

Praying, Part 3

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[0 : 0 0] returning to a further aspect of my theme of praying. And because we need the Lord's help for study of such a matter, I'm going to ask you to pray with me for a moment before we do anything else.

Lord, teach us to pray. Lord, give us the realism and the humility and the wisdom and the faith, the honesty and the patience that we need in order to learn the path of prayer according to your word.

And bless what is now to be said and what will be going through all our minds and hearts at a means to that end.

So we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Yes, we continue now from where my second talk brought us.

I'm talking about praying. That's what the book for which these talks are dummy runs is going to be all about.

[1 : 3 8] We are building up an account of praying, looking at the activity from many different angles. we are circling around it in the hope of seeing it better, so that we may then engage in it better.

And so I'm exploring a whole series of the realities that are involved in proper praying, Christian praying.

And may I remind you of how far we've got, because that's the springboard for where we now go today.

I started off by saying that for proper prayer, we need a proper conception of God. And I talked about different things that we need to know about God, the God to whom we speak, and with whom we deal, and who deals with us in this activity of praying.

Then I said, we need also a conception of life. And I've brought in already the fact that our brains have two lobes, and the two lobes of the brain govern the two kinds of activities in which our minds engage.

[3 : 1 1] The left lobe is for logic, analytical thinking, and the right lobe is for imagination, pictures, everything that turns the grey of logical discourse into the glorious technicolor of human realities, with all the excitement that human realities involve.

And I gave you a picture of living, the picture which I use when I think about my own life, and which I invite you to use in thinking about yours also.

Think, just as you think of happiness with a warm puppy, so I urge, we should think of life, Christian life, as hiking, because of the ups and downs, you see, hiking with our God as a resource, and more specifically, with Jesus Christ, our Saviour, as the friend who keeps us company.

And I said a little about how we are to understand the glorious reality of Jesus calling us his friends and treating us as his friends.

Since then, I've run across one or two quotes that I'd like to share with you that elaborate the thought of our friendship with the Saviour who makes friends with us.

[4 : 50] Tein takes it further. These thoughts, these notions take it further than I took it before. Have you, for instance, ever heard this?

Friendship means fidelity. Quote, actually, from the American journalist Walter Winchell, a friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.

Walks out on you, of course, is what he means. But the Lord Jesus comes in at that time, and he comes in at all other times.

He is the friend that sticks closer than a brother, and that's a wonderful thought to carry with you. There's a ministry in friendship, and I picked up this.

A friend is a push when you've stopped, a word when you're lonely, a guide when you're searching, a smile when you're sad, and a song when you're glad.

[5 : 59] And the ministry of the Lord Jesus to us in his character as our friend covers all of those encouraging and supportive acts.

And then there is, of course, intimacy in friendship. Friendship with Christ means getting close to him.

as prayer means in broadest terms getting close to God. And I picked up this from the Roman philosopher Cicero.

Here's the quote. Real friendship cannot exist where one party is unwilling to hear the truth and the other is equally unwilling to speak it.

Oh, how true that is when you think of those relationships that we all of us have which we can only call acquaintanceships. They're not real friendships because we don't speak all the truth that we think to the other party.

[7 : 16] And we know the other party wouldn't appreciate it if we did. but with our Lord Jesus intimacy is unlimited at this point.

He is constantly speaking truth to us and searching us with it and if the friendship is to grow into what it's meant to be well we have to be ready to hear what he says and see what he shows us.

And that I may say this is what we used to call a trailer to come on that's going to be the big theme for next week if you come back next week. My colleague Jim my long time colleague Jim Houston the founder principal of the Regent now retired he wrote about friendship rather like this he's focusing on a human spiritual friendship which does rather reflect the way that it comes to be between Christ and ourselves if we accept his friendship the way we should.

Writing of what he calls the spiritual friend human Jim Houston says this the spiritual friend is one who is loyal and has right motives discretion and patience in order to help his friend know God better.

Since there's no end to the extent to which I can and do deceive myself I need a spiritual guide to keep me honest. Moreover the love of God is only effectively developed when my friend helps to draw me out of myself and to show me how I can enter into a wider circle of insight where I can be more honest with myself than I have been.

[9 : 22] A true friend in Christ will wake me up help me to grow and deepen my awareness of God for God's love is mediated through relationships by those who care for me encourage me and desire my affections to become God-centered.

He's writing about human spiritual friendship but what he says is true in spades of the divine spiritual friendship which our Lord declares is the reality of his bond his relationship with us.

