words, holistic spirituality is a pilgrimage of deepening responsiveness to God’s control of our life and being. (Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 12)
- L. Spiritual growth is, in large measure, patterned on the nature of physical growth. We do not expect to put an infant into its crib at night and in the morning find a child, an adolescent or yet an adult. We expect that infant to grow into maturity according to the processes that God has ordained for physical growth to wholeness. The same thing is true of our spiritual life.

Yes, there are spurts of growth in our spiritual development. A few years ago I had a little boy. Then, within a year, he became a man. He went through one of those adolescent growth spurts. He grew almost a foot in height, his voice dropped into a deep bass, he began to shave, his body filled out – he was a different person. The same thing happens to our spiritual life. For a while we may live on a plateau of life and relationship with God. Then one of those moments comes in which we experience a growth spurt and find ourselves on a new level of life and relationship with God. We experience God in a new and different way. We see ourselves and life in a new perspective. Old things pass away, and new things take their place. But if we mistake such a growth spurt for all there is in spirituality, then we are not prepared for the long haul toward spiritual wholeness. (Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 21)

- M. If, indeed the work of God's formation in us is the process of conforming us to the image of Christ, obviously it's going to take place at the points here we are not yet conformed to that image. This means that one of the first dynamics of holistic spiritual formation will be confrontation. Through some channel – the Scripture, worship, a word of proclamation, the agency of a brother or sister in Christ, even the agency of an unbeliever – the Spirit of God may probe some area in which we are conformed to the image of Christ. That probing will probably always be confrontational, and it will always be a challenge and a call to us in our brokenness to come out of the brokenness into wholeness in Christ. But it will also be a costly call, because that brokenness is who we are. (Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 37)
- N. Everything that God has done, is doing and ever will do in our lives to conform us to the image of Christ (which is the image of our wholeness) is not so that we may someday be set in a display class in heaven as trophies of grace. All of God's work to conform us to the image of Christ has as its sole purpose that we might become what God created us to be in relationship with God and with others. Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 40)
- O. Sometimes I consider myself there as a stone before a carver, whereof he is to make a statue; presenting myself thus before God, I desire Him to form His perfect image in my soul, and make me entirely like Himself, (The Practice of the Presence of God – Brother Lawrence p. 37)
- P. Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely. This is what the apostle Paul means when he encourages his young protégé Timothy to “train himself in godliness.” (The Life You've Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 47)

Q. Discipline is not a popular term in our culture. Quaker writer Richard Foster's invitation to the "celebration of discipline" is a radical call to a largely undisciplined and comfort-seeking culture. Our avoidance of discipline is another symptom of the pursuit of instant gratification which characterizes our culture. Instant fulfillment of needs and desires allows no time for the long and rigorous path of disciplines. Yet it is this path that brings true and lasting fulfillment, not the brief and fleeting appearance of fulfillment that disappears in the next moment. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – pp. 102-103)

A few words from "The Life You've Always Wanted" by John Ortberg pp. 49-60 on spiritual discipline...

1. What spiritual disciplines are not.
  - a. Spiritual disciplines are not a barometer of spirituality.
  - b. Spiritual disciplines are not necessarily unpleasant.
  - c. Spiritual disciplines are not a way to earn favor with God.
  
2. Signs of wise spiritual training
  - a. Wise training respects the freedom of the Spirit.
  - b. Wise training respects our unique temperament and gifts.
  - c. Wise training will take into account our season of life.
  - d. Wise training respects the inevitability of highs and lows.

R. The community of faith is the living reality within which the spiritual disciplines nurture us and provide the support structure for our personal disciplines. A true story: It is said that one cold and gloomy day, Dwight L. Moody visited a man who had expressed some interest at one of Moody's meetings. Moody was ushered into a comfortable room with a fire blazing on the hearth. After some gracious preliminary conversation, the man began to argue that it was possible for a person to be a Christian without participating in the life of the church. As he made his elaborate and detailed arguments, Moody leaned forward in his chair, took the poker and pulled a flaming coal from the fire out onto the stone hearth. Moody watched as the coal slowly dimmed and went out. He then turned and looked at the man, without saying anything. After a long pause, the man said, "Mr. Moody, you have made your point! We can no more be conformed to the image of Christ outside of corporate spirituality than a coal can continue to burn bright outside of the fire. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 145)

## Information versus Formation

The information below comes from chapter 5 of “Shaped by the Word,” written by M. Robert Mulholland Jr.

