



# The Discipline of Meditation

## What is Meditation?

The word may carry negative connotations for the Christian, for example, one may think of *Transcendental Meditation*, a form of eastern mysticism. However, Christian meditation is different. Rather than a passive emptying of the mind it is contemplation focused on objective truth regarding God. Its aim is developing our personal relationship with God (Thomas a Kempis describes “a familiar friendship with Jesus”). Meditation produces definite outcomes in the form of praise and communion with God, but also prompts obedience and provides direction. As Richard Foster notes “Often meditation will yield insights that are deeply practical, almost mundane ... Meditation sends us into our ordinary world with greater perspective and balance.”

## The Four “Rs” of Meditation

**Rest:** Psalm 131:2: “like a weaned child with its mother.” In a hectic world Christ promises us his peace. Whilst I may enjoy long conversations with my older children, my youngest son still enjoys sitting next to me in amicable silence – just *being* – secure in a family relationship. So meditation allows us to settle ourselves before God and enjoy his presence.

**Renewal:** Psalm 1:3: “like a tree planted by streams of water”. Like Elijah beside the brook, we need refreshed and restored.

**Re-alignment:** Psalm 119:33: “Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes”. As the world tries to “squeeze us into its mould” we need to re-calibrate, to rest our moral compass to true north. Meditation allows us to examine ourselves in the light of the Word.

**Response:** Psalm 119:7: “I will praise you with an upright heart”. Meditation on the truths of God prompts a response of obedience and praise.

## Difficulties and Dangers of Meditation

In the Eastern Orthodox church the Hesychast movement began to use prayer as mantra, emptying the mind of ordered thought in order to achieve a mystical state. However we must also guard against the opposite error. “If theology loses that contemplative dimension, it becomes an exercise in scholasticism.”

## The Practice of the Presence of God

Our goal then is to meditate on God’s world, God’s works, and God’s Word. To live our lives in constant awareness that we are God’s people in God’s world. To be able to say with Brother Lawrence “I possess God as peacefully in the bustle of my kitchen as I do on my knees before the Holy Sacrament.”

Michael Trimble