Well that I think is terrific and that is our launch pad for a lot of the things I'm going to say today remembering namely that hiking with Jesus Christ our friend is the image of life and the friendship of Christ means all that I've said.

Almost on a side wind I have also given you the preliminary notion I should get back to this of course as we continue but the preliminary notion of what prayer is we need a definition here just as we need a definition of the Saviour's friendship with us.

Prayer then we have said is converse with God I'm not sure that I used that word before but it's the word that focuses what I have said on the side wind that doesn't mean that prayer is simply casual conversation informal almost to death if we get to the point of praying in a way which seems to treat the father and the son as our buddies well I think I can guarantee that something is very much out of kilter I know that fatherhood like friendship is an image of intimacy but when Jesus taught his disciples to pray he taught them to invoke the father as the father in heaven and that phrase points to the unmappable distance between

[11 : 55] God and ourselves I mean never forget that in the practice of the intimacies of prayer and there are the two basic what am I to call them moods or modes or orchestrations or tempers of prayer we've made incidental reference to them and I'm not going to get beyond the incidental reference today but I want you to remember what we've said up to this point we have said that on the one hand prayer is opening one's heart to the Lord to express need and ask him to meet it and I think I did say help has often been described as the best prayer in the world you look to the Lord in your conscious need and you say help then the other mood or mode or orchestration major key if you like as contrasted with the minor key of asking help is to lift up your heart there's an old phrase which means that translated in our communion service lift up your heart and express thanks and praise to God to Christ to the

Holy Spirit for what the divine team has done for us well that's prayer more about that as we go along but against that background and within that frame this morning's subject is brooding nothing to do with hens and eggs though you might have thought so I use the word brooding to refer to something that everybody does it's an activity which you can express in a five letter word spelled t-h-i-n-k and pronounced think brooding has to do with thinking something that we do when we're on our own that is on our own humanly speaking and we are reflecting on well it just depends now a lot of our thinking you know is idle and random thinking really our thoughts wander we moan about the way that they wander when we're trying to pray but as a matter of fact they are wandering a great deal of the time when we're on our own and just letting our mind run free we think but laterally and by association rather than logically to some purpose we daydream we fantasize we reflect on experiences we've had which either delighted us or distressed us and it's the impact of the emotion that brings these things back to our memory and we dwell on them just because we felt so strongly at the time this was good that was a bad experience we think of our joys we think of our sorrows we think of the situations and perplexities that make us anxious anxiety as a feeling which we don't like but can't always escape and so our minds run pretty free dwelling on these things problems of relationships puzzles about dead ends in the life we're living or in particular activities in which we're engaged

I'm not getting anywhere that's a thought which carries a bad feeling with it feeling of gloom and distress and we think about circumstances and scratch our head as to what to do about them and so it goes on but it's constantly a matter of thoughts wandering through this these fields shall I say of reality these fields of reflection and a phrase that I read only yesterday I think in the detective story that I was using to go to sleep with the sentence had only five words in it and it refers to the detective who hasn't yet solved the crime he's brooding all right but here are the five words his thoughts were a blur and friends

I think we all know what it's like for our thoughts to be a blur where yes our mind goes to and fro restlessly travelling up and down and around and about but we aren't getting anywhere all right but now in contrast with that Christian brooding as distinct from merely or as beyond merely human brooding Christian brooding is directed thinking and it's a Christian discipline to practice it and when I say this to people they sort of blink and they say but you can't control your thoughts you're making it sound as if you can and to that my response friends and this is my word to you just as it's my word to them is that the scripture assumes that you can and tells you how to do it so just to show you what I mean let me quote to you from

Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 4 and verse 8 finally brothers writes the apostle whatever is true whatever is honorable whatever is just whatever is pure whatever is lovely whatever is commendable if there's any excellent if there's anything worthy of praise think about these things that's directed thinking and Paul assumes that by practice and with the Lord's help we can learn to focus our thoughts and to keep them focused on the things that are worth thinking about and there's a Christian name for the activity of doing this it's a familiar name I think to all of us the word is meditation now I have a series of points to make about meditation first the meaning of meditation let's go a little further along this line meditation meditation is thinking in

[19 : 41] God's presence that's the first thing to say thinking before the Lord it's comparable to the cow chewing the cud God you bring things back to mind as the cow brings back the stuff that it's taken into one of its stomachs and you chew it over in the presence of the Lord yes you're talking to yourself this sort of talking to yourself isn't a sign that you're losing your marbles it's a sign rather that you're advancing in Christian sanity you get your thoughts into order before the Lord the Puritans were great at this and they're not alone in it actually there's a very noble tradition of directed meditation on the other side of the