Informational Reading		Formational Reading
Seeks to cover as much as possible as quickly as possible.	1	Avoids quantifying the amount of reading in any sort of way. You are concerned with small portions
Is linear. We move from the first element to the second element, the third and on to the end, thinking that that reading is little more than the process of movement through the parts.	2	Is in depth. You are seeking to allow to passage to open out to you its deeper dynamics, its multiple layers of meaning.
Seek to master the text. We seek to grasp it, to get our minds around it, to bring in under our control.	3	Is to allow the text to master you. This means we come to the text with an openness to hear, to receive, to respond, to be a servant of the Word rather than a master of the text.
Is that the text is and object “out there” for us to control and/or manipulate according to our own purposes, intentions and/or desires.	4	Is that the text becomes the subject of the reading relationship; we are the object that is shaped by the text.
Is to reading is analytical, critical and judgmental.	5	Requires a humble, detached, willing, loving approach.
Is characterized by a problem-solving mentality.	6	Is an openness to mystery.

There must be this constant interplay between the informational and formational modes of reading. The informational mode is only the “front porch” of the role of scripture in spiritual formation. It is, you might say, the point of entry into the text. But once we have crossed the porch, we must enter into that deeper encounter with the Word, which is the formation approach. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 59)

### III. Some Specifics About Meditation

- A. We begin our meditations with the prayer for the Holy Spirit, asking for proper concentration, for ourselves and for all we know are also meditating. Then we turn to the text. At the close of the meditation we want to be truly able to say a prayer of thanksgiving from a heart that is full. (Meditating on the Word – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 25)
- B. What text should we choose, and how long should the text be? It has proven helpful to meditate on a text of approximately ten to fifteen verses for a period of a week. It is not good to meditate on a different text each day, since we are not always equally receptive, and the texts for the most part are much too long for that. Whatever you do, do not take the sermon text for the next Sunday. That belongs in your sermon meditation time. It is a great help if a community knows that it is concentrating all week on the same text. (Meditating on the Word – Dietrich Bonhoeffer pp. 25-26)
- C. The best time of meditation is in the morning before the beginning of our work. A half hour is the minimum amount of time which a proper meditation requires. It is, of course, necessary that there be complete quiet, and that we intend to allow nothing to divert us, no matter how important it may seem. (Meditating on the Word – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 26)

Psalm 142:2 says, “Let my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.” The time for meditation may also be during the day. The key is that there *is* a time when we do meditate.

- D. Where should we meditate? The place needs to be outwardly unhindered. You need, if at all possible, to have a time and place when you will not have interruptions or disruptions of your reading, to have a time when there will not be outside intrusions into your opening of yourself to the Word.

#### E. Techniques

##### 1. Meditative Technique

The simplest, yet one of the most difficult of the techniques for reading and hearing is the technique of meditation. In this technique you read the text slowly, carefully, with full attention on each sentence, each phrase, each word. When you have completed the passage, perhaps reading it through several times, you then focus your attention on God and become still, listening for God to speak to you. If you find your thoughts wandering, return to the text, read it again, and still yourself one more to listen. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 145)

Sometimes the focus of your meditation will be a single word or a single facet of the account in the text. At times God's address may lead you to such a point of focus. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 145)

## 2. Harmony-Dissonance Technique

This technique facilitates the focusing of our reading and providing us the material for meditation. It is also a technique suitable for use with larger portions of scriptures. As you read a portion of scripture, you keep alert to those things in the text that strike either a note of harmony or a note of dissonance in your thoughts, attitudes, feelings, or perceptions. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 147)

Once you have finished reading the portion of scripture, return to those places where you experienced harmony or dissonance. It might help if you developed a system of marks you could place beside the text as you find those points of harmony or dissonance. On occasion, you may find that you encounter both in a passage. Let the experience of harmony and dissonance be the penetration of the living Word, opening you to the deeper dynamics of your being and doing. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 147)

