

Contemplation

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Russell Herbert

[0 : 00] I want to ask you a question. It's quite a personal one, but it's alright, you don't have to answer it out loud. You can if you want, but I can't hear you. My question is this.

What are you thinking about right now? Or rather, what were you thinking about just before you started watching this? Now, that's not just a rhetorical question. I really want you to think about it. What was on your mind just a moment ago? You might even want to pause the video for a few moments while you just give that some thought. Now, I have no idea what is on your mind at the moment, but I could hazard a guess that in the widest and most general terms, there's probably a mix of things.

Some of those things are positive, happy thoughts. You know, the stuff that makes you feel good about life, things that you're looking forward to, things that give you a sense of satisfaction.

Then there will probably also be those things that are not quite so positive. Things that you are anxious about. Things that make you feel bad. Things that may bring a sense of fear.

[1 : 12] Things that make you feel bad. Things that make you feel bad. And of course, in among all of the stuff that's on our minds, there's probably also one or two other bits and pieces of mental activity that's neither particularly positive or negative.

It's just plain old ordinary. I'm referring to all those mundane thoughts that we have about everyday life, like, well, shall I have a cup of tea or coffee in a minute?

Now, I guess most of the time our minds are carrying around a range of thoughts. And that's because that range of thoughts reflects the range of different things going on in our lives.

C.S. Lewis seemed to be aware of that whole range of thoughts that fill our heads all day, every day, when he wrote this. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning.

All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back. In listening to that other voice.

[2 : 13] Taking that other point of view. Letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings.

Contemplation is precisely what can enable us to do this and can empower us in this. And it's most simplest. And in fact, contemplation is strangely simple.

Contemplative prayer is just the intentional act of inviting God to become the centre of your attention. It's about making yourself present to him so you can sense his presence with you and in you.

It's not so much a case of pushing other distracting thoughts away, but rather letting them go and giving them over to God. And by engaging in this in a focused way, it can have an impact on our thoughts and feelings and actions throughout the rest of the day.

Now, that very last part is really important. Time spent in contemplation can significantly shape the whole of the rest of your day. You see, a popular misconception of contemplation is that it's all about some kind of devotional activity that is somehow separated from the rest of the day.

[3 : 35] Well, it sort of is insofar as it represents setting time aside in a way that's disciplined and intentional. But that doesn't mean that it is essentially prayer time as though we spend that time and that time alone praying before we get on with everything else.

Living a Christian life is about a whole of life relationship with God, which means that prayer can't be compartmentalised as one activity among others.

To be a Christian is precisely that, to be in relationship with God. It's a state of being and aspiring for our actions to be grounded in that state of being.

That means that everything we engage in throughout the day, whether we're on our own or interacting with others, takes place within our relationship with God. That's what surrounds

everything and underpins everything.

To pray, then, is not just an activity in the same way that other things like eating and drinking are, but it's that state of being in communion with God, which brings that extra dimension to all our activity.

[4 : 49] But having said that, contemplation is something very specific. It's where we give special focus to the presence of God. Now, John Wesley described prayer as the breathing of the soul.

So I guess we could say that we never stop breathing, but it is very helpful to slow down and concentrate on our breathing and take a few breaths that are intentionally long and deep.

In his book, how to pray, Pete Greig describes a conversation with a Franciscan priest called Brennan Manning. The two were talking about the idea of spending a whole hour in prayer.

The old priest was eager to make it clear that what matters is not so much the prayer time as though it were some measurable quantity of effort. No, what matters is the connection between contemplation and the rest of the day.

He said this. What if the hour you spend in prayer is when you refocus on Jesus so that you can carry his presence with you into the other 23 hours of the day with a heightened awareness that he is with you?

[6 : 06] He is for you, that he likes you, that he hears your thoughts. You start to pray in real time. You instinctively lift situations to the Lord in the actual moment you experience them.

While you're watching that distressing news report or hearing about a friend's latest crisis, you're no longer deferring all your prayers to some later holier moment because your whole life is becoming that holier moment.

Now, let's finish where we started. I began by asking you, what have you been thinking about today? You see, thoughts are really important. They determine how we feel and how we behave, for better or for worse.

And a lot of the time, we might not even be aware of those thoughts. But they are there, continually playing their tune as the kind of soundtrack to our lives.

Now, have you ever noticed how a song heard early in the morning can stay with you the whole day? You hear a tune and it doesn't have to be one that you particularly like, necessarily.

[7 : 16] Then you can't get that tune out of your head. You might even be humming it to yourself without even noticing. Music has that power. The simplest of melodies can take hold within us when we're not even aware of it.

That's what I'm talking about when I say that our thoughts are a bit like a soundtrack. I'm referring to the patterns by which we do our thinking.

The way we perceive the world around us and the way we process what's going on. Contemplation is rather like purposefully putting on a piece of music.

Like setting our lives to a soundtrack that will transform us and empower us. So maybe if you find that you're getting yourself caught up and weighed down by thoughts that are negative and unhelpful.

Maybe it's time to change the record. In his paraphrase of Philippians 4, the late Eugene Peterson put it like this. Celebrate God all day, every day.

[8 : 25] I mean revel in him. Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns.

Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness. Everything coming together for good will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the centre of your life.

Summing it all up, friends, I say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true. Noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious.

The best, not the worst. The beautiful, not the ugly. Things to praise, not things to curse. Do that. And God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

What happens?net. I'm so excited to see you next time. Colleen■istjes. I hope you like it for the most excellent human beings. What happens when you I success knows where you are. You are soon on.

[9 : 30] That's good. I'm a friend of yours. So, all the people who are coming to this to the future. And I'll be the most successful, happy purpose. And I'll be the most successful, happy purpose. Today, that's one of these ■■■■■ to be in my kolay.

Let's see. And I'll be the most successful, bitterly installation again.