Reformation divide the Catholic Church has a great deal of wisdom to teach us about doing this yes thinking in God's presence is the basic idea and then what do you think about well meditation is thinking about God and everything else in relation to God thinking about your own relationship to God thinking about God's purposes and God's greatness and God's achievements and God's blessings and about what's involved in our pleasing of God what it means to respond to God we think about these things we think in other words about life our life under God the life which remember is hiking with God as our resource and the

Lord Jesus as our friend life with its ups and downs life with its immediate pressures life with its long term pressures but always hiking with the Lord we think about these things think about them from all sorts of angles matters where we've already seen God solving problems we learn to say hallelujah and there are aspects of life where problems still wait to be solved and there we learn what it will mean to say to God help and meditation moves into prayer very easily and very naturally so easily and naturally that I shan't say anything about it you know perfectly well I'm sure from your own experience how this happens and it's right that it should meditation is a sort of preparation for prayer just as meditation will well may properly follow prayer as one reflects on God and what one has been saying to God and the business one has been seeking to do with the

Lord thinking in the presence of God becomes talking to the Lord in whose presence you were thinking and it's a natural transition I read quite recently the autobiography of a man who got to 81 and then only a few months ago suddenly died a Christian man the autobiography is full of wry touches w-r-y he was a wry sort of man and in the chapter that he titles God and I Almost Friends he writes as follows he never this is God he never well almost never talks to me I gather that he talks to other people and he quoted a Latvian spiritual my God and I go in the fields together we walk and talk as good friends should and do well we all sing the chorus he lives he lives

Christ Jesus lives today he walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way I'm sure you've all have you sung that well this good man a wry realist cites those things and then he says when I am with God I do all the talking most of the time he's making the point you see that there's not always a great deal of reality when people blithely say he talks to me and he'd never found it so in his own experience and I don't suppose you have either but look what we need to say here is that meditation as an activity again and again leaves you aware that God has guided your thinking and God has made some things clear to you through your thinking and that in effect is God speaking to you and telling you something that you needed to know that is the united testimony of those who learn to meditate

[25 : 44] God makes things clear through through the meditation and that's the reality of God speaking showing us things telling us things getting us clear on things as he regularly does but there are a lot of Christians who've never really got into the habit of meditating and so they miss this I wouldn't want that to be a story in my life or in yours that's the meaning then of meditation next heading you know my mind does alliterations this is a set of ends materials for meditation here scripture itself gives us the leads that we need starting I think with what God says to Joshua in the book of

Joshua as it's recorded in the book of Joshua chapter 1 verse 8 this book of the law says God to Joshua Joshua the new leader still shivering in his shoes trying to get over the fact that Moses is dead and now all the responsibility of leading Israel into the promised land is on Joshua's own shoulders this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth God says to Joshua but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it for then you'll make your way prosperous and then you'll have good success haven't I commanded you be strong and courageous don't be frightened and don't be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go in scripture you read of course of the distinctive experience that the prophets knew whereby messages verbalized messages came into their minds and they knew that this was from God now that's the experience which a moment ago

I was saying we don't ordinarily have these days though it may be of course that once or twice you have felt that God has spoken to you and I don't want to doubt that that has happened if you do if you do have that memory but it ain't the usual thing that's the point I was making the usual thing is that matters become clear after meditation backed as it may be by praying about the things that we've been thinking about and then you find you know what the mind of God is well this is Joshua anyway and the reason why I'm quoting Joshua is because the material for meditation is specified this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth that of course is the five books of Moses in whatever form Joshua had them now the canon of scripture includes 61 more books and it's the

Bible that I hold in my hand that's now the book which isn't to depart from our mouth but on which we are to meditate day and night God's word in other words is the basic matter for meditation and there is enough in it this translation occupies 1200 pages of fairly small print there's enough in it to keep us meditating for life and we shan't have exhausted the wisdom of the scriptures by the time that life ends when you move to the Psalter you find that this point comes out big the first Psalm is in a sense the keynote of the whole book and you know how it starts blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of scoffers but his delight is in the law of the

Lord and on his law he meditates day and night echo of God's word to Joshua and it really means something to say to say it that way on God's law he meditates day and night the spiritual reality friends that lies behind that is that when one comes to a living faith in Christ and is born again one's heart that is one's inner being which is changed in a number of ways it acquires a capacity for discerning the divine and persons born again don't have problems with the divinity of the scriptures because Calvin said it this way I'm just echoing him now the scriptures immediately impact you as divine this is not merely human writing this is from