## 3. Imagination Technique

You imagine the things you would be seeing; what they would look like – their colors, their motion, their size; the faces, their clothing, their postures, their movements. You imagine the things you would be hearing: the sounds of nature – the wind, birds, animals, the water lapping on the shore, boats creaking at their moorings; the sounds of human activity – talking, children playing, infants crying, people yelling or groaning, the sounds of work. You imagine the things you would be smelling: the scents of the surroundings – flowers, the sea, the earth, fields, barnyards, a carpenter's shop, a fish market, a baker's shop; the human aromas – perfume, perspiration, freshly washed garments, dirty garments. You imagine the things you could feel: the wind blowing around you, the stillness of a room, the roughness of a path, the textures of clothing, the coolness of water or a marble pillar, the heat of the desert, the wetness of rain or sea spray. You use all your senses. You let your imagination loose to recreate the setting of the passage of scripture. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. pp. 148-149)

Once you have recreated the scene in your imagination and placed yourself in the scene, then begin to examine your thoughts and feelings about the situation. Here again you may experience harmony/dissonance. This can become a focus for your prayerful openness to God and your meditation on what the Word is saying to you in this experience. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 149)

#### 4. “If-You-Were-There” Technique

At first glance this might appear to be the same as the imaginative technique, and its can be used in conjunction with the imaginative technique. You leave the spectator stance and become a participant. Whereas the imaginative technique powerfully involves you at deep levels of your being in the scripture account, the “if-you-were-there” technique is somewhat less threatening – at least in its initial stages. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. pp. 149-150)

This technique asks the questions: If I had been there what would I have done? What would I have said? How would I have reacted? (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 150)

### F. Responses

The address by God calls for a response in the daily dynamics of our being and doing. This means that our encounter with the Word, our address by God, must be carried into the details of our daily lives. There are many ways in which the Word can be carried into your life. We will look at three of the basic patterns: Reminders, Disciplines, Journaling.

#### 1. Reminders

Once you have been addressed by the living Word of God in a passage of scripture, it is of great value if you can keep that portion of scripture or the message of the Word before you throughout that day or the following days, or even the subsequent weeks. You will be consistently opening yourself to the shaping power of the Word if you are able to keep the passage or a reminder of the Word before you until it has become an integral part of your being and doing. Here are several ways in which this can be done. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. pp. 151-154)

##### a. Written Reminders

This can be done on a number of small cards, strategically placed throughout your “living space.” If you place these cards

at points in your living space where you are active several times every day, there will be almost constant encounters with the Word.

b. Journaling

Journaling takes the form of our deep personal reflections on the scripture. It can be employed with all of the techniques described earlier, and can also reflect on what has happened as you have sought to carry the Word into your daily life and to exercise the spiritual disciplines engendered by your encounter with God. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 156)

As you journal, take particular note of your feelings, attitudes, reactions, and responses to the Word. Analyze your attempts to carry it into your daily life, and the disciplines the Word has brought into being. Note your victories and failure, your elation and despair, your fulfillment and frustration. Be brutally open and honest with yourself regarding your encounter with and response to the Word of God. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 156)

Periodically, perhaps every two weeks or every month, review the entries in your journal. Look for patterns of response to the Word, patterns of feelings, sequences of victories or defeats, relationships between fulfillment and failure. (Shaped by the Word – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. p. 157)

Journal keeping is a highly intentional reflection on the events of our days. It differs from a diary by its focus on why and wherefore rather than who and what. The external events are springboards for understanding the deeper workings of God in the heart. One special value of a journal is the record that it keeps – a personal Ebenezer, if you will. We can turn back to the pages of our personal history with God as often as we like and see the issues we have struggled with and the progress we have made. (Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home – Richard Foster p. 33)

Journal keeping is valuable for certain people – usually those who are especially verbal – and not valuable for others. (Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home – Richard Foster p. 34)

c. Memorization

This method can be used alone or in conjunction with the others mentioned here. The Psalmist repeatedly enjoins us to write the

Word on our hearts or to hide it in our hearts, and then to meditate upon it there constantly.

d. Praying the Word

You develop a phrasing of the text of scripture or the message of the Word, expressed in a very brief prayer.

e. Singing the Word

We all have had the experience of having some melody or silly ditty get into our minds and then find ourselves humming it all day long. Why not use this dynamic for God's work in our lives?

