

Keeping in Step with the Spirit: Spiritual Disciplines as Kingdom Living

Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church | Kyle David Bennett, Ph.D.

Fall 2022

WEEK FOUR

I gave you eyes to look at the sky and everything else and the beauty of creation through me. I gave you your ears to listen to my word and to pay attention to the needs of your neighbors. I gave you your tongue to proclaim my word, to confess your own sins, and to work for the salvation of others. I gave you your hands to serve your neighbors when you see them sick, and to help them with alms in their need. I gave you your feet to carry you to places that are holy and useful to you and your neighbors for the glory and praise of my name.

~ Catherine of Siena

- **Summary of Last Week:** We finished juxtaposing a “self-centered” view of spiritual disciplines with a “sacrificial” view. We then sketched the whole program of spiritual disciplines: these are practices that “discipline our daily deeds” to reform and renew our life together in community. They instruct us in Kingdom living and embody life in the Spirit.
- **What Are Heads, Minds, and Thoughts for?**
 - Some argue that minds and thoughts are *primarily* for *thinking* (Hannah Arendt), *understanding* (Aristotle), or *remembering* (David Hume). Biblically and theologically, they are for *knowing* God, particularly revealed in Jesus Christ, and His way of living in the world.
- **What Is Meditation?**
 - *Meditation has to do with heads, minds, and thoughts*
 - We don’t meditate with our hands or our tongues. We may use these “parts” of our body during meditation, but our mediation isn’t *founded* in them or *oriented* by them. We meditate with our *minds*, which are in our *heads*. And what we work with when we meditate is our *thoughts*, not directly *feelings* or *desires*.
 - *How we typically think of meditation*
 - **Getting in touch with God:** hoping to receive a positive feeling because I’m struggling with my world. I meditate to purge or remedy a feeling.
 - **Gaining insight:** Aiming to procure some sense of what to do because I don’t know. I meditate to gain insider knowledge.
 - *How the tradition has thought of it*
 - *Etymologically:*
 - The word “meditate” comes from the Greek word “*medesthai*,” meaning “to care for” and from the Latin word “*meditari*,” meaning to “consider,” “think over,” or “measure.”

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- *Biblically:*

- “This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate (הָגָה | *hagah*) on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful (Joshua 1:8 | Psalm 77:12) (cp. Psalm 119:15 שִׂיחַ | *siach*)
- Meditation is primarily about speaking God’s law and living it.

- *Historically:*

- John Climacus (c.579-649: Meditation is about “fix[ing] your mind” and “hold[ing] back your mind” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*).

- **What Is Meditation for?**

- *Thinking the right thoughts*

- “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought [νόημα] captive [αἰχμαλωτίζω] to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).”
- “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think [λογίζομαι] about these things.”

- *Correcting malformed ways we move our minds:*

- **Self-absorption:** We’re too preoccupied with ourselves to think of God or our neighbor. We’re too busy with our lives. We need to be *called* to.
- **Negligence:** We give little to no thought to God and our neighbor. We come to church and go to “Linger Longer,” but think about what we want to accomplish or do all week. We need to be *challenged*.
- **Maliciousness:** We ignore God and think evilly about our neighbor. We entertain and intentionally hold wrong or wicked thoughts about someone. We need to be *chastised*.

- **How to Move Our Minds in the Right Direction: Some Simple Steps**

- *Schedule some time:* As appropriate and available, meditate for 15 mins. each day. Consistency and regularity is most important. Consider 1 Cor. 10:24, Phil. 2:3-4, Gal. 5:14).
- *Keep a journal:* Get into the habit of reflecting on the day, ideally before bed. Keep a record of what you thought about most that day. “Plan” your thoughts for tomorrow.
- *Bind the law to your world* (Debt. 6:8): Write the law on your mirror. Put sticky notes on your desk. Put notes on the back of the front door. Turn off the radio and meditate.