[31 : 28] God the scriptures immediately impact you in that way as Calvin's illustration sweet and sour impact the taste buds immediately you have lemon juice in your mouth you know it's sour immediately you have sugar in your mouth you know it's sweet the immediacy is the real point that's being underlined here it's like sight sight like taste discerns things immediately here am I looking at you and I see you and that's an immediate reality if anyone said to me now are you sure that you can see those people that you're looking at I know that philosophers in past days have scratched their heads over that and thought it was a very profound question I would simply say don't talk nonsense of course

I can see them and if you look down the room you'll see them too that's all I should say to him well it's the immediacy of the Christians awareness that there's something divine about all that's in this book that I'm talking at this present moment the word of God evidences itself as the word of God and so the heart goes back to it again and again like the needle of a compass goes back to the magnetic north the heart in other words is drawn to the divine scriptures in the same way that the heart this is the heart of the regenerate person now is drawn to fellowship with the father and fellowship with the son it's immediate it's a basic fact about the born again and so the thought of meditating on the scriptures day and night the thought of the bible or something from the bible in your mind as you rise in the morning something from the bible in your mind as you finish the day and close your eyes at night that thought isn't hyperbole it isn't fantasy it isn't unreal it's a very natural way for things to be in the daily experience of the born again and what is it from scripture that will come to mind well passages that have meant a great deal to you and which bring you joy every time you meditate on them when you get to psalm 119 the longest psalm of course in the psalter and the one which most significantly is focusing on the word of god in all but one of its 176 verses you've got this same thought of constant meditation on the word of god coming out again and again here we are in verse 15 of psalm 119 i will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways this will be something constantly in my thoughts i will delight in your statutes i will not forget your word verse 23 back it comes even though princes sit plotting against me there he is in the state you see of tension and anxiety or well yes it is tension and anxiety and you can't get that completely out of your mind but even though princes sit plotting against me your servant will meditate on your statutes your testimonies are my delight they are my counselors and verses 47 and 48 i find my delight in your commandments which i love i will lift my lift up my hands towards your commandments which i love that's a gesture you know of just a delight same as we put our hands up when some friend whom we love and weren't expecting to see is coming towards us you've done it and you'll do it again as i say it's an expression of exuberant joy i'll lift up my hands towards your commandments which i love and i will meditate on your statutes and verse 97 to round off this set

of texts oh how i love your law it is my meditation all the day your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies for it is ever with me i have more understanding than all my teachers for your testimonies are my meditation and so on well that's as you will agree very whole hearted stuff and yet it's stuff which is no more than natural for the born again child of god there's another thought too in the songs it links up with what i've just been saying you meditate not only on the word but also on the works of god the things that he has done and is doing even now so in psalm 77 where you've got a man in trouble psalm starts with that i cry aloud to god he will hear me and the day of my trouble i seek the lord my soul refuses to be comforted in the night so on when i remember god i moan when i meditate meditate what well think about my own condition my spirit faints but then in verse 11 he gets to this i will remember the deeds of the lord yes i will remember your wonders of old i will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds and by controlling his thoughts in that channel sending them into that channel think about god and the great things he's done the great things he does think about him in creation and in providence and in grace thinking in a directed disciplined way about those things i will stabilize my soul that's the thought he started in trouble but now he meditates on the works of god and gets steady again gets hopeful again well that's an art which we need to learn from him when i said a moment ago that meditating on the things in scripture is natural i wasn't meaning to cancel the thought that i gave you earlier namely that meditation is directed thinking when you do something that's natural well the direction aspect of it isn't primary it isn't strong it isn't stressed because your heart is spontaneously going to something that it's delightful to think about and actually if when you're in trouble you set yourself to think about the works of the lord in creation and providence and grace you will very soon find that the joy and the delight are flowing again thinking of god in that way for born again child of god is a source of joy you have to prime the pump by disciplining your thoughts to focus on the works of god as distinct from the troubles of your own heart if you allow the troubles of your own heart to be center stage well they'll stay center stage forever and that wouldn't be good psalm 143

gives you some simlations thinking verse 4 my spirit faints within me my heart within me is appalled i'm in trouble what do i do well verses 5 and 6 tell you i remember the days of old i meditate on all that you have done i ponder the works of your hands i stretch out my hands to you my soul thirsts for you like a parched land i meditate on all that you've done and my heart goes out to you obviously praying in terms of real need help and my soul thirsts for you like a parched land but you're doing what a Christian what a born again person ought to be doing in this situation well these are the materials for meditation the words and the works of