#### IV. Different Gifts For Different People

Paul wrote to the factionalized Christians in Corinth:

For just as the body, though many parts, is one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. (1 Cor. 12:12-14)

In this passage, and the illustration that follows in the text, Paul puts his finger on an issue of crucial significance to holistic spirituality. Paul implies that our spiritual journey, while it is unique to each of us as an individual member of the body of Christ, is not an isolated pilgrimage but is a part of a sort of caravan with the diverse members of the body. Paul touches here upon the vital issue of the relationship between the individual and the faith community, especially the relationship of the uniqueness of individual persons to the community and the community to them. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – pp. 49-50)

With his metaphor of the body in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul emphasizes both the vital reality of the community of faith as a living organism (it is a body, even the body of Christ) and the uniqueness of each individual member of the community. The faith community is not a homogeneous collection of individuals among whom there is no distinction. Nor are the individuals in the community of faith isolated, independent entities without any essential reference to one another. Paul's emphasis is on the interdependence of the individual members of the community of faith. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 50)

There is no holistic spirituality for the individual outside of the community of faith. In fact, to use Paul's image, the holistic spirituality of the individual is essential for the spiritual health of the community, and the health of the community is essential for spiritual wholeness of the individual. Just as each cell in our physical body depends upon the wholeness of each individual cell, the individual Christian can be whole only through interdependent interaction with the other members of the faith community. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 50)

This reality provides the deeper context in which we consider our unique creation gifts, those very personal and individual structures of our personality preferences that characterize our being and doing. These unique creation gifts are God's means of grace for the enrichment of our community of faith, and our community of faith is the means of grace by which God nurtures the fullness of our creation gifts. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 50)

## 1. Our Creation Gifts

Over the years of his study of human behavior, Carl Jung discovered that human beings have four essential preferences that shape the way they relate to the world around them and process the data they receive from that world. Jung organized these preferences in four pairs. The four basic pairs of preference are extraversion (E) and introversion (I), sensing (S) and intuition (N), thinking (T) and feeling (F), judgment (J) and perception (P). Within each pair, persons generally prefer one mode of behavior over the other; one behavior is preferred, the other is less preferred. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 51)

- a. The first pair of preferences relate to where persons find their preferred focus – whether in the outer world of persons, events and things (E) or in the inner world of self and idea (I). Extroverts tend to be people persons.” They enjoy the company of others and are energized by fellowship with others. They are good at remembering names. They like to be actively engaged with others in work and play. Introverts, while certainly not people-haters, tend to prefer solitude to fellowship. They have difficulty remembering names. They prefer to work and play by themselves and tend toward reflection rather than action. At social gatherings, extroverts will be found actively mingling about, interacting with others, while the introverts tend to find a space on the edges and let the extraverts come to them. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 51)
- b. The second pair of preferences, intuition and sensing, have to do with persons’ preferred means of receiving information for their living – either through primary reliance upon intuition, the inner “urgings” of the spirit (N), or primarily through their physical senses (S). Intuitive persons are problem solvers. They enjoy envisioning a way to bring order to a complicated situation and then doing it. But then they move on to another problem. They do not like repetitive activity and can be impatient with details. Sensing persons like routine and details and enjoy established ways of doing things. They tend to be good with work that requires precision. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – pp. 51-52)
- c. The third pair of preferences, thinking and feeling, suggest the means for processing the data received through intuition and sensing – either a primary reliance upon the cognitive

processes of reasoning (T) or a primary reliance upon the stirrings of the heart (F). Thinking persons do not show emotion easily and tend to be uncomfortable around those who do. They are very analytical and logical and tend to make decisions in an impersonal way, sometimes hurting others without being aware of it. Whatever disciple said, “What a waste! This ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor “ (Mt 26:8-9), was a thinking person. Feeling persons, however, are very sensitive to how others feel. They like harmony. They have a need to please others and sometimes let their decisions be influenced by others’ like or dislikes as well as by their own. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 52)

- d. The final pair of preferences, judgment and perception, have to do with a person’s preferred relationship to the flow of life – either a primary desire for closure and completion, order and control (J) or a primarily open-ended and laid back approach to life (P). I can always tell the J and P preference students in my classes. The J preference students usually have their work in on time or even early. The P preference students often come in just before the deadline and ask for an extension. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 52)

We all have both options of each pair available to us. These preferences are part of the equipment we are created with, what Reginald Johnson calls our “creation gifts.” Our preferred modes of employing these gifts have been developed as we progressed through the stages of our psychological development. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 52)

## 2. Our Individuality

Human wholeness lies not in seeking to become an “XXXX,” a person with no distinct preference in any of the pairs, but in a mature and discriminating ability to function with whichever side of the preference pair is best suited to the situation at hand. There are numerous times daily when each of us finds that we cannot simply exercise our preferred pattern. Those who prefer introversion finds themselves required to function as extraverts if they are to be effective in a given situation. Those who prefer the thinking process find themselves called to lead with the heart if their contribution to the issue at hand is to be creative. Those who prefer the judgment mode of control and closure find it necessary to resist imposing control and to defer decision so that the ultimate closure can be a wholesome solution to

the issue. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. –pp. 54-55)

Our image of handedness can again help us here. Even though I am right-handed, I would be greatly disadvantaged should I lose the use of my left hand. There are times when my right hand needs the help of the left, and other times when the left must do the job itself. So it is with our preferences. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 55)

### 3. Problems

One major the problems of our lives is our tendency to evaluate our pattern of preference as being superior (or perhaps inferior) to the patterns of others. The problem for the Corinthians, and for us, is the tendency to view one's own pattern of preferences as the norm. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 55)

Left to ourselves in the development of our spiritual practices, we will generally gravitate to those spiritual activities that nurture our preferred pattern of being and doing. The shadow side of our preference pattern will languish unattended and unnurtured (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 57)

The results of such one-sided spirituality can be devastating to our spiritual pilgrimage. The undernourished shadow side will, sooner or later, demand equal time. Not having any holistic spiritual patterns for its expression, it will usually manifest itself in “unspiritual” behaviors which are both antithetical to holistic spirituality and destructive to the spiritual activities of our preferred patterns. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 58)

The following story will illustrate the dangers involved in a one-sided spirituality. A student came to me a few years ago and, after breaking the ice, admitted to me somewhat sheepishly, “MY devotional time is the pits. I’m just getting nothing out of it” I asked, “What are you doing?” He responded, “Well, I have a quiet place in the apartment where I go and sit. I try to get silent, I read the Scripture, I pray, and I try to meditate. It’s just horrible.” (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 61)

Since we have all our students take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as part of their orientation, I inquired about his preference pattern. It turned out that he was an ESFP with strong sensing feeling preferences. When I asked him how he had developed this kind of

devotional life, he said, “I was taught that if you want to have a good devotional life you go aside by yourself and sit quietly, read your Bible, pray and try to be silent and meditate and listen to God.” (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 61)

I asked him, “What are some of the times God has truly been alive for you, when God’s presence has been real?” He replied, “When I am out walking in the woods and hearing the sounds of nature and things like that.” And he went on to describe a pattern of sensing-feeling activities. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 61)

A few weeks later the young man returned ecstatic. He had experienced a wonderful renewal of spiritual vitality and a sense of once again being on the pilgrimage toward wholesomeness in Christ. What had happened? Some well-intentioned INTJ had laid upon this fellow, in the early stages of his Christian pilgrimage, a purely INTJ devotional life. Such a model of devotion can be rich and fulfilling for an INTJ, but not for an ESFP. It didn’t nurture this kind of person at all. It had become a numbing burden rather than a nurturing blessing. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – p. 62)

## V. Prayer And Spirituality

- A. Dietrich Bonhoefer says of prayer, “The child learns to speak because his father speaks to him. He learns the speech of his father. So we learn to speak to God because God has spoken to us and speaks to us. By means of the speech of the Father in heaven His children learn to speak with Him. Repeating God’s own words after Him. God’s speech in Jesus Christ meets us in the Holy Scriptures. (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 11)
- B. Pious prayer offered in faith is familiar conversation with God. It shows us how much we depend on God. It is refreshment in the heat of misfortune; it is medicine during illness. It is a sword against the devil and a defense against misfortune. It is a wind that blows away evil and brings earthly benefits. It is a nurse that nurtures virtue and conquers faults. It is a great fortification for the soul and gives free access to God. It upholds the world and rescues people. It calms the conscience and increases our thankfulness. It sends demons running and draws angels close. It is a foretaste of the life to come and sweetens the bitterness of death. (Meditations on Divine Mercy – Johann Gerhard – pp. 21-22)
- C. Henri Nouwen said, “Prayer is the act by which we divest ourselves of all false belongings and become free to belong to God and God alone.” He adds, “Prayer is such a radical act because it requires us to criticize our whole way of being in the world, to lay down our old selves and accept our new self, which is Christ...Prayer therefore is the act of dying to all that we consider to be our own and of being born to a new existence which is not of this world.” The times of prayer in the synagogues were scheduled to coincide with the daily sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem; prayer was associated with sacrifice. (Invitation to a Journey – A Road Map for Spiritual Formation – M. Robert Mulholland Jr. – pp. 106-107)
- D. To pray is to tell Jesus what we lack. Jesus’ mother in the story of the wedding in Cana exhibits this. She goes to the right place with the need she has become acquainted with. She goes to Jesus and tells Him everything. (Prayer – O. Hallesby p. 46)
- E. Prayer changes things, people say. It also changes us. The latter is the more imperative. The primary purpose of prayer is to bring us unto such a life of communion with Father that, by the power of the Spirit, we are increasingly conformed to the image of the Son. This process of transformation is the sole focus of Formation Prayer.