God and we move on a little to the third M in my series methods of meditation and here i have more than one possibility to set before you and the first thing i want to say as i introduce those possibilities is that just as all forms of meditation will be and should be a preface to more prayer so all the ways of meditating that we're going to mention are right for some people meditation is something that you can do right in more than one way and you and i have to find what's best for us as long ago as the 14th century a chap named Walter Hilton who's gone down in the books as one of the great mystical teachers of the middle ages made this point and i'd like you to hear him making it in his own words now i want to say a little about meditation as i understand it you should recognize that in the matter of meditation there's no universal rule which can be established for everyone to keep in every situation these things are by nature a gift of our

[43 : 07] Lord and are directed to the various dispositions of his chosen souls according to their particular state and condition and according to each person's growth in virtue and spiritual state he increases opportunities of meditation both for their spiritual knowledge and for their love of himself that testimony I believe is true now methods of meditation different ways of doing it well I've got three here the first one subdivides first method of meditation listening to the Bible listening as you listen to music or as you listen to somebody making a speech there's a flow going on and you listen to see what strikes you and things do strike you a person says something which strikes you and you can't forget it a theme comes up in the music which strikes you and you can't forget it well the word of God the written scriptures which are as divine as they are human are to be listened to with openness to be impacted by things that they say and that's to be a basic discipline of our Christian life in a book some years ago I found that I could express all that I wanted to say here about the Bible in a series of seven yes you you've got it seven alliterated headings the letter in this case being the letter L the Bible if we're going to appreciate it properly if we're going to listen to it properly must be received as a library set of books written over a period of 1500 years or something like that a landscape a set of books which between them cover just about the whole of life in all its relationships all possible forms of up and down in the hike a letter that is a document this is all 66 books now that I'm generalizing about the Bible as a whole is a document of which

I can say as truly my Lord had it written for me as I can say and say truly Jesus Christ loved me and gave himself for me which is what Paul actually says as you know in Galatians chapter 2 verse 20 we can be as personal and as confidently personal as that yes when these books of scripture were written God had you and me in his mind and one of the things that he was ensuring in all 66 books was that they would be written in the way which would make them most effectively a communication call it a personal letter from him to us this is something that

I've been illustrating for 35 years ever since a book another book that I wrote about the Bible had the marvellous misprint on the contents page RSVP means revised standard versions and of course doesn't RSVP in Canada's second language means *répondre s'il vous plaît* reply respond to what's being said and in fact RSVP might well be written at the head of every page of the Bible for it's God's word to every reader of the Bible receive the Bible as my letter to you says the Lord and respond to what you find it saying and in connection with that fourth L was to say well the Bible is a listening post and I talked at that point when I'm putting this across or trying to about spy stories thrilling fiction part part of the story is that the spy has his own little radio receiving machine and he's got his own secret place where he goes and switches the machine on and gets instructions from headquarters and all of that well it's a fair illustration of the discipline of reading the Bible and listening to what it says the discipline to which all of us as literate

Christians are called and then there are three more L's the Bible is law Torah is the Hebrew word for law as sure you know and you need to know that Torah doesn't mean public legislation Torah basically in Hebrew means the kind of instruction authoritative instruction which a good parent gives to the children family instruction you could call it but family instruction which has parental authority behind it and it is a word the Bible comes to us as a word extended word from our heavenly father so you can see how that thought develops and then 6th L the Bible is a light thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path says the psalmist and you've got the picture haven't you you have to travel at night so you need a light a lantern a torch something that you can use to illuminate the ground immediately in front of your feet so you can see where the path is and follow it you've got to travel over open country full of places where you could slip and fall and do yourself a mischief but there is a path and the light enables you to see it that's the picture a lamp to my feet and a light to my path you listen to the scriptures and that's the benefit that you get from them without the scriptures of course the other side of the point is that even if you're a born again

[50 : 37] Christian if you don't listen to the bible you'll be traveling blind half the time perhaps more than half the time and you are likely to stumble and fall and get hurt as you go along and then seventh L I spoke of the bible as a lifeline and I myself have proved it to be a lifeline and I get a bit anecdotal in elaborating that thought but I get anecdotal in order to make sure that all the people I'm talking to will get personal about listening to the bible and expect personal blessing and benefits through the bible in the way that I have found that it came to me but now there's a subdivision a and b think in terms of the military you know what a steady march is you march in time left right left right you go at the same speed all the time well the bible should