None of us will keep up a life of prayer unless we are prepared to change. We will either give it up or turn it into a little system that maintains the form of

godliness but denies the power of it - - which is the same things as giving it up.

When we begin to walk with God, He is gracious and marvelously answers our feeble, egocentric prayers. We think, "This is wonderful. God is real after all!!" In time, however, when we try to push this button again, God says to us, "I would like to be more than your Provider. I also want to be your Teacher and your Friend. Let me lead you into a more excellent way. I want to free you of the greed and avarice, the fear and hostility that make your life one great sorrow." Each day in a new and living way the brooding Spirit of God teaches us. As we begin to follow these nudgings of the Spirit, we are changed from the inside out. (Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home – Richard Foster p. 57)

- F. Luther said that there three rules which are amply presented throughout Psalm 119. They are *Oratio, Meditatio, Tenatio*, that is, prayer, meditation and spiritual trial. On the basis of his journey of faith and his own personal experience he found these three components of spirituality to be vital, necessary and effective in a faithful appropriation of the Christian heritage.

As is to be expected, he gives first place to the Bible, which is the source of true knowledge and wisdom and which turns wisdom of all other books into foolishness, because no one teaches about eternal life except this one alone. For that reason Luther advises that one kneel down in one's room and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, asking for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit so that one may rightly understand the message of Scripture. This way of beginning one's study of the Word is essential in as much as the Scriptures are not subject to one's own rational powers of understanding and insight. The Holy Spirit has to guide a person in the proper discernment of the truth and meaning of God's Word.

In the second place, meditation on Scripture, which follows prayer, involves diligent attention to the meaning of various words in their context and a prayerful reflection on the message conveyed. This meditative process is an undertaking which makes it possible for a person to strengthen his faith and to appropriate the riches of God's grace and truth revealed in his Word. Adhering faithfully to the external Word of Scripture is a precondition for the inner enlightenment of heart and mind by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, spiritual trials are the ways and means by which the knowledge and understanding one has gained from meditating on Scripture are put to the test in the struggles of daily living. As a consequence one will experience "how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom." Such testing of one's faith in the encounter with various persons and events in the multitudinous settings of life is never an easy matter. Trust in God, and His Word will be subjected to all kinds of

stresses and strains. The world will respond with opposition, misunderstanding and enmity. Doubts and misgivings will seek to demolish the citadel of faith. But one's eventual triumph over unbelief is assured, as one reverts to prayer and meditation on God's word and gives God the glory and praise for His grace. (Luther & Prayer, Martin E. Lehmann pp. 136-137)