I believe be read by all god's people in that way as well as in other ways in other words you make it your business to get to know the whole of the bible by steadily reading it here I have a plan of bible reading it was drawn up by a Scottish saint named Murray McChain it's four chapters a day and it gets you through the bible in a year saint john has its own variant on that which will get you through the bible in two years it doesn't matter how much you set yourself provided that you read the bible steadily and do get through it and when you got through it you go back to the beginning and start again McChain's ideal and mine too is to read all the bible every year

Luther read the bible twice a year i don't know if you know the name of tc hammond he was an evangelical stalwart of 60 years ago hammond read the bible four times a year which amazes me every quarter he went right through from genesis to revelation this is a discipline distinct from what i'm going to talk about next which is the slow march again think of the military the steady march is one thing the slow march is another but there are times when the slow march is what's called for and i put it to you that ordinarily every day there should be a bit of slow marching with the bible and once again i subdivide there are two proven ways of doing that there's the way to start with that was developed by benedictines that is followers monastic followers of the rule of benedict in the middle ages here is the testimony of a presbyterian lady who over a period of twelve months spent a great deal of time in a monastery and during her time in the monastery labored to master this particular art i'm just going to read you the way that she wrote about it i've been a devoted reader since childhood she writes and i've been surprised to discover that what benedict that's the founder of the benedictines he drew up a monastic rule for his followers what benedict termed lectio divina it's a latin phrase which means divine reading what benedict termed lectio divina and what many contemporary benedictines call spiritual reading has given me a new appreciation for the contemplative potential of the reading process lectio lectio divina is an attempt to read more with the heart than with the head one doesn't try to cover a certain amount of material so much as surrender to whatever word or phrase catches the attention a slow meditative reading of the scriptures lectio respects the power of words to resonate with the full range of human experience well what I'm putting to you is what I believe to be the wisdom of both and the two ways of marching through the bible the steady march two three four chapters a day whatever and the slow march where maybe you read only one or two verses but they grab you and the right lobe of your brain is engaged and something said in the scripture in a pictorial way and nearly everything in the scripture actually is said in a pictorial way we regularly miss this friends but all the key words of the bible are picture words and if we're open to this the pictures will grab the mind or the heart perhaps I better say heart itself of course is a picture no question that the the Hebrews and the

New Testament writers knew that there is a physical organ which to which the word heart refers and it pumps blood around the body yes but they always use the word heart in a different way for the center of the person the real core of your own personal being the core in terms of which one answers the question well who really am I what really am I and they talk about the word of God making its impact on the heart you heard that from Kathleen Norris the lady I was reading from a moment ago and I am certain there is a time there should be a regular time in our experience for reading the Bible slowly that way and letting texts and the wording of texts trigger vision and insight through presenting to your mind and generating in your mind the picture with its implications so that your experience with a particular text or two will be rather like being in a dark room and then suddenly someone releases the blinds the blinds fly up the light rushes in and you see things you didn't see before and they sometimes hit you quite strongly and excitingly just as another illustration of the same thing you've all been to the bootchart gardens yes and so have I well there are corners one or two corners in the bootchart gardens you round the corner and there it all is the quarry with all the flowers in front of you it's a breathtaking moment and if you don't draw in your breath at your first sight of all that's going on in the quarry which is the heart of the bootchart gardens

I am surprised I'll tell you it's just an overwhelming show of glory and beauty in the form of flowers well Lectio Divina can do that for you and often it isn't spectacular in the way that my illustrations might suggest but quietly you know yes that image that picture that single thought in the passage that I've read that is very fruitful for me today that thrills me today that gives me my orientation for living today thank you Lord let's Lectio Divina there is another way of doing the flow march and that is to do what Roman Catholic teachers describe as making a meditation Ignatius Ignatius of Loyola and his disciple

[59 : 50] Francis de Salle are actually the classic exponents of this imagination is invoked from the start you put yourself in the story you imagine yourself part of it time place you're alongside the person alongside the persons in the story this works particularly well when it's stories of the Lord Jesus dealing with somebody you're there you're listening and when you've seen what the Lord Jesus has to say or what God says to Elijah or whatever then you say to yourself well now if that's how the Lord spoke then to that person or those people what is he saying to me now along the same lines and that's how that method of meditation works I'm over running so now