## VI. Possible Stumbling Blocks

### A. Hurry

1. Meyer Friedman defines hurry sickness as “above all, a continuous struggle and unremitting attempt to accomplish or achieve more and more things or participate in more and more events in less and less time, frequently in the face of opposition, real or imagined, from other persons.” Hurry will keep us consumed by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, as Jesus put it, and prevent His way from taking root in our hearts. (The Life You’ve Always Wanted – John Ortberg pp. 83-84)
2. We must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives. This does not mean we will never be busy. Jesus often had much to do, but He never did it in a way that severed the life-giving connection between Him and His Father. He never did it in a way that interfered with His ability to give love when loves called for. He observed a regular practice of withdrawing from activity for the sake of solitude and prayer. Jesus was often busy, but never hurried. Hurry is not just a disordered schedule. Hurry is a disordered heart. (The Life You’ve Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 84)
3. Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. Hurry can destroy our souls. Hurry can keep us from living well. As Carl Jung wrote, “Hurry is not of the devil; hurry is the devil.” (The Life You’ve Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 82)
4. The most serious sign of hurry sickness is a diminished capacity to love. Hurried people cannot love. Lewis Grant suggests we are afflicted with what he calls “sunset fatigue.” When we come home at the end of a day’s work, those who need our love the most, those to whom we are most committed, end up getting the leftovers. Sunset fatigue is when we are just too tired, or too drained, or too preoccupied, to love the people to whom we have made the deepest promises. (The Life You’ve Always Wanted – John Ortberg pp. 87-88)
5. Hurry prevents us from receiving love from the Father or giving it to His children. That’s why Jesus never hurried. If we are to follow Jesus, we must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives – because, by definition, we can’t move faster than the one we are following. (The Life You’ve Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 88)
6. Farmers characteristically work hard, but there is too much work to do to be in a hurry. On a farm everything is connected both in place and in time. Nothing is done that isn’t connected to something else; if you get in a hurry, break the rhythms of the land and the seasons and the weather, things will fall apart – you get in the way of something set in motion last

week or month. A farm is not neat – there is too much going that is out of your control. Farms help us learn patience and attentiveness. (Athens, WI, fall of 1955) Eat this Book – Eugene H. Peterson p. 39)

## B. Lack of Solitude

1. At its heart, solitude is primarily about not doing something. Just as fasting means to refrain from eating, so solitude means to refrain from society. When we go into solitude, we withdraw from conversation, from the presence of others, from noise, from the constant barrage of stimulation. (The Life You've Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 92)
2. Solitude requires relentless perseverance. I find that unless I pull my calendar out and write it down well in advance the times when I am committed to time of solitude, it won't happen. (The Life You've Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 92)
3. I find it helpful to think about solitude in two categories. We need brief periods of solitude on a regular basis - - preferably each day, even at intervals during the day. But we also need, at great intervals, extended periods of solitude - - half a day, a day, or a few days. (The Life You've Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 92)
4. One of the great obstacles to extended solitude is that frequently it may feel like a waste of time. This may happen partly because we are conditioned to feel that our existence is justified only when we are doing something. (The Life You've Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 94)
5. Reviewing the Day with God.
  - a. Be still for a moment and quiet your mind.
  - b. Acknowledge that Jesus is present. Invite Him to teach you.
  - c. Go back in your mind to when you first woke up. Watch the scene, as if on video. This may lead you to pray for patience, greater love, courage, forgiveness, or other virtues.
  - d. Continue through the day, going from scene to scene. As you reflect on them, some scenes may fill you with gratitude, others with regret. Speak directly to the Lord about this. You may also be led to pray for some of the people you were interacting with during the day.

- e. End with a prayer of thanksgiving for God's mercy and love. Ask Him to refresh you as you sleep. (The Life You've Always Wanted – John Ortberg p. 92)
6. Thoughts on silence from "Meditating on the Word," by Dietrich Bonhoeffer pp. 48-53.
- a. In Psalm 62 we find a strong endorsement of the psalmist's call for silence before God, which is the precondition for meditation of any kind. (Class quiet time)
  - b. Being silent before God means making room for God so that he may speak the first and last word about us, and then receiving that word, whatever it may be, for all eternity;; it means not wanting to justify ourselves, but wanting to hear whether God wishes to say something about our justification. To be silent does not mean to be inactive, rather it means to breathe in the will of God, to listen attentively and be ready to obey.
  - c. To be silent before God means to be humbled before God, to feel the pain of contrition; but, beyond all measure, there is the joy of love and grace.
  - d. None of us is so rushed that it would be impossible to allow for even ten minutes in the day, in the morning or the evening, in which arrangements could be made for silence, in order to place oneself in the presence of Eternity, allow it to speak, question it, and thereby look deep within and far beyond oneself.
  - e. It is possible for there to be rest and silence anywhere, then it is only possible where there is wholeness, and that is only in God. All human strivings and drives are finally directed toward God and can only find their complete satisfaction in him.
7. Obstacles to Spiritual Reading from "Shaped by the Word," M. Robert Mulholland Jr. pp. 129-137.
- a. Perceptual Obstacles
    - i. First, our self-image. If we fail to see ourselves as a word spoken forth by God, even though garbled, distorted, and debased, then our spiritual reading will fall under a self-image characterized by self-generated, self-maintained, self-directed, and self-protective dynamics. With this kind of self-image, we will have a strong tendency to read the scripture in ways that only serve to confirm our false self-image.

One of the best ways to overcome this obstacle is to infuse each period of spiritual reading of the scripture with the constant and conscious reminder that are a word spoken forth by God. Remember that God Is seeking to shape your word by the Word as you open yourself to God in scripture.

- ii. Second, our perception of reading. If we fail to come to the scripture formationally, then the informational dynamics of reading that have so shaped our lives will exert their control. We will find ourselves holding the scripture at arm's length and dealing manipulatively with the text in an objective, analytical manner which will reflect back to us our own conscious or unconscious agendas.

The best way to overcome this obstacle is by coming to the spiritual reading of scripture with a perception that yields control to the process to the text.

- iii. Third, our view of the Bible. If we fail to understand the iconographic nature of the Bible, then we will see it as a collection of pictures, images, myths, and ideas which we interpret, analyze, demythologize, and categorize according to our own understanding and perceptions.

The best way to overcome this obstacle is to remind ourselves constantly of the iconographic nature of the Bible. We should come to the scripture expectantly, receptively, openly, eagerly waiting for God to breathe the living Word in and through the icons of our life.

- iv. Fourth, our perception of existence. If we come to the scripture with no perception of the reality of kairotic existence, no awareness of God's radical new order of being in Christ, then our activity will be fruitless.

This obstacle may be ultimately overcome by the dawning awareness of the reality of kairotic existence in our own experience.

#### b. Experiential Obstacles

- i. First, functional dynamics. If we come to the spiritual reading of scripture in the functional mode, entering into the activity as a means to accomplish our own agenda in our

own way and in our own strength, the we will manipulate the scripture for the for the fulfillment of our agenda.

- ii. Second, “doing dynamics”. If we enter into the discipline of spiritual reading with the idea that what we are doing will, in and of itself, make us what we think God wants us to be, then we will be constructing a facade of activity which we and others will tend to mistake for genuine spirituality.

## 8. Practicing the Presence of God.

A child of God cannot stay in solitude every minute of every day. The hymn writer Joseph A. Robinson states in verse 5 of the “Tis Good, Lord, to Be Here: “Tis good Lord, to be here! Yet we may not remain; but since Thou bidst us leave the mount, Come with us to the plain. (LSB 414 - Transfiguration)

There are several ways to take the blessings of our solitude with us to whatever plain we may be asked to travel.

- a. Brother Lawrence was born Nicholas Herman in French Lorraine. He was lowly and unlearned in the teaching of the schools. He served briefly as a footman and soldier, and under the whips of God and conscience was driven to become a lay brother among the barefooted Carmelites at Paris in the year 1666.

A wholly consecrated man, he lived his life as though he were a singing pilgrim on the march, as happy in serving his fellow monks and brothers from the monastery kitchen as in serving God in the vigil of prayer and penance. (The Practice of the Presence of God – Brother Lawrence pp. 12-13)

A few quotes from his book follow:

That we might accustom ourselves to continual conversation with Him, with freedom and in simplicity. That we need only to recognize God intimately present with us, to address ourselves to Him every moment, that we may beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful, and for rightly performing those which we plainly see He requires of us, offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have done. (The Practice of the Presence of God – Brother Lawrence p. 25)

And it was observed that in the greatest hurry of business in the kitchen he still preserved his recollection and heavenly-mindedness. He was never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in

its season, with an even, uninterrupted composure and tranquility of spirit. “The time of business,” said he “does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knee at the blessed sacrament. (The Practice of the Presence of God – Brother Lawrence p. 30)

- b. Stan Musial, Hall of Fame batsman, remarked that when he was hitting well, “he could see the ball dent the bat as the two met.” This was sometimes done before 50,000 fans in the ball park. This requires extreme focus and single-mindedness.
- c. “The best athletes find a way to slow the game down,” Gardner said. “I define ‘slowing the game down’ by being able to focus on what you need to do in the middle of havoc. (Doug Gardner founder of ThinkSport Consulting Services in California – Fox Sports – 9/28/2011)