I speak very quickly in order to stop very soon there is another there's a second way of second method of meditation where you actually interrogate the Bible you ask it questions every chapter you read what is this telling me about God about the Lord Jesus what is this showing me about life and about people and certainly in light of the answer to those two questions what then is this passage telling me about myself and my life today wish I had time to go into that because actually most of my Bible reading for a large number of years has been done that way I get furthest fastest myself by asking those questions of every passage that I read and then there's a third way of meditating also you cogitate surveying a Biblical theme

Biblical truth it's topical topical meditation you meditate on the wisdom of God or the scope of salvation or the hope of glory something like that again I had more to say than I can say now illustrating how it's done you must know of course Bible truth about these things before you can meditate on it the fruit of the meditation will be every time isn't the reality of this wonderful how then should I be reacting to this reality and depends what you're meditating on as to what the answer to that question is going to be then fourth M the mentoring effects of meditation meditation operates as a kind of spiritual workout because God as I indicated earlier applies his word to you through prompting you to apply it to yourself and so you have to face questions like in light of what

I've read in light of what I've seen what should I do and what should I stop doing what attitudes on my part are right and what attitudes on my part are wrong and how am I to develop the right attitudes what really does Christ like godliness involve for me and how am I to pursue that goal and what help do I need from my God right now and you see we're going to move into prayer what help do I need from my God right now to be more Christ like than I have been you can see meditation is operating at food and exercise for the soul and food and exercise produce growth think of your children think of how you yourself grew through food and exercise when you were young there are anorexic

Christians who just don't eat enough they don't meditate you see there are plenty Christians they don't grow enough because they don't meditate there are Christians suffering from arrested development there are Christians who emotionally are quite infantile and the story is the same every time they haven't been meditated as Christians should out of meditation comes better knowledge of God and the world and yourself and Christ and the promises of God given for your encouragement and your reliance and guidance out of meditation comes truer wisdom for facing the world's value system and behavior patterns which are contrary to the way of Christ we mustn't be seduced by them we need clear vision therefore as to what's wrong with them meditation will give us that clear vision and meditation will give us at every point a deeper understanding of praying when we say help praising when we say hallelujah and pleasing

[65 : 37] God when we say hallowed be thy name by holiness in my life and there's a model of this kind of living in the New Testament that I wanted to refer to time's gone can't do it but I wanted to talk about meditative Mary whose story is told us at the end of Luke chapter 10 and of whom you remember the Lord Jesus said Martha you're Martha Mary's sister remember you're concerned about all sorts of things and the implication is that in their place that's quite right Mary so you Martha so you should be but Mary who sits at the Lord's feet to listen and to learn Mary has chosen the good part the good portion the good course of action and it will not be taken from her yes because though dealing with all the practicalities of

Christian life is priority in one sense listening to the Lord by meditating on his word is an even higher priority than that so it's got to be a case of both and being Martha and Mary by terms for all of us but I was going to go to town sermon on that and I mustn't I've really come to the end now friends thank you for allowing me my ten minutes overrun and God help us to brood to his glory and so learn to pray better more wisely and more fruitfully now from monologue to dialogue any comments thoughts reactions whatever we've got I suppose ten minutes Bill before we need to close what do you think Bill foresight suggests that our whole thought life might be a prayer so that in our meditation the true desire that our heart might be there even though we may be shaping a prayer which may not include those true desires but would you agree with foresight in a broad sense yes

I would agree with foresight that the whole of a Christian's thought life in a very broad sense should be prayer and if our hearts have been changed in the way that they are changed in the new birth that's practical reality that can happen foresight also says that there is a time for focusing your thoughts in particular prayers he's got that marvelous phrase somewhere formulate your soul that's a terrific phrase I think to describe what we do when we pray but yes what he's talking about in more general terms the thought life which is all in the presence of God all permeated by awareness thankful joyful trustful awareness of God that's absolutely right that's the life that's the basic life conscious life of the born again believer yes he's right on target then

I think Chris he's the last century produced in volume on biblical psychology and there he separates the heart from the mind and the heart is the center as you said of the human being also the emotions and the mind is above and it's really amazing how the responsibility is on the decisions of the heart with the emotions feelings as well as thought it's a deep mystery in the very biblical view of man is not the intellect but the heart

I've been asked well I have been asked I've been given a very fruitful comment from a 19th century theologian named Franz Delitzsch the point Delitzsch is developing is that there's a distinction to be drawn and kept in mind between the heart and the mind I would say to my friend that I think Delitzsch makes the distinction too absolute I think there's overlap here scripture itself speaks of the thoughts of the heart the thoughts of what's his name heart Simon the sorcerer you know Simon Magus in Acts chapter 8 are specified as the something for which

[71 : 43] God's forgiveness is needed pray that the thoughts of your heart will be forgiven you Peter to Simon but they're not identical if that's sort of to be right and a lot of the activities of our mind are functional activities I mean working out the way to do things the functional activities of the mind and a lot of the scholarship in which we engage in mathematics and the sciences and study of languages and so on that will be done in the same way as it's done by people who are not believers so that aspect of what we call the mind that is the thinking the thought life the thinking life of the human individual is distinct from the

Christian heart yes it is the heart sets the mind to work on these things but that's the only link but there'll come a time of course when the heart will take over again and you'll find yourself wanting to praise God for all the wisdom that he's shown and the things that he's made the things that he's taught you and the powers that he's given you thank you Lord for enabling me to use my mind the way I do and so once again the link between heart and mind is established but when Delich talks the life of the Christian heart and the life of the human mind are two distinct things well I think he's over arguing frankly there is an overlap the overlap is as important as the distinction sorry oh

I didn't know in your presentation a statement which shocked me and I think I can understand what you were saying but I'd like to just ask you to elaborate on it to make the comment that it is very unusual for God to speak to us and you made the comment that you might credit a person with having one or two experiences in their life God speaking to them but in general this is not the way that God deals with us we don't hear a voice in the mind that's the thought I was trying to give words to carry on now that shocked you alright the rest of your presentation emphasized how commonly God speaks to us and it was not clear in your initial statement that you were talking about God's voice in a literal excuse me we seem to be grateful for the fact that we are able to hear

God's speak God speak to us through his word and further than that it just seems to me that there are dangers because I have different experiences of this in my own family of the way in which people speak about God speaking to them about God speaking to them as though it were a voice yes well again I've been asked a question more elaborate than I'm going to try and summarize for the microphone but the essence of what my brother is saying is that this language Christian language about

God speaking to us talking to us this is this is an area where different people use words in different ways to express different aspects of experience now I hoped that it was coming clear that what at least I wanted to say was that though it's very rare I believe I stay with this I believe it is very rare for Christian people to have an experience which of which they would say when questioned about it yes it was as if I heard a voice and I wanted to say that with emphasis because some Christians hear other Christians talking that way and their reaction is the kind of glum reaction which I quoted from this wry brother who said in effect well he doesn't speak to me when I'm in the presence of

[77 : 14] God I do all the talking but the brother in question knew just as all of us surely know the other something of the other thing that I was concerned to say for our encouragement namely that through the discipline of meditation things come clear so clear that we're perfectly perfectly entitled to say God made this clear to me God showed me God told me and then if you want to express that by saying God spoke to me about it well you may do so and the statement won't be inappropriate if I bumbled in trying to say those two things both actually for our encouragement I don't want anyone you know to go away glumly feeling well obviously there are some top

Christians to whom God speaks in a way that he doesn't speak to me I don't want that I don't want anyone to feel that I want all of us to realise that God is a communicator and he is concerned he is going to speak to his children constantly one way or another not perhaps with what sounds like a voice in the ear the way that it was represented for instance in Thessalby DeMille's Ten Commandments when Moses heard a deep divine voice giving the Ten Commandments by dictation but then the other thing I wanted to say again for your encouragement you see is that through meditation we shall all of us find that God has made things clear to us and that we can be confident that this course of action is his way for us and that course of action isn't

I don't know whether it helps to put it that way but both my points were meant to give encouragement neither was intended to shock except in the mild sense in which one says things that one hope will make people blink and listen a bit harder but not shock can any other sense okay now there's one question in your book do you cover any of the questions around or will you cover the questions around Satan falling in this field of thought that we have is an area where we can be easily attacked I am likely to be speaking of Satan and prayer before this course is over but you'll remember

I'm giving talks which I hope will become the basis of chapters for a book next week's talk is not about Satan and prayer it's I give it the title check up and if you don't understand what that's about we'll come back and I'll tell you and if you can see what it's about well still I hope you'll come back because I need your support but we do things in what I hope is a logical manner and we're walking all the way round the reality of praying from the different spiritual aspects I mean the aspects that relate directly to God and we shan't get on to Satan until we have covered all the aspects that relate directly to God this course I may say it ends at the end of this year and then starts up again in Lent when I do the second set of presentations nobody is bound to come but

I value your support if you do come okay you you you you you